

altogether, and when overruled in this, he stipulated decisively that Mysie should not return to Mr. Hope's.

This arbitrary interdiction might have been disputed, but that the cottage was so literally a tiny shell of a place, with merely four little rooms on one floor, and a sleeping-place for the servant girl in the roof. Very pretty, indeed, it was in situation; the little parlour overlooking a long reach of the winding river, and with an aspect that commanded a view of the setting sun, but shut away from all land views of Hall or Chace by trees and surrounding shrubs. It suited Mr. Hope's feelings thus to have his prospect limited, to river and sky. He was rapidly lapsing into the late autumn of life, and the sunsets were eloquent to him, telling of a calm evening, and of the brightness of the rising day in the land afar off. Marian's taste soon made the little nest cosy, but both father and daughter had a delicacy sensitively restraining them from anything that might appear intrusive; and as Miss Austwicke, in the most pointed way, had said to Marian, soon after their coming to the cottage, "Of course, Miss Hope, you fully understand that if your family included more than two persons, my brother would not have offered you that mere nutshell," Marian had no alternative, but, with thanks, to say, "She perfectly understood that, and the nutshell was just what her father liked."

Henceforth Marian could not overcome the restraint that Miss Austwicke's reserve imposed. It so chilled her that she never originated any topic in conversation when Gertrude's aunt was present; and time increased the sense of coldness and distance. Not that Miss Austwicke was otherwise than kind; she was, indeed, elaborately so, but that very elaboration induced constraint in the obliged party, so that the great cement of intercourse—geniality—was wanting.

These three years did not pass wholly without incident to Gertrude.

Among the women-servants was one, called Ruth, the Gubbins had hired when the family were in London at the time of De Lacy Austwicke's death, and to whom old Mrs. Comfit, from the petulance of age, jealous of any one usurping her authority, had taken a great dislike. No sooner had the family returned, than the aged housekeeper asserted her power by giving Ruth notice to quit. This caused a quarrel among the highly sensitive gentry of the second table. Mr. Austwicke, wanting to make changes in the establishment, availed himself of this rupture to pension off Mrs. Comfit. Knowing Martin to be an experienced, active woman, long trusted by the family, and liked by his wife, he elevated her to the dignity of housekeeper; she undertaking to train and superintend a waiting-maid for Miss Honoria. Now, as Martin and the functionary she superseded had long disliked each other, of course Ruth's having failed to please Mrs. Comfit was rather a recommendation to Martin's good graces. Among high and low, community of dislike is sometimes as efficacious as better feelings. Consequently, instead of being dismissed, Ruth was elevated to the dignity of upper housemaid. We should not have entered into these domestic details, but our readers will no doubt surmise that this Ruth was no other than the servant formerly at the "Royal Sturgeon," Southampton, and the ally, in some strange sense, of Burke.

Nothing could be quieter or more orderly than this woman, as Martin said—"Certainly there was quite enough of her, near upon two yards, which was expensive to clothe, but that was her look out. However, every one knew as a housemaid must have bones, and the longer the better. Not as long bones was better supplied with elbow-grease for rubbing furniture, but they'd a reach as was undeniable."

Gertrude hearing by accident this speech of Martin's one day laughed very heartily, and said, "Martin, then you like overreaching people?"

"Lauk, miss; 'overreaching,' why I never heered anything like you. I think, for the matter o' that, as Ruth is a sort of mumchance; 'can't say bo to a goose,' if so be as geese was a' gazing in the Hall; and as to her being overreaching, why—"

Now it so happened that Martin's words were

spoken at this time when she was standing in the lobby, and it startled Gertrude to see that Ruth was passing behind Martin, and that she must have heard the word "overreaching," for she stopped suddenly a moment as if about to speak, coloured violently, and then hurried on.

It was so repugnant to Gertrude to wound the feelings of the humblest, that she was annoyed at the incident, and from that time, in her sweet way, made amends for the involuntary pain she felt sure had been caused, by taking kindly notice of Ruth, who, whether she was really happier in her present service, or felt the inspiring influence of gratitude, certainly became a most attentive, efficient, and valuable servant.

In the autumn, Mr. and Mrs. Basil Austwicke went on the Continent, and Gertrude fell ill of a rheumatic attack that was not thought absolutely dangerous, but was so very painful and tedious that it confined the sufferer to her room nearly four months. Marian attended her like a sister in the daytime, but Gertrude, with the waywardness of illness, would have no one but Ruth to sit up with her at night.

Miss Austwicke wished to have a professional nurse sent for; but Gertrude's entreaties prevailed, and Ruth was installed as the night attendant, Martin taking her full share of sick-room tending during the day.

Gertrude's malady had continued about thirteen weeks, and worn her very sadly, when she was pronounced by her medical attendant to be rapidly recovering. That day she had been dressed in ordinary attire, and not only sat up, but, with the help of Miss Hope and Martin, had walked across the room. There was a something more than the look of tender congratulation on Marian's face at the recovery of her friend, there was surprise also—a surprise that Martin shared, and gave instant expression to.

"Well, I never! only to look at Miss True! Gracious goodness, how pleased missus will be!"

