

to the desk, which stood in the corner of the long living room, where they always sat together except on high days and holidays, and took all their meals; there lay the letters on the open desk, two unopened, one from the girls away at school, (Eunice and Abigail always called Abbie) and one from Collins, the younger son at the university, they were all right—neither of them coming home for Christmas, and the letters were loving epistles, and she gathered courage by reading them to finish Harry's letter. "I wouldn't mind it so much after all," she said to herself by way of comfort, "if it was't for Rachel, and then she broke down again, looking up she caught sight of herself in the glass, and soliloquized, "dear me how old I am growing, my hair is getting gray, and my eyes are dull and sunken, and O, my, the wrinkles, I must try to brighten up a bit how long I've been here and all those visitors, and only John to entertain them; what will they think?"

Just then the clock struck midnight, and she could hear the merry voices calling out the Christmas greetings, and John came calling, "Hettie where are you?" and before she could answer, he kissed her on both cheeks, and brought her into the best room, and then there was more cheering, and at last they quieted down and sang and talked of old times, when they were all young, for an hour or more, and then Sally and Dick were called in, and the prayers were said in the old orthodox way, standing behind the chairs, and the company were shown to the cosy bedrooms up stairs, and entered to prim beds, with downy pillows and home-made flannel sheets. Hettie and John Fleming sat by the firelight with the shadows flitting about them and resting on the pictures on the walls, and talked of Harry's marriage, and of the children away from home, and the years they had passed at the old homestead, and the many changes; and the Squire turning to his wife as though to conclude, said, "We've been so happy here, and no great sorrow has come to darken our lives, 'twould be wrong to indulge in ill-feeling about Harry's marriage, cheer up, and make the best of it, we must make an effort to have our visitors enjoy themselves, they've come so far through the cold to see us, and brother Ben and his wife have never been here for years, nor cousin Joseph either, and the girls and boys will be delighted to see the farm and have a look around if the storm subsides, by tomorrow; they're used to the city, and it'll all be new to them; fine young folks they seem."

"Yes, John I know we have much to be grateful for and yet I can't help feeling hurt, we thought it would be so different, and for our eldest son to disappoint us so it is not a good example for the others, and it has been too sudden I fear, 'marry in haste and repent at leisure,' is the old adage, but its true generally."

"We mustn't expect too much in this world, life is full of changes, and the fact says, truly I'm afraid in your case."

"For disappointment's not the thing
'Tis pride and passion point the sting."

And seemingly Hettie I'm inclined to believe it is not so much Harry's marriage that is a disappointment, but your pride has been wounded, and you wanted him to marry Rachel Van Dyke."

"Indeed you're not very complimentary to me, of course I'm proud of Harry, and his pictures too, and I had set my heart on Rachel for a daughter-in-law,

and there's not a likelier girl anywhere, and she has good blood in her veins if it is Dutch, and she's as much an American as any of us; though her great grandfather came over from Holland and settled here in York state, he was one of the original land-holders; but I am hurt, I own to it, and it bothers me about Rachel, and telling all our friends, they're sure to ask after Harry, and they'll see how we feel even if we don't tell them."

"Let them think what they please, I shan't explain matters, Harry had a right to marry, he's of age long ago, and if we don't make a fuss, no one else will I'm sure," said the squire.

"You know every one around here just about worshipped him, and I don't fancy young men going off and marrying strange women, it isn't orthodox you know that, what kind of religion she's been brought up in we don't know, nor what sort of morals either, perhaps she'll lead Harry astray from truth and light."

Don't worry so Hettie, the Lord's care will be over him there as well as here, let us leave him in the good Lord's care who rules and over-rules all things for good to those who trust in Him."

Mrs. Fleming tried to be brave, but only mothers know the yearnings of the mother-heart for the absent ones, and with sorrow unfeigned, she tried to sleep away her grief and dream of brighter things.

