

THE OLDER BROTHER.



·BY·"PANSY·"

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“‘MY DEAR CHILDREN,’ IT BEGAN.”

THE  
OLDER BROTHER

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BY

“PANSY”

(MRS. G. R. ALDEN)

AUTHOR OF “ESTER RIED,” “WANTED,” “MAKING FATE,”  
“OVERRULED,” ETC.

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Illustrations

“ ‘ MY DEAR CHILDREN, ’ IT BEGAN, ”	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“ SHE LAID DOWN HER FORK AND LOOKED AT HIM PITI- FULLY ” . . . . .	Facing page 33
“ ‘ HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE PLACES WITH ME, PORT? ’ ” . . . . .	“ “ 65
“ ‘ ENGAGED ! ’ EXCLAIMED MA- MIE. ‘ HOW DELIGHTFUL ’ ”	“ “ 147

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# The Older Brother

## I

### WITHERED LEAVES AND HOPES

IT was a typical November day ; standing for dreariness and desolation. The sky was heavy with dun-colored clouds ; it almost seemed as though the sun could never again make his way through them. A fitful wind was blowing. There were moments when it hushed into utter silence, as though resolved never to be heard from more. Then, suddenly, it would make a savage rush among the autumn leaves strewn thickly everywhere, and send them in aimless whirls through space. There was a suggestion of frost in the air, and a sense of chill that struck to one's very heart. Lawrence Hammond leaned against the railing of the piazza and watched the leaves. There was



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one, a large well formed leaf still in vivid green, with only a vein of crimson running through it. A premature fall it seemed to have had. It was only a few feet from a branch from which it might have fallen. Was it sorry? Was it trying to get back? The young man pushed it gently toward the swaying branch, smiling at his fancy that the branch bent low to receive it. He pushed again, interested in spite of himself in the whimsical notion. Just then there came a madder rush of wind.

It seized upon the leaf and shook it; lifted it high as if in anger; sent it whirling over the myrtle covered bank a few feet away, then back again, and finally carried it quite beyond the fascinated gaze of the watcher, and lost it in a whirl of leaves and dust.

Lawrence Hammond turned his eyes away at last with an involuntary sigh, and then a slight contemptuous laugh.

“What a fool I am!” he said. “And yet I

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don't know but it is prophetic; only, it would be difficult to find the person to do the pushing; mother would if she could, I think. Poor mother!"

There was another sigh heavier than before. The sadness that seemed as if it were habitual deepened into positive gloom. He drew himself away from the worn post on which he had leaned, and stood erect, with folded arms looking out upon the sullen world. He felt a sense of fitness in the gloom about him; it was better that the sun did not shine. Sunshine on a grave seemed mockery; at least upon so new a grave as theirs. The air looked full of snow; perhaps before morning the new mound would be covered over with a mantle of snow; leveled by it, so as not to be distinctive any more. Would that be better? Perhaps, that too, was a prophetic thought. By to-morrow, or the next day, or in a very few weeks at most that awful new made grave would be leveled to the common height to every one but them;

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merely one of the many graves in the cemetery. To the inmates of that little farmhouse would it not always stand out boldly as the most prominent point of their experience?

Not to Porter, possibly; he had a way of making a business of forgetting; of turning himself resolutely away from that which was hard to look upon or think about. And Mamie cried so easily and so frequently that perhaps her tears would be the soonest dried; he had heard that such was the case; but his mother and himself:—would it be ever possible for them to get farther away from that grave than they were this moment? It had come upon them so suddenly; fierce illness, and death, and a funeral and all the awful details connected with them, consummating at last in that cruel mound in the graveyard. They were used to failures in crops, and high prices for apples, and potatoes, when they had none to sell, and ruinously low prices for these and

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other farm produce when their yield was bountiful. They were used to planning and contriving; to wearing last year's style of clothing; to going without the new suit months after its necessity seemed imperative; at least he was used to it; Porter, it is true, generally contrived by the help of some happy accident, to secure the much needed garments some time before he did; Porter was always having happy accidents, but he, Lawrence, was used to a great deal of self-denial about clothes, and other matters. Yet despite all sorts of drawbacks and perplexities they had contrived, both of them to remain in school until their preparatory course was concluded, and they were ready for college. Quite time for him, too; for he had passed his twentieth birthday, although Porter lacked still some weeks of his eighteenth. Porter had gone steadily forward from the first, but he had dropped out two winters, to teach in the public school; and missed nearly the whole of one spring term

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because his father was in sore need of help about the small fruits. So at last they were ready to enter together. It was going to be hard work, that they knew. Porter, indeed, had felt it so much that he had sometimes grumbled that "a fellow might almost better not go to college at all, than to have to go like a pauper, counting his pennies and freezing and starving himself to get through." But at other times he had been cheery over it and assured his brother that they would no doubt find easier times than they were planning; something almost always turned up to help out. And no one could be more amazed than he, when the next thing that "turned up" was an accident and a resulting illness for their father, who had been wont to say that at least he had always his good health to be thankful for. The accident had occurred but a few days before they were to leave for college; of course they were delayed, at first by their anxiety, and later, by the need of

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their constant help in caring for the father. From the first they had called it delay, and had looked forward with assurance to entering college a few weeks late. Then, suddenly, all unprepared as they were, had come to them the solemn word: "Your father cannot recover. The internal injuries he has received are beyond human skill; he can live but a few days."

Scarcely had the young men rallied from the first shock of this terrible news, when the blow fell in all its crushing power, and on this November day they had a grave, and an empty chair, to remind them of their father. No wonder that the household was crushed. It surprised no one that Mamie the sixteen-year-old daughter, and her father's darling, made no effort to control her bitter weeping, and needed day and night her mother's arms about her, and her mother's self-forgetful care and sympathy. It was only when Mamie slept that the mother dared take time to cry; and her pallid face with dark circles

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under her heavy eyes spoke appealingly to her eldest son whenever he trusted himself to look at her searchingly.

