

"What do you think of my plan, Miss Letty?" he asked. A shade of vexation crossed her, but one look at the face above her, so grave and earnest, and yet so kind, subdued her.

"I could never learn to be so solemn as old Mr. Greer was," she said evasively.

"Miss Letty, pray don't trifle with so important a subject. Would you not like to be what your father and sister are?"

"Papa was always so, I guess; and Nellie,—I never *could* be half as good as she is. You don't know a bit, Mr. Bernard," she said, warming with the subject, "how good she is. I don't believe she *ever* does any of those wicked things."

"Now tell me honestly, would you not like to be as good, and true, and pure, as she is?"

"I would give my life, almost, to be like her," she said, tears springing into her eyes. "But I don't think it would be a bit of use for me to try. You might as well try to make a kitten walk straight. I've tried often, but I always upset it before a day was over."

"You have not found quite the right way of trying, yet. Now you will not think I am lecturing you, nor get angry at me, will you?"

"Not if you don't tell me I'm dreadfully sinful. If you do I can't answer for my temper."

Mrs. Carroll came to take the sleeping child, and the conversation was interrupted.

It was a dull, rainy morning when, the last trunk strapped down, and the last good-bye said, the two sisters started for Montreal, accompanied by their father.

Mrs. Norton breathed a sigh of relief as the carriage drove off with them. She might not have felt quite so easy if she had known that at that particular time George Staunton was unpacking and making himself at home within a block of where they were to board. It had never occurred to her to enquire where he intended to spend the winter. She only knew he was not to enter the office until spring. The girls were to board with an old friend of their father. George was already acquainted with the family, as the only son, who died at college, had been his room-mate there; and so it happened that

he saw them very often through the winter. So Mrs. Norton's plan only favored the result she so much dreaded. It is not our purpose to follow them through their school-days, as it is with their home-life we more particularly have to do.

Mrs. Norton sat in the library before a bright, warm fire, with her feet on the fender; and in an arm-chair beside her sat her aunt, Mrs. Lawrence.

"I tell you, Aunt Maria, I am not going to have them home for the holidays. I intend having a grand gathering here New-Year's; and I am sure Helen would not approve of my way of doing it, and would perhaps upset it altogether with her appeals to her father."

"But will the Doctor allow such a gay party as you would get up?"

"I can manage him well enough when she is out of the way; but with her here, it would be simply impossible."

After tea that evening, Dr. Norton threw himself down on a couch in the library, and his wife drew up a low seat by his side, and drew back from his forehead the iron gray hair. As she did so, she thought his face bore marks of care that it had not when she married him; and her heart smote her, ever so little, for the additional burden she was sure the holidays, as she intended to spend them, would bring him. But she had been long trained to selfishness, and so she did not hesitate long.

"Howard, I suppose you expect Harry home for Christmas."

"Yes, I had a letter from him to-day."

"I have been thinking," she went on, musingly, "whether it wouldn't be better to leave the girls in Montreal over the holidays. It would be a break, you know, to bring them home, and they might not settle to their studies again so easily."

"But, Isabel, they will need the change."

"Oh, as to that, there will be festivities enough in town, I don't doubt."

"But Harry will want to see them."

"Let him go down then."

"That would not be the same to them as a visit here; and, besides, I want to see them myself. Riverside has been very lonely without my girls." Mrs. Norton's handkerchief went up to her eyes spasmo-