

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN BEAUTIES

ON the morning of Lydia's long-expected return, as Mrs. Emery moved restlessly about the large double parlors opening out on a veranda where the vines were already golden in the September sunlight, it seemed to her that the very walls were blank in hushed eagerness and that the chairs and tables turned faces like hers, tired with patience, toward the open door. She had not realized until the long separation was almost over how unendurably she had missed her baby girl, as she still thought of the tall girl of nineteen. She could not wait the few hours that were left. Her fortitude had given way just too soon. She must have the dear child now, now, in her arms.

She moved absently a spray of goldenrod which hid a Fra Angelico angel over the mantel and noted with dramatic self-pity that her hand was trembling. She sat down suddenly, and lost herself in a vain attempt to recall the well-beloved sound of Lydia's fresh young voice. A knot came in her throat, and she covered her face with her large, white, carefully-manicured hands.

Marietta came in briskly a few moments later, bringing a bouquet of asters from her own garden. She was dressed, as always, with a severe reticence in color and line which, though due to her extreme need for economy, nevertheless gave to the rather spare outlines of her tall figure a distinction, admired by Endbury under the name of stylishness. Her rapid step had carried her half-way across the wide room before she saw to her surprise that her mother, usually so self-contained, was giving way to an inexplicable emotion.