Barely three days since the grave closed over their hopes, and as yet, only Porter had rallied to speak of other matters. But an hour before, he had strolled out to his brother making a rustle among the leaves as he said :

“ How soon do you think we can get away, Lawrie ? ”

“ Get away ? ” Lawrence had repeated mechanically, as one who heard the words, but hardly caught their meaning.

“ Yes, that was what I said. Wake up, and look things in the face ; there is no use in glooming like a girl all the while. It doesn't better anything. We owe it to Dr. Britton to get there as soon as possible. Hardly any other man in the world would have taken the trouble to make special provision for our being late ; we shall have to work like ponies as it is, to catch up. This studying at home doesn't amount to much ;

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at least under such circumstances as we have had. Father was worried over it, I know; he tried to speak something about it to me the last time—" The young man's voice faltered, and ceased suddenly while he gnawed his under lip to hold it from quivering. It was too soon yet to speak that thoughtful father's name in natural tones. After a moment he added: "We owe it to his memory to make all possible speed now; it is what he would have wanted."

Was it? The elder brother looked up quickly with this thought in his eyes; but he did not speak. Oh it was what his father would have *wanted*; that was easy enough to say; but was it what he would have counselled? If he only knew! Yet he did not feel like speaking these words to his brother.

"There are many things to plan for and arrange, before any getting away can be done;" he said at last. "There are mother and Mamie to be thought about."

"I know, of course; that is why I am



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speaking. The temptation is to fold our hands and do nothing; but it doesn't really help any of us. What must be done might as well be done at once I should think, as later; especially when there is such imperative need for haste. A week with us just now is more important than a month would be, later."

Lawrence lifted his eyes again and searched his brother's face before he finally asked: "What is to be done, Porter?"

The younger brother rustled the dead leaves impatiently under his feet as he spoke:

"How should I know? I am not the eldest; and not a word has been spoken to me about plans. What I say is, that we must not allow ourselves to go on in this way any longer; we have no time to nurse our sorrow; we hinder ourselves and help no one by doing so."

"Have you thought of any plans?"

"Yes, a dozen; but of what use? A

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fellow cannot plan alone. This place will have to be rented, I suppose; but that can hardly be managed at this time of year. We might advertise, and keep on the look-out. Meantime I have thought that perhaps mother and Mamie would accept Uncle Stuart's invitation for a time, at least: or perhaps go to Aunt Carter's if that seems better. Mamie can't go back to school just now, I suppose; mother needs her, don't you think? What *do* you think, anyhow? You can't have been without plans all this time."

"Do you think mother would be happy at Uncle Stuart's? He invited her, it is true, but perhaps you noticed that Aunt Alice did not second the invitation heartily; and as for Aunt Carter's, I should say it was quite out of the question. Mother could not endure that climate, even if they had a comfortable place for her. Moreover, who is to provide them with the necessary money for going, and for getting ready to go; even if there were no other expenses? And after

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they had made as long a visit at Uncle Stuart's as was within the range of decency, what then?"

There was more rustling of the dead leaves, and the look of anxiety on the younger face was deepened by a frown.

"I don't know, I am sure," Porter said at last, speaking half angrily. "As I said, I am not the eldest. I have driven myself nearly wild with trying to plan; and I seem to be the only one who has given himself any anxiety. What can they do?"

"Porter, as I look at the matter it is left to you and me to take care of our mother and sister."

"Of course. Do you suppose I had any other idea? To that end it behooves us to waste no time, but to get to college as soon as possible and make ready for our work in the world. That is what I am trying to make you feel."

"I feel it, Port; but the way is anything but plain to me. We have the money in the

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bank for the greater part of this year's expenses; not all of them because the heavy expenses of"— he hesitated and his face paled; he could not say "the funeral,"—"of the last few weeks, will need to be paid out of it. For the rest, our father depended on his home, and his work, and his prudent self-denying care to support mother and Mamie through the year. But he is gone; and the work and care have stopped. Somebody must step in and try as well as he can to fill the place."

"What do you mean, Lawrence?" The questioner's face grew pale with a sudden fear,— "What are you thinking about or talking about? Mother and Mamie cannot live on alone here and care for the place. You *cannot* mean, you surely cannot think of such a thing as our giving up college! What would father say, after all his sacrifices to give us the opportunity. I would sooner die at once and lie beside him, than to thwart his cherished hopes in that way.

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I tell you we owe it to father to take our place in the world where he meant us to be. Of course we will go, and as soon as possible. Mother will say the same ; see if she doesn't. Some way will open, mark my word. You are too much given to looking ahead. Take life a term at a time if that is the utmost stretch of your courage. For a single term, at least, mother and Mamie can visit, and we can get started ; after that, something will turn up. A college education I'm going to have, old fellow ; and I'm going to have it *now*. Of that much you may rest assured. We have struggled too hard thus far, to allow any other thought than this for a single moment. I'll tell you what I think you ought to do ; talk the whole thing over with mother this evening and get at some definite dates. I'll take Mamie off for a long tramp, so as to give you a chance ; the sooner things are settled the better it will be for her as well as for us. It's queer that I have to take the lead ; but I waited for you as long as I could.

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You see that to be altogether the best way, don't you?"

He was spared the necessity for a reply. At that moment appeared at the gate, two of their intimate friends from the neighboring farm; Robert Felton and his sister Cora.

"Good-afternoon," said the young man, cheerily, "Cora and I have been wondering if we could not coax Mamie and one, or both of you, to come for a walk. It isn't a bad afternoon for a tramp, though the sun does refuse to shine."

"We were just speaking of that very thing," said Porter Hammond promptly. "I told Lawrence I was going to try to get Mamie out for a long tramp; the poor child needs the exercise; she hasn't been out of the house yet."

There was no necessity for completing the sentence more fully; every one understood that the word "yet" covered that dreary stretch of time between the funeral and the present.

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Cora ran into the house to add her entreaties to those of the younger brother, while the two young men thus left, leaned on the gateposts and talked together in desultory fashion, carefully avoiding any reference whatever to that new grave which was distinctly in the mind of each.