"Of course, papa and mamma will be glad I'm better; but they do not quite know how ill I've been, Martin."

"Oh, but they'll be struck all of a heap—comical like—jest as Miss Hope is, only she won't say right out, like me. I do wish, now, as you could just ketch hold of something while I goes to fetch Miss Honor."

"Whatever do you mean, Martin? what is it that is altered so in me?"

"Why, law, miss, you've grow'd. You aint a giant, to be sure—a good ways off that still; but you aint a dwarf no more."

"Have I grown? have I, indeed?" said Gertrude, trembling with weakness.

Marian drew a chair and sat her in it, saying—

"You're my own dear fairy still; but I think the name will not be exactly as literally appropriate as it has been."

"Oh, if I please papa that way, though it's no merit of mine, I shall be glad, dear Marian—very glad."

Martin wheeled a cheval-glass before her chair, and they both helped her to rise, and she saw the change.

"Well, really, I'm not a pigmy," she said. "I suppose if I do not reach the Austwicke standard, I shall be forgiven if I am not much below the general height."

At this instant Miss Austwicke entered, her face wearing the hue of that pallid melancholy which had now settled upon it; but for a moment surprise lighted up her gloomy eyes with a half smile.

"Why, Gertrude, child, you have grown at last! You're 'little True' no more."

"Not the least of the little, aunt, but yet *True* ever. I think I should like those two words to be the Austwicke motto."

What made her aunt turn away with something that seemed a shudder from her niece, who was, in her caressing way, leaning her cheek towards Miss Austwicke for the expected kiss? What had she said that it was withheld? How strange Aunt Honor was! The young girl's eyes, enlarged by her illness, looked their wonder; and Miss Austwicke read the look, and, constraining herself, called a commonplace phrase to her aid.

"After all, child, 'it's the mind that's the measure,' or, what is it?—the stature of the man or woman?"

"Have not I said so any time these seven years?" replied Gertrude, wearily, "and you never agreed with me before. But, there, if papa is pleased, that's enough."

Trifling as this incident may appear, Gertrude had been so made to feel the disappointment of her relatives, that the sudden discovery of her growth curing her illness rather excited her; and when she went to rest it prevented her sleeping. But she knew enough of the importance of sleep to her recovery not to neglect to woo it by extreme quietude. Her chamber was darkened, and the attendant Ruth remained in the adjacent dressing-room, from whence only the feeblest ray of the night-lamp was permitted to glimmer into the bed-room.

Gertrude closed her eyes and lay perfectly still, rather lulled than otherwise by the accustomed sound of the knitting-needles, with whose exercise Ruth often beguiled the hours of watching. At last the little familiar click was still, and Gertrude was glad to think that slumber had surprised her vigilant attendant. Some time passed, when there was a faint rustle, and a little sound like the creaking of a board in the floor under the weight of a footstep.

Without opening her eyelids, Gertrude glanced through their long fringes, and saw—by the dim light that came in from the dressing-room door—to her surprise, that Ruth was creeping noiselessly towards the bed. It was surely neither wrong nor unusual that the watcher should see whether her charge was sleeping; but something, Gertrude knew not what, in her manner, kept the young girl spell-bound.

In a few moments Ruth was at her bedside leaning over and looking at her. Wondering what it meant, Gertrude continued to lie still, when, just as she drew a long breath, and was about to open her eyes, and say, "Pray go away, you disturb me, Ruth," she felt something fall on her cheek—it was a tear. Ruth was crying silently but bitterly. The woman moved back a step, pressed her hands tight over her chest, as if to still the beating of her heart, and muttered—

"She's better, the poor, wee thing. I feared to think she'd die. It was bad enough, that one death—bad enough, but this young gem's saved. Yes, yes, it's all right—all right."

There was a touch as if a hand was hovering over the invalid's head, and had accidentally touched her hair. Gertrude without opening her eyes, turned away; and Ruth, in a startled manner at the movement, crept back to the dressing-room. Then, in an instant after, reissued from it, and walking in her usual manner, came to her bedside, smoothed and adjusted the clothes, and Gertrude spoke—

"Ruth."

"Yes, miss; it's only me. I thought you might be cold. I hope I have na disturbed you?"

She tucked up the bed-clothes and went away, leaving Gertrude to revolve her previous strange words and manner, which she did without being able to make anything of it, until she fell into a deep health-giving sleep.

With the morning came the recollection of the incident, and it was a part of Gertrude's frank nature to speak openly about it.

"Ruth," she said, "I could almost think I was dreaming last night about you."

"About me, miss?"

"Yes; how you came to my bed crying—crying tears, and said, 'It was bad enough, that one death; but this one's saved. Yes, it's all right.'"

Ruth's wide, pale face changed to an ashy tint, her full, light eyes dilated and glared at Gertrude, who, shocked at the expression of her countenance, exclaimed—

"What's the matter, Ruth? what ever makes you look like that? what does it all mean? Speak?"

"Nothing, miss," she said, evidently making a great effort at composure, and the rigid look passed away. "Nothing; you must, as you say, have been dreaming."