

"I wish I could get Elliott's place, mother."

"I'm sure you deserve it, my son. But don't think too much of it. Don't set your heart on it. That only makes the disappointment greater."

"Who do you think will get it?" asked Edward.

"Markham, of course. It is between him and me. If he doesn't, I will."

"I never could bear that man!" exclaimed Kate. "He is so sharp with his great hook nose and eagle eyes."

"As sharp as he looks, too," answered Robert. "But Markham is a very good business man. No one can deny that. He never neglects his work, any more than he neglects to find fault with another, if he has a chance. Always trying to keep himself up by pulling another down. I don't wonder he is no favorite there. When Mr. Burke comes in, Markham is so obsequious you would almost think he was going down on the floor to crawl. Then he turns to the others below him and shouts, orders, and finds fault, so that one might suppose there was not a man in the place who attended to the business but himself, and that he was carrying the whole responsibility on his own shoulders. But he never does neglect the business at any time, I'll say that for him, though he has a hateful disposition. One morning, a couple of months ago, I was about a quarter late—had to go round for the doctor or something. It made no difference so far as customers went; it was so stormy, there was no one out. In the afternoon something had gone wrong, and Markham, of course, was settling it; and though it was not in my department at all, because Mr. Burke was in, he said loud enough to be heard by every one: 'He supposed it must have occurred this morning before Mr. Gray was here. He noticed Mr. Gray was not quite up to time this morning.' Nothing annoys Mr. Burke so much as tardiness, and I have been late a few times this winter—a fact that Markham takes good care to make known if he can. He is a little afraid of me because I am equal with himself; he knows there is no danger of the others stepping up before him."

"What is the difference in the salary, Robert?" asked his mother.

"Two or three hundred more than I have now."

"That would be a great thing for us," said Mrs. Gray. "But don't think too much about it. Markham is an older man than you, and more likely to be promoted. We'll get along some way. Edward will soon get something to do. We've been in worse circumstances before. When will Mr. Elliott leave?"

"About the first of the month, I think; at least it will be decided who his successor is to be at that time."

"I should think Mr. Burke would rather give it to you anyway. The way I've heard him talk about father, sometimes you'd think he'd do anything," said Kate.

"That makes no difference in a matter of this kind. Burke is a self-made man himself, and 'every one on his own merits' is his motto—a good one, too, I think. But when I first went to him he gave me more than I had any right to expect. Still things don't seem to be evenly divided, mother. I've never seen Markham do any person a good turn yet, and I've known him do many mean things—things I could never bring myself to do;—but for all that, and for all we need it so badly, and he could live without it, you'll see he will get Elliott's place. I don't understand it, mother. Virtue must be its own reward."

Robert rose from the table with a half bitter laugh; but they heard him whistling on the steps, which was one of the little deceits practised by affection, that his mother might not suppose he was gloomy or discouraged. Outside of the gate he stopped. He was in no mood to whistle. Anxious, troubled thoughts pressed too heavily on him. How were they to live?—or what more could he do than he was doing now? It had taken good management to keep the family on his salary and his brother's together. But all the winter, Edward, who was always rather delicate, had been sick, and now that he was well enough to go about, there was no prospect of employment. How are we to live? he thought, while fighting his way against the biting, boisterous March wind, so fierce