## II

### AN EVENING OF DECISIONS

PRESENTLY, Lawrence left to himself, watched the walking party pass down the street. They paired off naturally, his sister Mamie with young Felton, and Cora with his brother; just the right number for a pleasant walk. He had not been urged, indeed he had not been asked to join them, beyond that tentative invitation "Will one of you go?" It had not seemed to occur to any of them that he could have made a fifth. He thought of it casually, but dismissed it from his mind with a mental "of course not; they knew I wouldn't leave mother alone." He could not help noting that Cora and his brother looked well together; they were of about the right relative height. He was bending his tall head toward her as they walked, evidently listening with the deepest



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interest to what she had to say. Porter was always a gentleman, especially in his treatment of ladies.

The watcher presently turned resolutely from the gate, refusing to look again down that road leading to the family burial place, and went back into the woodshed, where he seized the axe and struck such vigorous blows on a great hickory log as presently reduced it to the right size and shape for the kitchen stove. But instead of attacking another, he sat down on the wood block and gave himself up to a resolute settlement of certain questions. A smile that had a touch of bitterness flitted over his face as he recalled his brother's words: "I seem to be the only one who has given himself any anxiety." What had he done but try to plan, during those last three days that at times seemed to him like an eternity? Still, it would not do to be bitter with Porter; it was true, as he had been reminded, that he was the elder brother, and the care of mother

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and sister ought of course to be chiefly his. For a full half hour he sat with folded arms and eyes fixed upon the sawdust at his feet, not so much planning now what should be done as settling how best to do it. In truth he had known when he stood out there among the dead and dying leaves just what ought to, and therefore *must*, be done. At last he arose with the look on his face which meant decision, and, taking the axe again, prepared this time an armful of kindlings, carried them into the large deserted kitchen, and arranged them in the cook stove with such skill that the moment a match was touched to them they burst into a brisk blaze, and presently sent forth that cheerful and continuous roar which told that not only the kindlings but the more uncompromising wood had yielded to his skill and meant to burn. Then he took the bright teakettle and passing to the outer kitchen filled it from the pipe that brought water from the bubbling spring to their very door. Not

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- even so small an act as this could be performed, without calling to mind the painstaking care of the dead father. How hard he had tried to make life on the farm as easy as possible for the mother! The thought of it somehow nerved afresh the heart of the young man who must now take his place. He felt ready, at last, to face his mother.

She sat in her sewing chair in the large room, that served them as a family sitting and dining-room. It used to be a peculiarly cheerful room, especially in winter; it was furnished with reasonably easy chairs and an old-fashioned lounge that was the very essence of comfort; and it contained, besides the ordinary furnishings, a bookcase fairly well supplied with books and magazines. Of course everything partook now of the general gloom that enveloped the house. A large armchair, tenantless, pushed into one corner, told its woeful story. Mrs. Hammond had her mending basket beside her; she had seated herself with it that afternoon,

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from necessity as well as force of habit, for it was late in the week, and certain garments that it contained would be sure to be needed soon. But in the course of her work she had fallen upon a pair of socks that would be needed no more; and the poor bits of wool with yawning holes in them, bore yet the shape of the feet for which she could never mend again. The trivial incident seemed to emphasize her desolation. She had dropped the stockings as though they were things of life and torture, and resting her head on the cushions of her chair let the slow tears force themselves one after another through the closed lids.

From the very first she had tried hard not to break down before her children; but now that she was alone, the tears might come.

It was thus that Lawrence found her; he saw the tears the moment he opened the door. For a single second he hesitated, then went forward as one who did not notice them.

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“Shall I raise these shades, mother? The sun has broken through the clouds, after all, and there will be a lovely sunset. Shall I set your chair where you can get a view of it?”

“Not to-night, Lawrence,” she said, trying to speak in her natural tone, “I haven’t time for it; I want to finish my mending before tea, and it must be nearly time to get it. I didn’t know you were here; I thought you went for a walk, with the others.”

“No; I sent them away, but I had some matters to attend to. It will not give you much work to get supper to-night, I think. There will be only you and me to eat it; I heard Cora coaxing Mamie and Porter to come back by the grove road and stop with them for supper. I hope they will do so; Mamie needs to get out; she has been hounding herself too closely, mother.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Hammond with a long-drawn sigh, “the child isn’t used to trouble and it has told upon her very much even in

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this short time ; but she will have to get used to it like the rest of us. I am glad that you succeeded in persuading her to go for a walk ; but I am surprised that they were willing to go out to tea ; I don't quite see how they can, so soon." Her voice trembled pitifully over those two words, and Lawrence's heart ached for her, but he would not appear to notice ; he spoke with persistent cheerfulness.

"Oh it is only at Felton's ; that is different from going anywhere else you know ; they are almost our own people. Charlie is at home now, you remember, and he will amuse them. I confess, mother, that I persuaded Mamie to yield to Cora's urging, I thought it would be right. We must not make life any harder than it is, must we, for the sake of supposed proprieties?"

"Oh no," said Mrs. Hammond, "it is hard enough at the best. If they can do it, it is something to be thankful for. I will get tea for you and me, then. I shall not have a chance long, I suppose."

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She gathered up her work as she spoke, having already forgotten that she intended to finish it before tea. As she bent over the basket, she surreptitiously wiped away the tears, and comforted herself with the thought that her son had not seen them. Lawrence interested himself busily in the tea getting; he went back and forth to pantry and cellar, saving his mother's steps when he could, and following her when he could not; keeping up meantime a steady flow of words in cheerful voice. He asked innumerable unnecessary questions about the appointments of the table; and made several such queer mistakes that his mother had once or twice to smile over them.

In short he could hardly have been recognized as the gloomy-faced young man who kicked the dead leaves about, and moralized over them so short a time before.

He waited until he had seen his mother eat at least a portion of her bread, and drink



"SHE LAID DOWN HER FORK AND LOOKED AT HIM PITIFULLY."