And while family and guests are buried in dreamy sleep, oblivious of surroundings, we will ramble round the premises. It is an old square two-story house with large rooms below and chambers equally spacious, plenty of windows, and the regulation green shutters. The front piazza was quite imposing, with tall fluted columns, and the entire appearance denoted stateliness; the front yard was some distance from the road and the long walk was bordered on either side with tall lilacs and great horse chestnut trees in the corners; old shady elms on the road-side—the lane on the south side ran out to the barn, and thence to the orchard; the trees now were covered with frost and snow, and in the moon light the whole place was like fairy land. A beautiful picture in itself. Some parts of the house were not used much in winter, for those were not the days of stoves and furnaces, and the best room was only for company of the best sort from a distance and not for ordinary visitors, not even the minister, and the guest chamber over the parlor was even more exclusive, and colder, but on special occasions like the present, the great brass warming fan was taken down from its nail in the wall, and filled with live coals, and the housemaid went through the bedrooms, and seen that each bed was thoroughly warmed; as you can perceive that flannel sheets were not amiss in those times. Horses, cows, pigs and chickens everything upon the premises, all were well housed.

Christmas day was bright with sunshine and good cheer, the breakfast over all went to church in the most orthodox fashion, and at the close of the services, while introducing his relations to the minister, the Squire invited him rather unceremoniously considering it was Christmas, to dine with them at the mansion, (as the place was designated by common acceptance,) Rev. Erastus Gillman after some excuses about his housekeeper's preparations, and the Christmas goose, finally consented to join the party. Having paid strict attention to

the proprieties all felt at liberty to "eat drink and be merry" for the rest of the day. Even Mrs. Fleming forgot her trouble and joined in the general festivity. Nothing was said of the recent news, until the visitors gathered in the parlor after dinner, when the minister opened the subject by inquiring "what news Squire, from Mr. Harry, how does he like Paris, or is he in Italy at present?" Uncle Ben supplemented the question while the Squire sort of deliberated, by saying "Yes, John, we've not heard a word since we came about Harry, and you were always so proud of his talent for drawing, and Ruth and myself were examining his paintings here this morning, and wondering if he was going to be a great artist, now he's gone abroad." The hush was almost painful, the Squire looked at his wife, and she turned toward Rachel, (who had come early in the afternoon) it was evident some explanation must be made, and the Squire broke the silence with, "Mother where's the letter we had last night, we might read it, that explains affairs exactly." Rachel unconscious of any secrecy, but fully aware of her love for Harry, asked, "can I fetch the letter Squire?" Mrs. Fleming grasped the opportunity and said "yes come with me!" Squire Fleming had not remembered the girl when he had proposed reading the letter, and now he realized the embarrassment, still he trusted to his wife's tact to help him in the dilemma. Meantime in the other room Mrs. Fleming and Rachel read the news together, the girl proud-spirited and unwilling to betray even to his mother her unrequited affection showed no outward emotion, while Mrs. Fleming wept bitterly, and broke out sobbing, "You mustn't be down-hearted my girl," "there's as good fish in the sea as ever was caught," and I'm sure Harry has been deceived by a false glitter, and away from home, he'll come to his senses when it's too late. I'm as disappointed as can be, I always thought he would marry you though there was nothing said."

"Don't mind me Mrs. Fleming I'll take the letter in while you compose yourself," and with the open letter in her hand, Rachel walked up to the squire handing him the letter, and then sat down and listened apparently as unconcerned as if the writer had been a total stranger. After the first few comments all congratulatory, noticing Mrs. Fleming's absence she went to look for her, telling her the letter had been read and quoting some of the complimentary remarks; her indifferent manner completely modified the mother's grief, and the evening passed off as gayly as though no heart had been broken. Rachel was asked to sing and reluctantly consented, she sat down to the Melodeon and in a voice of touching sweetness sang the old favorite, "Oh, no we never mention him, his name is never heard," by the suggestion of one of the young lady visitors, strange how these things happen. The minister was the only one who noticed anything unusual in her voice, and he sympathetically then and there made up his mind to win her for himself if possible; he knew her preference for Harry Fleming, but he had never thought the young man returned her affection in a manly way, yet he had been too sensitive to risk an uncertainty; now he felt he would at least offer his sincere friendship and wait his opportunity. How little we know what passes through the minds of