

now quite distinct from the large mansion. An arrangement most agreeable to her from the first, and of which she had by degrees so availed herself, that even Gertrude came to understand she was to wait for permission to visit her. That young lady had lived, for the greater part of the last three years, in companionship with Marian Hope, and found so much occupation in her studies and her charities, that time never was tedious to her. Her aunt's secluded habits left her to her own devices, and she had therefore enlarged her very limited circle of friends by adding Harriet Nugent, the curate's sister, to the number.

As Allan was driving slowly now, marking the alterations to the house, his attention was not so wholly engrossed that he did not observe there were three ladies on the lawn. He noticed that one hurried away to the little side gate, leading, by a private way, through the churchyard to the parsonage, while Gertrude, who was waiting to catch sight of him, ran open-armed across the lawn, with all her old childish impetuosity, to welcome him. Throwing the reins to the groom, Allan jumped down and ran to meet her, half lifting her sylph-like form in his embrace, and saying—

"It's a pity, True, my darling, that I cannot swing you unto my shoulder, as I once used."

"Orson! you're big enough, and rough enough for anything."

But as she spoke, each looked approvingly at the other. They were, indeed, a great contrast; strength and delicacy were the two words that described them. Never an Austwicke of them all, as his aunt would say, was taller or comelier than the young man, whose cheek of ruddy bronze was shaded by short, crisp, nut-brown hair; and whose laughing hazel eyes shed such a light over his face, that people did not stop to examine the features before they said, "What a handsome man!" while Gertrude, still *petite*, had all the pliant grace of nymph-like elegance. Few now would comment on her smallness, for there was such just proportion in the fine lines of her form, the falling shoulders, and round, white throat, and her sweet fair face, with its contrast of dark eyes, had so much more expression than usually belongs to a blonde, that most people would be tempted to think her brother very economic in his praise, when, after an admiring look, he held her off at arms' length, and said, approvingly—

"You'll do, True."

"To be sure I shall—for you, that is, and perhaps—but see, here's Marian, we're forgetting her."

They walked towards Miss Hope, who was wonderfully altered since we saw her last. The Austwicke air, and freedom from the anxiety that had wasted her early youth, had caused Marian to develop into a very lovely young woman, with one of those exquisitely clear, pale complexions, that shows the faintest tint of rose which animation or emotion gives, and therefore ever varies the expression of the face with the feelings. Amid a crowd, Marian would never be noticed for personal attractions; but in a small circle, when animated by music or conversation, her face kindled into positive beauty. Now, as she advanced to welcome Allan, and to answer his inquiries, he could scarcely believe it was the same Miss Hope he remembered, pale, subdued, and timid, and that he had once irreverently stigmatized, in order to tease Gertrude, as an "inanimate piece of putty."

The three walked together to the house.

"And how is Aunt Honor?" said Allan "I suppose I shall find her in the house?"

"No, Allan; she sent to me this morning the message that this was one of her bad days, and that she cannot see me. She has been reading Lady Hester Stanhope's Life of late. I hope she will not take her views about lucky and unlucky days," said Gertrude.

"Miss Austwicke has too much good sense," interposed Marian, looking rather deprecatingly at her friend.

"I don't know about good sense, Marian! Megrimms grow like mildew, if people live alone and yield to them."

"Well, our mother, dear True, will never have megrimms from that cause, happily."

"I hope mamma may come down, Allan, now you are here."

"She has written to me to meet her at Scarborough. She thinks the boys should stay the bathing season there."

"Oh, but papa wants you here, Allan; I heard him say so when he made just a run down, to look round, as he said, three weeks ago. You won't go to Scarborough?"

"No, True no; my mother has the boys, and though I should like well enough to go to the moors this autumn, I shall stay here and look to things a bit."

After a little desultory talk of home matters when they reached the house, they soon separated to dress for dinner. As Miss Hope was preparing to go, Gertrude pressed her to remain.

"You forget, my dear," said Marian, "that Miss Austwicke may change her mind, and dine with you and Mr. Allan after all; and you cannot wonder that I do not care to meet her oftener than necessary."

"Oh, why do you attach so much importance to Aunt Honor's whims, Marian? I thought you were a better Christian."

"I think, dear Gertrude, that it is a Christian duty to avoid giving offence or annoyance. Miss Austwicke, I think, has never liked me; at least, upon acquaintance, I fear she has come even to dislike me, and therefore it is well to avoid her."

"What does her dislike matter—if dislike it is? I think it's mere whims."

Marian shook her head. "We don't discuss the matter. I don't see that Miss Austwicke is bound to like me because her niece does."

The two girls looked affectionately at each other, and Gertrude said, "So much the worse for her to have missed making such a friend as you are, Marian—though you do preach to me dreadfully sometimes, and are so frightfully obstinate."

"You'll have no end of things to say to your brother, my dear, and you know I half promised to go to Harriet's for an hour."

"Oh, then I've no chance. Let's see, Mr. Nugent is at home, I think?"

"Hush!" said Marian, laying her white hand lightly on Gertrude's mouth. "You worry me, you do indeed, when you—"

"Oh, it's tender—too deep—a subject to be discussed," whispered Gertrude, provokingly.