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nearly her cup of tea, before he began the talk on which he had resolved.

“Mother, while you and I are alone together would it not be a good time to go over some plans, and determine concerning them?”

She laid down her fork and looked at him pitifully.

“O Lawrence! I suppose it must come. I am afraid I have been very selfish; you and Porter are of course in haste to have things settled. I have thought about it a great deal, but there seemed to be nothing that I was willing to say. Your father’s growing worse so suddenly left me no opportunity to consult with him in any way.”

“I know, mother, of course we understand all those things perfectly; do not torture your heart by going over them, and trying to explain anything. All I want to know, is how you feel about it. What you would like to plan, with regard to yourself and Mamie.”

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She gave him a weary patient smile that almost broke down his self-control as she said: "I don't want to talk about things in that way, dear; I don't mean to be selfish if I can help it. I did not learn any such lesson from your father; though I am afraid I shall never be able to lose sight of self as he did. I suppose there is really very little planning to be done, after all, though I have tortured my brain with it; Uncle Stuart asked Mamie and me to come for an indefinite time, you know; and I suppose that is what we shall have to do. Mamie will have to give up going away to school, of course, for the present. I thought that after we had been at Uncle Stuart's awhile, a few weeks perhaps, or months, if they should be able to keep us so long,—I could make myself useful in their home, I think.—But, after awhile, when my eyes get a little—stronger, I thought of trying to get plain needle work to do in a quiet way. Your uncle's wife may not exactly approve; she is rather a

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fine lady, you know ; but we could manage it quietly, without offense to her, perhaps. I think I could do plain sewing, enough to pay my way and Mamie's. For that matter it need not all be quite so plain. I could take some embroidery for Mamie ; taking it in my name it wouldn't distress the child ; and she would find it easier to be employed some of the time, than to have the hours hang heavily on her hands ; of course I would not allow her to do enough to weary her, nor injure herself in any way."—She added this last to what she thought was a look of dissent on her son's face.—“That is as nearly as I have been able to plan anything ; it is only for this winter. I thought in the spring when the place could be rented, we might be able to arrange differently, if this should prove too unpleasant. Is it at all in accordance with your ideas, Lawrence ?”

“No ;” he said with quiet distinctness, “not in the least, mother ; while I have a

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head and a pair of hands. I don't think you and Mamie would be happy at Uncle Stuart's. He is a good man, I suppose, though he is not enough like father to imagine that they could be brothers; and Aunt Alice isn't in the least like you. I have been at their home since you have, remember; Aunt Alice is the head of the house. I cannot think of anything much more disagreeable than to have you and Mamie her guests of necessity."

"I was not planning for happiness," his mother said with quivering lip, "I know your Aunt Alice pretty well, and your Uncle Stuart is certainly not like your father, but what is there that we can do? We must go somewhere. You cannot be thinking of Aunt Carter's?"

"Not for a moment; Aunt Carter is poor, and has a house that is overfull already. Besides, the climate would not do for you, and would not be desirable even for Mamie. No, my dear mother, let us put away all

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plans connected with our respected relatives. I have thought of this subject with a good deal of care as you may imagine; and I have come to the deliberate conclusion that the very best place for you and Mamie this winter, is home."

Her face flushed, then paled. Was she pleased or disturbed? For a moment he was not quite sure which.

"But how can we? What do you mean? Do you think it possible for Mamie and me to get along here quite alone? Porter was sure that nothing of that kind could be thought of. I supposed you and he had talked it over together."

"No," said Lawrence, and he shut his lips tightly for a moment, then continued: "Porter and I had not considered plans together, when he talked with you, but we have since. Yes, I am quite sure it can be planned. In fact, I believe I have it already planned. If Mamie is willing to give up school for this winter, it will be as well per

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haps, in the end. She can go on with her studies at home, and keep with her class, possibly. As for the farm work, I understand it pretty well; I can get along through the winter without any trouble; and in the spring, by hiring help by the day, as occasion demands, we can get on until vacation; then of course Porter will take hold for the summer work. I see my way quite clear through it all, provided it is what will best suit you."

His mother was looking at him with wide-eyed earnestness and anxiety.

"Lawrence, what do you mean?" she asked tremulously. "Do you mean,—you can't think of giving up all your prospects for an education; the opportunity which your father struggled to give you!"

"No, mother, not giving up; just keeping them in abeyance for awhile. I shall go on studying, and keep up with Porter if I can; but I shall go on with the farm work also, and take care of my mother and sister. My

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father would be the last person to advise me to desert them, even for the sake of getting an education. I have looked it all over and haven't the slightest doubt but that my duty lies here."

"And you mean Porter to go without you?"

He winced a little over this question, and spoke in a somewhat lower tone. "Porter feels that he ought to go. It is not necessary that both of us should stay, and he might not be able to manage the farm quite so well as I; he is younger, you know. His heart is set upon entering college this fall, and it might be an injury to him in the future if he were disappointed. The plans which we had before our trouble came, can, I think, be carried out fairly well for one of us, but of course for both they are out of the question."

Mrs. Hammond sat for several minutes without speaking; and Lawrence, who could not decide what it would be wise to say next, did not disturb the silence. At last

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she said: "It is like you, Lawrence; you are unselfish, like your father. I am not going to try to tell you what it would be to me to be able to stay quietly in the old home that I came to as a bride, and that I wish I need never leave, until I can be laid beside your father. I hinted something of this sort to Porter; not about you, but for both of you to wait until another fall and see what we could plan; but Porter thought that it could not possibly be done. He reminded me how your father felt about your going. Porter feels that it would be almost a dishonor to his memory not to carry out his cherished hopes.

"They are his own hopes too, poor boy! How hard he has struggled through the years of his preparatory course, not allowing anything to interrupt him. You have never seemed to be quite so set upon this thing as he has; and yet of course you have been in earnest. I am afraid Porter will never consent to your dropping out. Can you bear to



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give it up for your father's sake, Lawrence, even though you personally do not care so much about it?"

