

You know, dear, how hard it is to be alone." One white hand was caressingly laid on the boy's curly head as the lady continued,

"Now, Tom, you will be kind I hope. I trust you—"

"Aunt, how can I?" he cried in his impetuous way. "How can I, Aunt? You know—oh, it might have been so different for us all! Philip changes more every day. Can't you see it, Aunt Theresa?"

"I see it all, but it is the business perhaps; you know he throws all his energy into it—all his heart in fact, Tom. I fancy, perhaps, it will be a good thing for Philip in the end; besides we must not lose faith in everybody. Listen now until I tell you about Myrtle. Her father wrote to my brother, asking him to be her guardian; Ernest had never heard of his death. The letter with later ones from a lawyer only reached Philip in the fall. The poor child was utterly alone, and I begged of him to take the charge entrusted to his father."

"She is an everlasting fixture, then?" after a pause. "Oh, dear!"

"Yes," said Miss Douglass.

"I wish I had stayed at Chamberlee. If there is anything I detest it's girls."

"Tom, Tom! You do not think before you speak; you are forgetting who I am."

"That is altogether different, Aunt. You are an old-fashioned girl. It's these new-fangled affairs I hate, with their giggles and frills and fixings. I love you, honestly, but upon my honor the rest of the women are only fit to iron a fellow's shirt and cook grub. They are a humbug."

"A necessary evil," laughed Miss Douglass, good-naturedly; she was accustomed to Tom's outbursts.

"Just that. Good-bye,—I'll take a bite in the pantry. Seeing that you are so much better, I won't be back for a while."

In his heart Tom hated to leave Miss

Douglass. It would have delighted him to stay and read or talk to her, but for "that girl."

In the afternoon, Tom came home, looking grim. He sauntered round the yard with his hands in his pockets, and his cap pushed on the back of his head, fuming at his lot. Growing desperately cold at last, he ventured in, or rather sneaked in, and after a cautious look out for the "Virgin Mary," he tiptoed up to the sick room. Miss Douglass was too tired to talk. After bathing her head until she dropped off into a quiet sleep, he suddenly bethought himself of the library, and decided to go and read awhile, and then write to his friend Neil. Accordingly, Tom was soon skirmishing among a pile of magazines and pamphlets.

With a yawn and a growl, he stretched himself on an immense lounge that was placed across a deep window. After reading until his eyes ached, he pitched the book on a table, and lay back with folded arms for a snooze. Soon he was blissfully asleep, quite unconscious that "that girl" was reading close beside him. Early in the afternoon, she had found her way to this room, and, becoming absorbed in the "Heir of Redclyffe," she had ensconced herself behind the lounge, flat on the floor, under shade of the deep, crimson curtains. Sometimes she grew intensely interested in her story, and sometimes she gazed away over the shrouded earth at the funny huts of the *habitants*, which dotted the river bank. Aware that she was safely concealed, and thinking that perhaps the "lazy big boy" would soon leave, she remained quiet. However, on coming to a touching part of the beautiful tale, she quite forgot him, until several short, loud snores provoked her ready laughter. Meanwhile—as we are very apt to do—Tom fell to dreaming, and, O horrors! fancied himself at the hyemeneal altar. His blushing bride, a tall, ungainly female, fancifully arrayed