

[Written for *The Family Circle*.]

The Old Library at Home.

BY E. T. PATERSON.

CHAPTER VIII.

She stood leaning against a tree-trunk, wondering idly why Dick did not come to summon her. She was quite alone; most of the others had already gone. A step crushed among the crisp moss beside her. She turned with a smile, and it was George Holland.

"Mr. Mason sent me," with grave politeness. "Something has happened to his carriage, and there will necessarily be a change of arrangement about going home. Miss Mason will go with your sister. Will you allow me to drive you?"

Leah's heart gave a quick little bound—a half-guilty one. It was of Holland that she was thinking as he came up, not with any girlish flutterings or specious self-deceiving—just coolly making up her mind with the hard, clear, logical directness of the New England mental processes.

He had thought as he approached her how sweet and pure and utterly unworldly she looked. And she was saying to herself:

"If he asks me, I will marry him."

There were ways enough. Other girls did as much for the men they cared for, and no one blamed them or thought they had overstepped the bounds of maidenly propriety. And just then his voice sounded in her ears.

For the first few minutes of the ride very little was said. Leah had never had a flirtation in her life. The matter before her was dead, solemn earnest. Her small hands lay lightly clasped in her lap; the soft evening wind blew her hat back on her neck, and she did not replace it. The moon shone full on her face, and deepened the shadows of the long lashes against her cheek.

"I fear I am rather a dull companion," he said, at last. "It has not come in my way to talk to young ladies much."

"Are young ladies different from other people—in their conversational demands, I mean?"

"Yes, rather. That is, I know very little about them; I am not a society man."

"Are you not?" She felt a half-contempt for the self-consciousness that began with an apology.

"No. But," cheerfully, "neither am I an artist or poet."

"I hope you are a good driver," a little sharply.

A rabbit had rushed across the road under the horses' noses. The impatient beasts improved the occasion. They reared and plunged and broke into a dead run. The wood road was narrow and rough; the light vehicle swung from side to side. Leah caught her breath and braced herself in her seat. He was busy with his horses. When he checked them at last, and had time to look at her, apparently she had not moved a muscle. He could not see that the hands lying in her lap were clenched like iron.

"You are a wonderful girl," he said, honestly. "I expected you to scream. Turn your face to the light and let me see you. How white you are! were you frightened?"

"Yes."

That was all she said. Her lips were too unsteady. At heart she was a horrible coward, but she had the pluck and pride not to betray herself often.

"Well, there was reason. We had about one chance out of four of not being overturned. As I was saying, I am neither a poet nor a painter."

"I suppose I should be afraid of you if you were. I never knew a man who was either."

"But I have learned to drive," smiling, "fortunately for both of us. All my life long it has been the practical that has been uppermost," half sadly.

"I do not know that you need regret that. I think it is the practical that comes first in most lives."

"In your life?"

"Decidedly!" There was a sharp little ring in her voice.

"I have always been a poor man," he said, deliberately. "Does poverty make a man better or worse?"

She caught her breath again, as if she were on the verge of a hysterical outbreak. Perhaps her fright had broken up her usual calm—Leah Allen was not a woman who turned her life inside out for all eyes.

"I know one woman whose temper is about ruined by it. I am very poor myself."

To be Continued.

FOR one instant the mother and daughter gazed in silence at one another. I could not see the expression of Mrs. Godfrey's face, for it was turned from me, but in Helen's wide blue eyes there was a look of horror not unmixed with fear; for as I have said, notwithstanding her love for her mother, she feared her, and on occasions I had even seen her shrink from her, I fancied, with the same sort of dread which I myself experienced in Mrs. Godfrey's presence; a feeling akin to that which a mad person inspires in most people.

The paper in Mrs. Godfrey's hand was more than half consumed, when Helen sprang suddenly forward and seized her mother's arm, saying something to her at the same time, which, of course, I was unable to hear. Mrs. Godfrey replied, and then freeing her arm, held her daughter from her, and with her other hand held the half burnt will in the flame of the candle.

Helen's face was white as death and her little hands were clasped over her bosom, which, I could see, heaved convulsively. She appeared to be pleading with her mother, but the latter heeded her not, only her face hardened and her lips compressed themselves more tightly.

When the last scrap of paper was destroyed she turned and spoke to the frightened girl, who shrank from her and covered her face with her trembling hands.

Mrs. Godfrey spoke rapidly and with more gesticulation than I had ever known her to do before; she seemed to be trying to impress something on her daughter's mind. Was she excusing herself for the crime just committed? Perhaps seeking to palliate the crime itself, to present it in as softened a light as possible to the mind of Helen. For an evil heart has ever on hand a fund of plausible excuses for its wrong doing.

But the girl interrupted her with a gesture expressive of more dignity than I would have conceived it possible for so *petite* a person to assume. With a face pale as death and her eyes sorrowful yet stern, Helen answered her mother, while the latter stood listening, a cold smile on her lips and an angry gleam in her eyes; one hand rested on the back of a chair, the other hung clenched at her side; the whole attitude of the woman spoke of defiance and implacable resolve.

At last Helen, utterly overcome, advanced toward her mother with hands outstretched beseechingly. But the elder woman shook her head, and answering, raised her hand to heaven as though registering some vow; and with a low, anguished cry the young girl turned and fled from the room.

I waited but to give one more glance at the remaining occupant of the library; she stood perfectly motionless, her head sunk upon her bosom, her whole aspect betokening utter dejection as a few minutes before it had defiance.

When I turned to re-enter the house I became alive to the state I was in. My limbs were so cramped that it was with difficulty I could walk; add to this a miserable drizzling rain was falling and my garments, heavy with dampness, clung to my chilled body. I ran as quickly as possibly to the door through which I had gained egress. Several times my benumbed fingers failed to turn the key in the lock, and, cold, tired, wretched as I was the childish tears started to my eyes; at last however I succeeded in unlocking the door, entering and relocking it after me. I went cautiously forward till I reached the hall; here I stood breathless; there was not a sound to be heard, not the faintest glimmer of light to be seen anywhere. In a few minutes I reached the safe shelter of my own room, and immediately began to remove my wet garments; scarcely had I finished this operation, when footsteps hurrying along the corridor outside my door, startled me so that my heart stood still for a moment and then commenced beating violently. With my gaze strained toward the door, I stood waiting in awful expectation for—I knew not what. My nerves were wrought up to a high pitch and the sound of a footstep at that unwonted hour was sufficient to set them quivering painfully. The footsteps stopped at my door; then came a quick impatient knock, and