### III

#### THE BURDEN SHOULDERED

LAWRENCE busied himself with the bit of cold meat on his plate, carefully cutting it into the tiniest pieces, as if it were being prepared for a child's mouth. Meantime the unusual flush on his cheeks which the talk had called forth mounted to his forehead. *He* not set upon this matter of a college education! He not caring for it with all his soul! What if he should say to his mother, "There is nothing in life that I care for so much; except to do my duty. I did not sleep an hour last night for thinking about it and trying to prepare myself to give up my cherished hopes. Porter's desire for an education is mere child's play as compared with mine. He wants it, of course, as he wants a new coat, or hat, when the fashions change, because it is the thing to have. He

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is a good scholar and will work faithfully in college without doubt, but his ambitions, as compared with mine are toys. Yet it is true, as you say that he has held unswervingly to those ambitions ever since he was a child. When the funds gave out and one of us had to wait and earn money for the next year's books and clothing, I know that it was I, not Porter, who dropped out. Why? Because Porter simply would not give up. When the spring came in which our father who had sacrificed much for us was in such imperative need of assistance that he had to say, 'One of you boys will have to give up this half term, and help me through,' it was Porter who said with alacrity, 'Lawrence is the chap for you, father; I cannot possibly give up this half term; I'm in a fair way to take the fifty dollar prize, and that will help more than a few weeks of farm work. Lawrence has no such expectations, so he is the one to shoulder the work. Isn't that so, old fellow?'" How distinctly he could see

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the boy's handsome face, and the father's troubled one as he looked at his eldest son and waited. It had all been true enough. There was a very fair probability that Porter would win the fifty dollar prize. Why was it that he had no chance of it? Did not Porter remember how he had come to him one evening with a heightened color on his face and an angry light in his eye though he tried to keep his voice playful, as he said :

“Look here, old chap, I think you will be as mean as dirt if you try for that prize. You know you have had opportunities to get ahead of me in that department, and you know that I'm the best scholar in it, next to you. You are sure of the Latin prize, and yet you want to cut me out on this. I call that brotherly, I must say !”

The playful note had entirely gone out of his voice before the sentence was finished. And his brother had felt ashamed of him ; had felt that he would not have made such an appeal, though all the prizes in the list

## The Burden Shouldered

had stood a chance of being fairly earned by Porter. But after a night spent in consideration, he had told himself that perhaps Porter was right and he was selfish; he must remember that he was two years the elder, and it would be hard on his brother if he should win both the first prizes of their class, and Porter none. He said nothing about it to any one but went that morning to the office and quietly withdrew his name from the competition. He had decided to give all his extra time to Latin, was the only explanation he had offered.

Nobody knew of this, not even his father, when they stood together considering which should drop out. Porter did not speak of it, and certainly Lawrence could not. Neither did Porter mention the Latin prize and the almost certainty of Lawrence's winning it if he remained in school. But that was not a money prize, and of course was not important! He shouldered the farm work and Porter bore off the fifty dollars in triumph.

## The Older Brother

All these things the young man might have told his mother. They came and gathered around him while he cut that bit of meat into infinitesimal pieces, and clamored to be told. Yet he had not for a single moment the slightest idea of telling any of it. Suppose his mother continued to think that no one in the world was so anxious for a collegiate education as was her younger son; what harm? It might comfort her somewhat in the sacrifice he was making for her. Of course it would be a relief to imagine the sacrifice less than it was. If his father had been there he would have understood. In truth the father had always understood this oldest son of his better than any other had. But his father was gone, and his mother's question must be answered. He did not keep her long waiting; those pictures of the past that had flashed before him in such vividness, had taken very little time.

“It is not given up, mother,” he said, looking at her with his winning smile, “as I told

## The Burden Shouldered

you, it will simply be held in abeyance. Meantime, I am sure of what my father's advice would be."

Before they arose from that supper table, everything was settled. Porter was to leave, on the Monday following for his belated work in college.

"We can get him ready by Monday, can we not?" Lawrence asked. "So much of the term has passed already that it is imperative for him to start as soon as possible. I know it is hard on you to give him up so soon but——"

"Oh I expected it;" she interrupted him to say. "I had nerved myself to bid you both good-bye; you have taken a terrible weight from my heart, Lawrence, but I don't know what Porter will say. I don't believe he will consent to it. He was so sure that whatever else was done, you and he must get away. He has been throbbing with impatience. Oh, he hasn't put it into words, very clearly; he has been considerate, poor

## The Older Brother

boy; but a mother can read her children's thoughts. I am afraid it will almost break his heart; indeed I don't believe he will do it."

Lawrence smiled gravely. He had love enough for his mother to be glad that she could not read his heart.

"I'll manage it with Porter," he said. "It will not be difficult to get him to listen to reason."

Nor was it. The task was undertaken that evening after the brothers went to their room. At first Porter exclaimed in indignation; asked Lawrence what he could mean, and whether he supposed that their mother would consent to such a sacrifice. Lawrence, meantime, sat with a bit of paper before him jotting down certain figures.

"Look here, Porter," he said, interrupting an indignant sentence, "just glance at these figures, will you? They represent what we shall have to depend upon during the coming year, and what it would cost for both of



## The Burden Shouldered

us to carry out the plans we had. You are a good mathematician, what would be left for mother and Mamie?"

