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MY FIRST SCHOOL—MISTRESS.

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The humble district-school, which stood on the summit of a very beautiful hill overlooking our village, had given place to a smart academy, with a belfry and green blinds, and which claimed the dignity of a male teacher the year round. Now it was not to be expected that a graduate of Yale College—a man who taught Latin and spoke French, could manage to teach the "little girl's class" how to knit worsted and sew patch-work, or that the smaller boys would make very great progress in their long lessons. So, after various meetings and consultations held by the committee, it was decided that the younger twigs, comprising some twenty children, all under ten years—should be cut-off, from that mother tree of learning, the academy, and placed under the charge of a woman teacher, who was expected to bend and cultivate them, so that in due season they might again be gathered beneath the shadow of that august institution. I have said that the district school-house had been levelled to make room for the new building; so, as the meeting-house, which stood opposite, but in a less exalted situation, was only used on Sundays, it was deemed advisable that our young ideas should be taught to shoot in that sacred and ancient building. It was a venerable, if not very imposing pile—a solitary survivor of the old-fashioned Presbyterian meeting-houses, now, we fear, departed from the bosom of Connecticut for ever. Dignified by its own simple antiquity, the old meeting-house rises before my mental vision. Its three heavy doors opening to the south, east, and west, its narrow windows and weather-beaten front, that had braved the storms of a hundred winters—the footpaths worn smooth and hard, branching from the highway, up the gentle acclivity through the greensward, to the separate doors. The burying-place at the back, in which slept some members of almost every family in the village, are all mingled with the first memories of childhood.

The interior of the building was solemn and imposing—opposite the southern entrance, a huge box-pulpit monopolized half that end of the building, backed by an arched window, crowded with small panes of greenish glass, and surmounted by a wooden canopy, venerable with dust, and heavy-carved work. Beneath this pile of unpainted wood, and along the whole panelled front, ran the deacon's seat, with doors opening near the foot of each set of winding pulpit stairs, and before the whole stood the communion table of cherry-wood. Two broad aisles crossed each other at right angles, dividing the body of the house into four distinct portions, each filled with low square pews, edged with a carved resemblance of lattice work. The galleries were deep, heavy, and dimly lighted, and in the brightest day, was insufficient to relieve the shadowy gloom that forever hung about the old building. I shall never forget the thrill of awe, with which we gazed in each other's faces, on the first morning we entered its ponderous doors, and heard the sound of our footsteps, as we crept timidly up the aisle, reverberating thro' the empty galleries. Our mistress, too, looked pale and death-like, for a greenish light was shed over her from the arched window, and her naturally delicate features took the hue of marble. It was long before we could settle ourselves to the simple studies allotted to us, or could shake off the gloom flung over our young spirits by the vast solitude of the place. But custom soon wore off this sombre feeling; we soon found out that nothing on earth could be better calculated for a game of hide-and-seek, after school, than the host of pews, and the heavy old rumbling galleries. The deacon's seat became an excellent reception for our sun-bonnets and dinner-baskets, and the lower pulpit stairs made capital seats for the sewing class, for they received the benefit of extra light from the arched window; besides, the stairs were carpeted, and the benches were not, altogether our removal to the old meeting-house rendered us far more comfortable and happy than we had been with our learned master of the academy. We had no older scholars to amuse themselves with our imperfect pronunciation; and if the academy bell did sometimes drown the humble rat-tat-tat of our mistress's rule against the heavy door-post of the old meeting-house, with its aristocratic clamour, then ten minutes play-time thus gained, more than compensated for the loss of dignity. As far as out-door conveniences went, we certainly had the advantage of our lofty neighbours. The sweep of heavy green-sward, which fell from the old building, to the highway, with a scarcely perceptible descent, afforded us a delightful play-ground, and we had the benefit of an old patriarchal apple tree, always full of robins' nests, and heavy with blossoms in the spring season, and which afforded us a delicious assortment of fine green apples during the summer. If our teacher, was sent for from a distant town; and if she was not so well versed in the dead languages, and general sciences, as the student across the way, she had one of the best hearts and sweetest tempers that ever brooded in a female bosom. There was not a

