

story. I at once assented, for I was beginning to feel a strange interest in the narrator.

"I think," said he, "that I spoke to you last night of the events which led me to leave Paris and to return to Seaton Village; I will now take up my history from the time of my arrival there.

"As I approached my aunt's house I saw a light shining through the window of the room in which she was accustomed to sit, and on my arrival I at once made my way towards this room, and opened the door expecting to find her within. I was disappointed, however, the only occupant being a young girl, who, at the time of my entrance, was standing in front of my aunt's chair with her face turned towards the door. She had evidently been sitting before the fire occupied with her sewing, which lay discarded upon the floor, and had arisen, disturbed by my footsteps upon the walk.

"Oh," I said, "I beg your pardon; I had expected to find my aunt here when I saw the light in the window, but I see she is not at home."

"No," she replied, "Aunt Hilda is not at home; she went to a meeting in the church this evening, and has not returned. I suppose," she added, "you are her nephew from Paris; she said one was coming. Are you her nephew?" And then, not awaiting a reply, she continued, "How thoughtless I am! It is my turn now to be sorry; here I have kept you standing all this time without asking you to be seated, and you must be so tired after travelling all the way from Paris, and then your long walk from the train." She drew a second chair up to the fire and said: "Won't you sit down here, Mr. —; she hesitated for a moment while I supplied my name, and then continued, "Yes, I remember now, that was the name my auntie spoke of; you will be seated, won't you, Mr. Arrall?"

"I took the proffered chair; and as she continued her sewing and the conversation, I obtained a better view of my aunt's little visitor.

"I had, when I first entered the room, almost unconsciously noticed the pleasing effect of the dark red gown fitting closely to the slight girlish figure; and now, upon examining her face, I found it was not less deserving of attention. It was not a beautiful face, nor even one which might be called pretty, looked at from an artistic standpoint, and yet there was something about it that I certainly found pleasing. Her eyes, which were blue, seemed to have in them tears and laughter so closely blended that one could never say at any time which would come the most readily.

"I am not now, my friend, speaking solely of the impression I formed of her at that time, for I came to know her much better afterwards, but I do not think that at any time during the days which followed she ever appeared prettier in my eyes than she did during that first evening of our acquaintance. No, my friend. I have many times since, in the gay French capital, seen women with eyes like stars; with hair like the sunlight; and with the stateliness of a queen; but I have never since seen a face that spoke so quickly to my heart as did the one upon which I looked that evening.

"It would be impossible for me to give you any description that would adequately bring before your mind a true conception of her features, and fortunately it is not necessary for me to do so. Shortly after the time of which I have been speaking she gave me several sittings; and I painted a picture of her which I still have in my possession and which I will show you when the time is come.

"She still continued to talk of any thing which she thought might be of interest to me, evidently trying, if possible, to make me feel that I had at last reached home. When she spoke she seemed to have such an unbounded faith, that the village church, the new minister, her trip to London, and Aunt Hilda, must be most pleasing topics of conversation that I soon found myself an interested listener, become so by the unaffected innocence of her manner.

"After she had chatted in this way for some time I said: 'You spoke a few moments since of Aunt Hilda; is she really your Aunt?'

"Oh, no," she replied, "Aunt Hilda is no relation of mine; I just call her aunt because she wishes it, and I like to. I wish she were though; she is so good, and then you know I haven't many relations. It would be odd if she really were my aunt, wouldn't it, because then you see we would be cousins? But as it is; why we are no relation at all to each other although we both call her aunt."

"You seem very ready to disclaim me," I replied, for I felt piqued, though I would not own it, at the way she had spoken. "I suppose you also have heard of my failure in Paris; well, I might have remembered that bad news travels fast."

"She took no notice of my first remark; but turning her face from the fire, into which she had been gazing as I spoke, looked at me in silence for a few moments.

"I remember there was a look of commiseration upon her face. My friend, I never was one of those who seek the opinion of their fellows, and I never asked nor cared for the sympathy of others in my misfortunes; but I remember well the unmistakable feeling of pleasure that stole over me as I saw the wistful look in those great blue eyes.

"Presently she spoke again. 'Did you really fail? I am sorry for you, very sorry. Won't you tell me about it? I wish you would. I think perhaps it would do you good to tell me. It always does me good to tell someone when I am in trouble.'