Porter looked and *looked*, and was silent for the space of several minutes; then he said in half undertone, "It might have been managed somehow, nevertheless; those things always are. My plan about sending mother and Mamie to Uncle Stuart's would have worked. Of course they would have been made comfortable there; it is not complimentary to father's own brother to think otherwise." Then, after a moment's silence, "Well, Lawrie, you're a brick! that's about all I can say. There are not many brothers who would do it. There is just one consolation to me, you *can't* care as much about it as I do, or you wouldn't. The fact is that dropping out two or three times makes a difference, I suppose. You don't feel keyed up to the necessity as I do. That is what I was afraid of for myself; dropping out is bad business. Not that you haven't ambi-

## The Older Brother

tion enough, Lawrence, I don't mean that; but then of course it does make a difference. It stands to reason that it should. Well, it will be for only one year; it will go hard with us all if we do not manage in some way by another year for you to come on. But we shall not be classmates,—that's hard too; I shall feel it a good deal, Lawrence, though I don't suppose you will care." His sensitive chin quivered as he spoke the words. Lawrence looked up with a cheerful smile, "Of course I care, Port, but we must make up our minds not to care about comparatively small matters when important ones are at stake. Besides, don't be too sure that I shall not be your classmate. I am going to work hard this winter to keep up with you if I can. I shall look to you to keep me posted in regard to the wisdom of all the professors, and to coach me a good deal. I may take the lead in scholarship when I get there, which will go to prove that I had a good tutor, won't it?"

## The Burden Shouldered

He accomplished his purpose, which was to make Porter feel at ease and cheerful. He had not that small nature which cannot rest content until it has forced its sacrifice upon the consideration of the one for whom it is offered, and made his heart bleed with a sense of its greatness.

Porter responded gratefully to the genial words, and declared his intention of winning all the money prizes offered in college that year, despite the lateness of his entrance.

“And I shall contrive some other way to earn money,” he said heartily, “see if I don’t. I’ll be even with you yet, Lawrence. It is too bad, but I suppose, as you say, it cannot be helped this year; and it will be a great blessing to mother to have you with her. Poor mother! I don’t know how she would have borne separation from us both, after all the rest.”

Evidently he liked that thought; he recurred to it again and again. There was the shadow of a smile on Lawrence’s face

## The Older Brother

when he heard his brother explaining the next day to Robert Felton, that Lawrence had given up college for a year for the sake of remaining with their mother. "We felt," he said earnestly, "that she couldn't spare us both; it would be too hard now, you know; and Lawrence, like the splendid fellow that he is, has insisted upon being the one to stay. It is hard on him; a fellow can't help admiring him for being willing to make the sacrifice."

"I should think not!" Robert said heartily; then he had added Porter's own words: "Not every young man would have done it."

By this time Lawrence knew that his brother Porter believed that they had considered the matter together as to which should offer the sacrifice, and that he, Lawrence, had forced his younger brother to let him be the one to stay. He went over the interview mentally that night when he lay beside Porter who was sleeping, and had permitted himself a smile that had a touch

## The Burden Shouldered

of bitterness as he reviewed Porter's words about his not being "keyed up to the necessity" of a collegiate education. Then immediately he said to himself: "Poor fellow! I ought to be glad that he can look on it in that way. I should be miserable if I were the one to go, and leave him behind."

The bustle of preparation was soon over, and Porter was gone. His departure followed so soon after the decision, that there had not been time for much expression of sorrow; the mother and sister feeling compelled to fill every waking moment with work connected with making the student comfortable. It was not until they had actually bidden him good-bye and seen Lawrence drive away with him to the station, that there was opportunity for lamentation. Then Mamie had thrown herself upon the couch and given way to bitter weeping.

"We cannot get through the winter without him, mother," she said pitifully, between the sobs. "How *could* he go and leave us

## The Older Brother

so soon! Mother, why don't you answer me? How can we ever live through this dreadful winter?"

"Hush, dear," Mrs. Hammond answered, quietly wiping the tears from her own face, "you forget how much harder it might have been for us. Suppose Lawrence had started too, this morning? And suppose that you and I were miles away from our home, among comparative strangers?"

"Oh yes, mother, I know; it is a great comfort to be at home, and to have Lawrence. But he isn't Porter."

She repeated that form of regret several times during that first weary day. Once Lawrence overheard her and smiled sadly, and was sorry for her. Of course he wasn't Porter. He set himself to try and think in what form his pretty young sister would most miss her special companion. Porter had always been so full of life and fun; so ready to join with her in all her plans for exercise and amusement. They were very

## The Burden Shouldered

much alike in their tastes and opinions, those two; Mamie could not but miss him sorely.

“Poor little girl!” the elder brother told himself, “she feels that she has lost her play-fellow. I suppose I seem to her to be a dozen years older than Porter; I seem so to myself sometimes; but we must see what can be done.”

And he fell at once to devising methods for filling in part at least the vacant places.

It is, after all, surprising how quickly human lives can accommodate themselves to changes. In a very few weeks, the depleted family at the Hammond farmhouse had settled into the new routine of their home life. Before the Christmas holidays were due, it had begun to seem almost natural for those three to be alone together. Mrs. Hammond and Mamie busied themselves all the morning about household matters; in the afternoons as long as the pleasant weather lasted,—and it lingered later than usual that fall, reaching away into December,—Law-

## The Older Brother

rence resolutely beguiled them both, for a walk or drive. When it was a walk, he took care to talk steadily and cheerfully without apparently noting that he received no replies, until they were well past the path that stood to them for desolation.

Very charming walks some of them were, at least to Mamie. She was young enough to be able to lay aside for hours together the sense of loneliness that never left her mother, and enter with zest into the pleasures of the trip. One day she confessed to her mother that she really had not known that Lawrence could be so "nice." "Oh he is always *nice*, I don't mean that; but he has been graver than Port, don't you know? always; or quieter. Perhaps it was because Porter and I chattered so that there wasn't any chance for him, but when we three have taken walks together he has been quiet, most of the time. I honestly did not know he could talk so much and so well; did you, mother? He is a very instructive companion, too. I



## The Burden Shouldered

really know more about the trees and the woods and the live growing things, than I ever dreamed of knowing.”