child in her school who did not love her. It was beautiful to see the little girls gather round about her chair on a morning, with their simple offerings. One would bring a cluster of red cherries, and with the thanks of her teacher, causing her little heart to leap, and her eye to brighten, would return to her seat and hold up her book, to hide the happy smiles, which spring up so naturally to the face of a child at each pleasurable emotion. Another brought a handful of damask roses, and was happy if for that day one of the half-open buds shed its fragrance on the bosom or amid the curls of "the mistress." It was marvellous how soon the affectionate creatures learned to study her taste, and to read the expression of her eyes. Though she seldom displayed a preference for any of our little gifts, but received all kindly, and with her own sweet, grateful smile; there was not a child who could not have named her favourite flower, or who would have dreamed of bringing anything over-blown or gorgeous for her.

Miss Bishop had not been among us a fortnight, before we knew that she was not happy. The colour on her delicate cheek was unsteady, and sometimes far, far too brilliant. There were times when she would sit and gaze through the window into the graveyard, with her large melancholy eyes surcharged with a strange light, as if she were pondering on the time when she, also, might lie down in the cold earth and be at rest. She was not gloomy—far from it; at times she was gay and child-like as ourselves. On a rainy day, when the grass was wet, and we were obliged to find amusement within doors, I have known her join in our little games with a mirth as free as that which gushed up from the lightest heart among us. At such times, she would sing to us by the hour together, till the galleries and the old arch seemed alive with bird music. But her cheerfulness was not constant; it seemed to arise more from principle and a strong resolution to overcome sorrow, than from a spontaneous impulse of the heart.

It is strange what fancies will sometimes enter the minds of children—how quick they are to perceive, and how just the deductions they will often draw from slight premises. It was not long before the sorrow which evidently hung over our young mistress, became a subject of speculation and comment in our play hours. One morning she came to the house rather later than usual. We were all gathered about the door to receive her, and when she waved her hand in token that we should take our places, there was a cheerful strife which should obey the signal first. Never do I remember her so beautiful as on that morning. The clear snow of her forehead, and that portion of her slender neck, exposed by her high dress, mingled in delicate contrast with the damask brightness on her cheek and lips. An expression of contentment, subdued the sometimes painful brilliancy of her eyes, and with a beautiful smile, beaming over that face in thanks for the offering, she took a half-open white rose, with a faint blush slumbering in its core, from the hand of a little girl, and twined it among her hair, just over the left temple, before taking her seat. The morning was warm, and all the doors had been opened to admit a free circulation of air through the tall building. My seat was near the pulpit, directly opposite the northern door, which commanded a view of the highway. I was gazing idly at the sunshine which lighted up a portion of the lawn in beautiful contrast with the thick grass which still lay in the shade, glittering with rain-drops—for there had been a shower during the night—when a strange horseman appeared, galloping along the road. He checked his horse, and after surveying the old meeting-house a moment, turned into the footpath leading to the southern door.

Seldom have I seen a more lofty carriage or imposing person, than that of the stranger as he rode slowly across the lawn. His face, at a first view, appeared eminently handsome; but on a second perusal, a close observer might have detected something daring and impetuous, which would have taught him to suspect imprudence, if not want of principle, in the possessor. He was mounted on a noble horse, and his dress, though carelessly worn, was rich and elegant. He had ridden close to the door, and was dismounting, when Miss Bishop looked up. A slight cry burst from her lips, and starting from her seat, she turned wildly towards the door, as if meditating an escape; but the stranger had scarcely set his foot within the building, when she moved down the aisle, though her face was deadly pale, and there was a look of mingled terror and grief in her eyes. The stranger advanced to meet her with a quick, eager step, and put forth his hand. At first she seemed about to reject it, and when she did extend hers, it was trembling and with evident reluctance. He retained her hand in his, and bent forward as if about to salute her. She shrank back, shuddering beneath his gaze, and we could see that deep crimson flush dart over her cheek, like the shadow of a bird, flitting across the sun's disk. The stranger dropped her hand, and set his lips close together, while