"So it was of my good she was thinking; well, I would tell her, and for perhaps the next half hour I found myself relating to this young girl the history of my struggle in

Paris, of the technical defects in my picture, and even of the adverse criticism of the Salon jury. She listened to the story with rapt attention, though she could not have understood one half that I said, and when I had finished she sat for sometime gazing into the fire.

"I said nothing but waited for her to speak.

"Presently she turned again towards me and said: 'Yes, I am sorry for you, very sorry.' She hesitated, but seemed as though she would say more, so I said 'There is something further you would say; what is it?'

"You will not be angry with me if I say it?"

"No," I replied, "I will never be angry with you."

"Well then, I think, perhaps, you should have stayed in Paris and tried to paint a better picture that would not fail, but then you know, I am not at all sure that I am right."

"I knew she was right, but before I could reply I was interrupted by the entrance of my Aunt, and from that time the conversation became general until we all retired for the night.

"It may seem strange to you, my friend, that I am able after so many years to recall those scenes so distinctly, but I have gone over them so many times that they seem as though they had occurred but yesterday.

"Winnie—that was the name my Aunt had called her—went away each morning after breakfast to her studies at the village school, and I, during the same period, usually retired to the little studio which my Aunt always fitted up for me when I was at home, and worked at my sketches. When the noon hour was come I almost invariably laid aside my brushes, and walked down towards the school-house to meet her. She always seemed pleased when she saw me coming, and if I was a little late and one of the village youths had already accompanied her part of the way she would always dismiss him and return with me.

"I had no reason, however, to feel flattered by her preference, as she invariably gave as her reason for it, that we were both going to the same destination and of course then it wouldn't inconvenience any one.

"When she dismissed her cavalier, it was always with such a winning little smile, and with such genuine thanks for his trouble in attending her, that I never remember seeing one take his leave of her thus, without looking perfectly contented, and more than ever bewitched by the unaffected kindness of her manner: I believe that one half of the boys in that school had enrolled themselves under her colours, prepared without question to do her slightest command. If so they certainly had a very discreet and indulgent little sovereign.

"I remember being amused one day at her odd and charitable way of deciding a rather delicate question to the entire satisfaction of all parties concerned, at the same time I became aware why it was, that she had quite as many friends among the girls of the village, as among those of the opposite sex.

"I had been busily engaged all the morning upon some sketches which I purposed sending up to London for sale, and as it had been raining steadily I had not noticed the lapse of time. When I looked at my watch, it was already considerable past the hour at which the school was usually dismissed, so I at once pulled on my cap and started out. I had not proceeded far however before I met quite a little procession coming towards the house, and what was my surprise to see it headed by Winnie's most ardent admirer. At his side walked one of the homeliest girls in the village, whom he was courteously shielding from the rain with a large umbrella. Next to these came another youth that I had only yesterday met coming home with Winnie, and by his side was a little lame girl to whom he was playing the chivalrous knight, while bringing up the rear, and entirely alone and unaided, trudged Winnie herself apparently the perfect picture of good-will and contentment.

"Why, Miss Winnie," I exclaimed, as I reached her side, "what in the world does all this mean? It surely can't be possible that two of your most devoted worshippers have withdrawn to other shrines, and left yours deserted."

"Oh, hush," she said, "don't speak so loud or they'll hear you. It is so funny; but I'm sure I couldn't tell you now without laughing right out, and I know they wouldn't like that, so you will have to wait till we reach home."

"When I had taken off her waterproof and rubbers, and she was snugly ensconced before the sitting room fire, she told me all about it.

"Breaking out into a little laugh she said, 'Oh, Mr. Arrall it was all so funny, so very funny. The way it was, was this: You remember yesterday, when Charlie and I met you on the road home, I promised Charlie before he left that he might walk up with me to-day. Well, this morning, as I was going to school, I met Hal, and he said it would surely rain before noon, and he asked me if he might come down with me in case it did. I said yes; because I always find it difficult to carry my books and an umbrella too; the books are so heavy you know.'

"I took occasion at this juncture to remark that I did not remember ever having seen her carry either until to-day. She however quite ignored my interpolation and continued:

"When I came out at noon Charlie was waiting for me, and it was only then I remembered that I had promised them both. I couldn't think what to do about it, and while I was standing undecided Hal came up, and they began to get real angry at each other. I had just told them that I was very sorry, and that it was all my fault—because it was my own know—when out came the two girls you saw with them, and as they never have any one to

accompany them home, I thought that would be a good way to settle matters. So I told the boys they were to go with them and that I wouldn't walk with any one at all to-day, and they both said they would, and what is more, were very good and kind about it, but it all seemed so funny to me that I could hardly keep from laughing."