"You forget that Mysie is there, and Mrs. Maynard is expected daily—and Mysie is to me what your brother is to you."

"Not exactly so; 'blood's thicker than water'—but you are right, Marian dear: I did forget." And so the two friends separated; and while Gertrude hastened away to change her dress Marian walked through the private path across the churchyard to the parsonage, intending to stay an hour there, and then go home.

Our readers remember that Mrs. Maynard, the widow lady at Elmscroft, with whom Mysie had been placed, was the eldest sister of Mr. Nugent, the curate at Wieke Church. That gentleman had not, as time advanced, made any more favourable impression on Miss Austwicke, who was tenacious in her dislikes—as may be inferred, indeed, from the foregoing conversation. She had shut herself up from all intercourse that could be avoided. Gertrude alone was welcome to her. And as she saw the attachment that bound her niece to Marian, the reserve which from the first Miss Austwicke had shown towards Miss Hope so increased that it became painfully marked, so much so, that the only natural solution was that which Marian and Gertrude had both arrived at—namely, reserve must unfortunately, have deepened into dislike. Whatever was the feeling, it was powerless to affect Marian's position in the family; indeed, to some extent, it had rather established her there. For, when after Gertrude's long illness, Mrs. Austwicke had stayed a month at the Hall, on her way from the Continent, before the London season commenced, that lady managed to discover how Marian was certainly far from being a favourite with her sister-in-law. From that time Mrs. Austwicke treated her daughter's companion more cordially than she had hitherto done, alleging, what was indeed the truth, that in Gertrude's illness Marian had been indefatigable, as a reason

for showing her greater consideration. When she took leave of Gertrude to go to town, Mrs. Austwicke said, "I'm not going to have your aunt interfering in this house. I yielded to her and your father, rather against my own wishes, in taking Miss Hope at first; but I shall retain her for my own pleasure. I like her; I told your aunt so."

Gertrude was, of course, very glad to have her friend's society more assured to her, but she was quite sufficiently versed in the tactics of the family to be certain that her aunt's coldness towards Marian would henceforth increase. And so it did, to such a degree, that all which concerned the Hopes—father and daughter—or that transpired in their intimacy at the parsonage, was wholly unknown to Miss Austwicke. She had none of that meanness that likes to encourage servants, talk, or to listen to depreciating remarks about others. She was silent herself, and enjoined silence on dependants as to the people not agreeable to her. And so it had come to pass that a distant politeness when they met was the prescribed rule between Miss Austwicke and her niece's companion-governess. She never invited Marian to her apartments, nor took any meals with Gertrude when Miss Hope was with her. It had been the custom the first two years for Marian to dine with Gertrude in the middle of the day; but during the past year Gertrude's attainment of the dignity of eighteen had led to her having a late dinner, at which, four times a-week, her Aunt Honoria appeared. It was served an hour later than Marian stayed, except in the height of summer.

This plan had given Miss Hope the opportunity of spending more time with her friend Harriet, who, on her part, was delighted to have a friend who entered cordially into all her parochial plans of usefulness. Mr. Hope, too, in the society of Nugent, had a happiness of which he had long been deprived. And as his health somewhat improved, he assisted the good clergyman in forming and conducting adult classes among the people of the village—a plan that never could have been carried out so efficiently but for the curate having such an ally. All these mutual pursuits and interests so ripened the intimacy, that the Hopes were able to explain, and the curate and his young sister naturally understood, how dear to them was the orphan Mysie whom they had reared, and who was now placed with Mrs. Maynard, the eldest sister of the curate. Harriet joined in Marian's regret that their cottage, "Ferry Gap," was so small; it gave force to the interdiction which had prevented the Hopes having Mysie to spend vacations with them. And as in process of time Mysie's term as pupil had expired, and Mrs. Maynard employed her as teacher, it was a kindness the curate's sister liked to manifest, to invite Mysie, or rather Miss Grant, to accompany Mrs. Maynard on a visit to the parsonage for the holidays. She had now been a month there, and was still remaining, while Mrs. Maynard had gone to London to meet the parents of pupils, and arrange business matters prior to the re-assembling of her pupils at Elmscroft. Mysie's stay would not be only for a few more days, and hence an evening with her was becoming precious. Though we won't say that this was the only attraction which the parsonage had for Marian; but in this we are anticipating.

When Gertrude found that Marian had actually gone, she sent Ruth with a note to urge her aunt to come and welcome Allan; but her attendant received the answer, written in pencil, "That she was in no mood to welcome any one."

"Poor soul!" sighed Gertrude, as she read the line; and her pity was almost as great as if she had known how hopelessly miserable the lonely woman had cause to be. To the young girl it seemed the depression of ill-health and isolation; to Miss Austwicke it was the constant fret, the caustic irritant, of a troubled mind, bent on an incessant arguing with itself in the impotent endeavour to make wrong right.

When Allan rejoined his sister in the drawing-room, and conducted her to dinner, he was rather amused at their being alone with the spacious well-filled table between them.

"How odd it seems, True, you and I *vis à vis*,