she wrung her hands and uttered some words of entreaty. He looked hard at her as she spoke, but without appearing to heed her appeal, had walked a few paces up the aisle, and taking off his hat, leaned heavily against a pew door which chanced to be open. His was a bold countenance! I have seldom looked on a forehead so massive and so full of intellect. Yet the dark kindling eye, the haughty lip, bespoke an untamed will, and passions yet to be conquered or to be deeply repented of in remorse and in tears. As he stood before that timid girl, she shrank from, and yet seemed almost fascinated by the extraordinary power of expression that passed over his face. His dark eye grew misty and melting with tenderness as he took her hand again, reverently between both his, and pleaded with her as one pleading for his last hope in life. We could not hear his words, but there was something in the deep tones of his voice, and in that air of mingled pride, energy and supplication, which few women could have resisted. But she did resist, though even a child might have seen the effort was breaking her heart. Sadly, and in a voice full of suppressed agony and regret, she answered him, her small hands were clasped imploringly, and her sweet face was lifted to his with the expression of a tried spirit, beseeching the tempter to depart and leave her in peace.

Again he answered her, but now his voice trembled, and its deep tones were broken as they swelled through the hollow building. When he had done, she spoke again in the same tone as before, and with the expression of sad resolve unmoved from her face. He became angry at last; his eyes kindled, and his heavy forehead gathered in a frown. She had extended her hand, as if to take farewell; but he dashed it away, and regardless of her timid voice, rushed towards the door.

Miss Bishop tottered up the aisle, and sunk to her chair, trembling all over, and drawing her breath in quick, painful gasps. We all started up, and were about to crowd around her with useless tears and lamentations, when the young man came up the aisle again. We shrank back around the pulpit stairs, and watched his motions, like a flock of frightened birds when the hawk is hovering in the air above them.

"Mary," he said, bending over her chair, and speaking in a low suppressed voice—for all traces of passion had disappeared from his face. "Mary, once again, and for the last time, I entreat you take back the cruel words you have spoken. They will be the ruin of us both—for, conceal it as you will, you cannot have forgotten the past. There was a time—"

"Do not speak of it, George Mason, if you would not break my heart here, and at once—do not—in mercy, arouse memories that never will sleep again!" said the poor girl, rising slowly to her feet, and wringing her hands, over which the tear-drops fell like rain.

"Be calm, Mary, I beseech you. I will say nothing that ought to pain or terrify you thus—consent to fulfil the engagement so cruelly broken off, and here, in this sacred place, I promise never to stand beside a gaming table, nor touch another card in my life. I know that in other things I have sinned against you, almost beyond forgiveness, but I will do any thing, every thing you can dictate, to atone for the wrongs done that—that poor girl, and I will never, never see her again."

Miss Bishop looked up with a painful smile, and a faint colour spread from her neck, down over her cheek and bosom.

"Can you take away the stain which has been selfishly flung on her name—can you gather up the affections of a young heart when once wickedly lavished, and teach them to bud and blossom in the bosom which sin has desolated? As well might you attempt to give its perfume back to the withered rose, or take away the stain from the bruised lily, when its urn has been broken and trampled in the dust. Vain man! Go and ask forgiveness of that God, whose most lovely work you have despoiled. With all your pride and wealth of intellect, you have no power to make atonement to that one human being, whom you have led into sin and sorrow."

She turned from him as the last words died on her lips, and covering her face, wept as one who had no comfort left. Tears stood in that proud man's eye, and his haughty lip trembled as he gazed upon her. He did not speak again, but lifted her hand reverently to his lips, and hastened away.

A week went by, and every day we could see that our "young mistress" walked more feebly up the lawn, and that the colour in her cheek became painfully vivid. She had always been troubled with a slight cough, but now it often startled us with its frequency and hollowness. On Saturday it had been her habit to give us some little proof of approbation—a certificate, sometimes neatly written, but more frequently ornamented by a tiny rose—a butterfly or grasshopper, from her own exquisite pencil. On the Saturday night in question, she distributed her little gifts, and it chanced