This was only one of the ways in which the older brother contrived to make life less hard for his charges. Early in the consideration of these new plans he had exulted in the thought of the long winter evenings. During the day there would be more or less work and care connected with the farm, even in winter; but the evenings that shut down so early should be his time for hours of unbroken study. He was a quick and accurate student, and his preparatory course had been thorough. He looked forward with good hope to the plan of keeping pace with Porter. But within a week after Porter's departure it became apparent to him that the programme for those long evenings must be reconsidered. It would undoubtedly be very fine for him to shut himself into his room and study hard, but what about mother and Mamie? They had their sew-

## The Older Brother

ing, it is true, and a good deal of it; for owing to the father's illness the fall work in that direction had been neglected entirely. But what a dreary prospect for the long winter evenings of two lonely people! The afternoon of the day on which Lawrence realized this phase of his duty he drove into town, and spent an hour at the Public Library, making careful selections of reading matter not strictly suited to his own tastes. That evening when the lamp was lighted, and Mamie beside her mother with a garment of Porter's to patch, was saying drearily, "Oh mother it is only seven o'clock! How are we to get through the time until nine? I wish people could sleep sixteen hours a day. Wouldn't it be nice if we could go to bed now and not waken till daylight?" when Lawrence entered the room.

"Are you two people ready to be entertained? I have brought a book from the library that I think you will enjoy. Shall I read while you sew?"

## The Burden Shouldered

“Oh delightful!” said Mamie, dropping her patch to clap her hands. “What is it, Lawrie? But never mind what it is; I should be willing to hear the almanac read aloud, rather than to sit here in such dismal silence. Mother and I must get talked out during the day; we don’t speak once in half an hour. Do we mother?”

In this way was the new fashion inaugurated, and the dreaded evenings became a source of entertainment and profit. Lawrence comforted himself with the thought that later in the season when they had grown more used to the vacant places he might make Mamie the reader and get to his work; but for the time being he felt that he must not leave them alone. By nine o’clock he resolutely closed the book, and the remnant of a family had family prayer together. After that there were three good hours for study in his own room. It made life a little harder for him in one sense, but work was not pressing on the farm at that season, so

## The Older Brother

he was able to get his full measure of sleep, and keep himself in vigorous health.

By the time that he might safely have left the two to enjoy their reading, a new plan had been evolved. He had coaxed Mamie to take up her neglected studies, with himself for teacher. He succeeded in making the work so interesting that his pupil assured him smilingly that if he had been one of the professors at the Academy she would be a good deal farther advanced than she was. Altogether, this brother and sister drew closer to each other during the winter, than they had ever been before, and Porter was not so much missed as they had expected.

## IV

### SOME BITTER MEMORIES

It was July, and evening, and moonlight. The windows of the Hammond farmhouse were all thrown wide open to catch the cooling breezes, and the two brothers in their own room occupied each a window seat. They were older by nearly two years than they had been when in that same room they planned for Lawrence to make his sacrifice.

Porter was at home for his second summer vacation ; having done as well in college as could reasonably have been expected. It is true he had not won all the class prizes, yet he had had his fair share of honors ; though none of them had been in money prizes. Nor had he found any other means for helping to defray his expenses. Instead, he had had occasion to write home several times in

## The Older Brother

the course of the first year for a little extra money for unexpected expenses. At one time it was a physician's bill, for attendance after an accident that Porter had sustained on the ball ground. "The idiot who knocked me down," Porter explained, "ought to have been in his room, drinking tea and writing verses; he can do both, better than he can play ball. The doctor charged abominably; they always do; send me a ten if you can, my dear fellow, and I'll promise to steer clear of the ball ground for the remainder of the season."

At another time five dollars were needed for his share of the class supper.

"It is a fool expense," the student wrote, "and I would get out of it if I could; but a fellow *can't*, you know."

Lawrence, however, had succeeded in meeting these and other extras. The season on the farm had been better than his most sanguine hopes; in fact it had been years since such harvests had been gathered in.

## Some Bitter Memories

The young farmer had been alert and careful. He had taken counsel of the wisest old farmers in the country around, not only, but had profited by a careful study of agricultural journals, and had made certain little ventures of his own that had responded generously. He had been very joyful over the year's summing up. Mamie could enter school that fall with her friend Cora Felton; and perhaps, if Porter saw things in that light, they too could change places for a year. A reliable man could now be afforded, and he himself could post Porter in all the new plans. In fact the fellow did not need much posting; he had worked with a will during the vacation, and proved himself able to be a farmer as well as a student, when he set his mind to it.

Having many times gone over the plan and arranged all possible details, the elder brother had broached the subject one night to Porter when they were alone together. He remembered the entire interview vividly, and

## The Older Brother

recalled it in detail as he sat in the window seat this July evening nearly a year later. It was an August night, and wanted but five or six weeks to the opening of the next college year. Not a word had been said in the family concerning that next year's plans. Not a word had Porter said to him privately. Yet of course the college boy knew that the studies on which his brother's heart had been bent had been carried on steadily, even through the vacation, thus far. Only the night before Porter had said approvingly, "You are a tough old scholar, Lawrence; I tell you I don't believe there is a fellow in our class who would have accomplished what you have! It is a pity you hadn't been there, you would have carried off the class honors without fail."

Lawrence had tried to speak then, had opened his lips for the purpose, and closed them again, with the undertone hope that Porter would himself broach the subject.

But the next evening he had resolved to





“ ‘HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE PLACES WITH ME, PORT?’ ”

## Some Bitter Memories

wait no longer. He remembered just how he had opened the conversation.

“How would you like to change places with me, Port?” he had tried to make his voice sound careless.

“How do you mean, old fellow? I should like to change brains with you, at least so far as some topics are concerned. I shall never be able to cram into mine as much knowledge of Latin as you have.”

“I mean for next year;” Lawrence had said, not permitting himself to be turned aside by a compliment. “How would it do for you to stay at home and run the farm, and let me take your place at college? For a single year, you know,” he had added hurriedly in response to the start which his brother had given. Porter had laughed uneasily,

“A-la-the nursery tale of our childhood you mean, eh?”

“I don’t remember. How was that?”