"She sat for a few moments as if in grave doubt about something, and then added solemnly; 'Do you know, I don't think I can be very good to-day, or I wouldn't have wanted to laugh the way I did, would I?'

"Poor little Winnie, she always had some question of casuistry, about which her conscience refused to be satisfied.

"And so the time wore on, lazily and monotonously, as it always does in the quiet life of a village, and yet each day as it passed was slowly weaving into my life a brighter ray of light than it had ever known before. I knew I could no longer conceal from myself the secret; I was in love with Winnie.

"My aunt, with a woman's quick intuition in such matters, had known it even before myself, and I well remember her saying to me one day, after Winnie had left us to go upstairs for something, 'Be careful, Paul, be very careful what you are doing, remember that the world would scarcely be content to live in the darkness, after it had once known the radiance of the sun.'

"Quite true, Aunt Hilda," I replied, "but why not always have the sun?"

"Because it may be beyond the compass of your powers, Paul."

"I knew well to what she referred, and said, 'I see no reason, Aunt Hilda, why I should not try to gain her love, except it be my own unworthiness, and if she ever truly loves me she is good, and I think she will forgive me that.'

"There may be other reasons, Paul, of which you are not aware. Her mother when she died was a Roman Catholic; her father is one now, and Winnie has always been taught that it is to be her religion also."

"But Aunt Hilda, how can that be any reason?"

"I have not finished yet, Paul. Her father, who is a pre-eminently selfish man, is an invalid in very straitened circumstances, and will undoubtedly wish her to marry for wealth, and Winnie is not the sort of girl for whom it will be difficult to find suitors."

"But Aunt Hilda," I exclaimed, "I shall not always be poor. You think because my picture was rejected that I am forever a failure. It is not so; it is anything but that. Why it was presumption for me to send it in; and I could expect nothing but failure. I would have won it in another year; and I will win it yet. I will work night and day to win it."

"No Paul, you do not understand me; there is no one believes in you more firmly than I do, yet it may be I am wrong; in any case, I see it is too late to warn you now."

"We remained silent for sometime, until at length Winnie came in again, and I retired to my studio to work upon my sketches.

"It was not long after this that Winnie and I went out one afternoon sketching together. She had accompanied me upon several occasions, and on this afternoon of which I am speaking had begged so much to be allowed to go, that it would have taken a much harder heart than Aunt Hilda's to refuse her. Ah, my friend, that afternoon is at this moment before my mind as if it were yesterday. I remember well how pretty she looked as she walked merrily along, every now and again springing up the grassy bank that skirted the road to pick a wild flower or some bright leaf, which her quick eye had seen in passing. It was from one of these excursions, that she returned holding up a daisy in view, and calling upon me to wait. I did so, and when she had overtaken me and regained her breath, she began: 'Now Mr. Arrall I want you to promise that you will do something for me; you will promise won't you? Please do.'

"Winnie," I replied, "I wish you wouldn't call me Mr. Arrall; I don't like to be called that by any one, and least of all by you. I would rather you would call me Paul; won't you call me, Paul, Winnie?"

"She remained silent for a few moments, and then said slowly, 'No, I couldn't do that; I never call any gentlemen by their first names; you see I am only a little girl, and it wouldn't be right; and besides I am quite sure Papa wouldn't like me to. No, I don't think I could ever do that.'

"I picked up my paints and easel, which I had laid down when she called, and we continued our walk in silence. When we at last reached the scene of my unfinished sketch I at once set up my easel and began work, as I hoped that afternoon would see it completed. It was Winnie's favourite spot, and the sketch, which was a rather pretty little water colour, I intended to give her when finished.

"She lingered around for some time, and then seeing that I was apparently so absorbed in my work, gradually wandered off about the field to gather the wild flowers and grasses of which she was so fond. After occupying herself for sometime in this manner, I observed that she was slowly making her way over to where I was painting, and as she sat down upon the grass near my easel, I noticed that her great blue eyes had a troubled look in them. I said nothing and continued my sketching.

"Presently she spoke; 'We have always been good friends haven't we?'

"Yes," I said, "Miss Winnie, I think we have."

"And we are good friends now, aren't we?" she continued?

"Well," I replied, "perhaps my idea of friendship is