“Why, don’t you know? They had but

## The Older Brother

one dress between them, wasn't it? Or shoes, or something. Anyway they took turn about in the parish school until the teacher had compassion on them after the manner of goody-goody tales and got them each a dress,—or whatever it was. You wouldn't like to have that sort of thing played over, at our age, I presume. The fact is, Lawrence, I suppose you are simply fooling; talking to hear yourself talk. The thing wouldn't do at all. For one reason I should make a failure of the farm; I don't understand it as you do, nor like it as you do. My tastes do not lie in that direction. In the second place, you would make a failure in college, coming into it in that way, expecting to remain just one year. What explanation could we make of such foolery? Besides, there is the class idea, one of the important features of college life. I should have to drop out of my class, entirely. But what is the use in talking? Of course you

## Some Bitter Memories

are not serious in proposing any such wild scheme."

"There is no harm in proposing a thing," Lawrence had replied, and again he had tried to speak carelessly. He looked out of the window at the shadows in the moonlight,—it had been moonlight on that evening also—and even hummed in undertone a few bars of a familiar hymn, to show how disengaged his mind was ; and also to keep himself silent until he could be sure to speak in his accustomed tone.

"Oh no," Porter had replied, "I suppose one could propose to go to the moon to live, instead of staying on this planet ; it would be about as reasonable as your proposition. If I thought you were serious I would——"

"Well," Lawrence had said, after waiting until he was sure of himself. "What would you do in such a case?"

"I would throw the whole thing up. Burn my books, put on my overalls, and let it go. In other words, if I had to go to col-

## The Older Brother

lege in any such way I shouldn't go at all." And Lawrence felt that he was speaking the truth. There had been silence between them after that, for several minutes. Lawrence remembered that he tried to think of something which it would do to say, and had not been able to satisfy himself. Then his brother had broken forth afresh.

"What do you mean, Lawrence? What are you really planning for? You expect to go back with me this fall, don't you? I think it could be managed. You have things now in such shape on the farm that it could be rented without any difficulty; rented on shares, or a good man could be put in charge, with mother to superintend; things could go on in that way, just as though we were here."

"Mamie is to go to school this fall, you remember;" Lawrence had said. "Would you have mother left alone?"

"I don't see why not. Other people have to stay alone. We could get a reliable

## Some Bitter Memories

family in here who would look after her comfort and be company for her. Or Mamie might stay at home another year. She is young enough to wait. I'm sure it could be managed if you were really in earnest in your desire to go. What I have been afraid of all along, was, that you would lose all inclination for college work ; grinding away at home as you have done. You show that you don't understand college life, or the class spirit at all ; or you could never have proposed such a wild idea even in sport."

"There would not be money enough for us both to go," Lawrence had replied quietly, as though he was really considering the suggestion.

"Oh, *money!*" Porter had answered loftily. "You look out for money too much. Let that take care of itself. There are more important things in life than money, and education is one of them. You have heard that from our father too often to need me to repeat it. We could borrow. The farm is

## The Older Brother

unincumbered, and in such a condition that there would be no trouble in life in raising money on a mortgage."

Lawrence had turned from the window then, and looked steadily at his brother as he asked quietly, "Do you remember that one of the comforts of our father's life, was, that if anything should happen to him, the farm was unincumbered for mother and Mamie?"

Porter had dropped his eyes and set himself to tearing to pieces the bit of paper which he held in his hand.

"Yes, I remember, of course;" he had said, "I have not forgotten my father, nor his ideas, any more than you have; but this would be very different from an ordinary mortgage; it would be a temporary affair; simply until we had completed our education and got on our feet. Man alive! to do anything in this world one *must* have an education. It would be worth going into debt for; and father would be the first one to say so. Moreover, I am not convinced

## Some Bitter Memories

that there would not be money enough, with economy. If the farm were run by a competent man, why wouldn't it be as productive next year as it has been this? The way things have gone since I came home, shows that it has been a profitable year."

"I fancy," Lawrence had said, "that a farm is more profitable property when the owner is on the ground looking after it, than it ever is in the hands of a tenant." But to this Porter had replied: "Oh Lawrence! you are growing conceited I am afraid. A little success has turned your brain. Just as though a practical farmer who has spent half a lifetime running a farm, wouldn't be able to do it better, or at least as well as you have! I don't deny that you have managed well; in fact you might be vain over it, if your pride lies in that direction; your praise is in the mouths of all the clodhopping farmers in the neighborhood; nevertheless, I believe there is another man in the world who could do almost as well."



## The Older Brother

To this Lawrence had attempted no reply.

He remembered feeling relieved when the stair door opened and Mamie's voice was heard calling to Porter that Robert Felton wanted to see him right away. He had sat as Porter left him, motionless for half an hour; then he had drawn the shades close, shutting out the beauty of the night, and lighted his lamp. As he did so he had said aloud, "It will not be tried, my good brother; my mother shall not be deserted. I think I can make a fairly good farmer if I try. I am sorry I said any of it; I have destroyed some illusions that it would have been pleasant to have held on to. Besides, I have wasted a precious hour that might better have been spent in work." Then he had settled himself before his books and worked harder than ever.

Porter had gone down to his friend, by no means in as happy a frame of mind as usual. In truth he had found it hard not to be positively irritable with Mamie, after his caller's

## Some Bitter Memories

departure. So marked was his ill-humor that she had asked tenderly as to his health, and then, being assured on that point, had inquired playfully if he and Lawrence had quarreled; and had offered to put the little room, at the head of the stairs, in order for him, so that he need not come in such close contact with his studious brother. It was the merest nonsense; the brothers had been all their lives the closest possible friends, yet Porter had answered the fun almost roughly, and would not for the world have had any one know how glad he should be if he did not have to room with Lawrence that night.

However he need have had no anxiety on that score; two hours of hard study had quieted Lawrence's nerves; he had glanced up with his usual smile, when Porter at last entered the room, pushed his books from him and began to ask questions about the Feltons and the plans formed for the coming week; and neither of them mentioned college matters again that night.

## The Older Brother

In truth it was nearly a week later that Porter, having waited for his brother as long as his nerves would permit, had waylaid him with a half impatient question.

“Lawrence what is the use of dallying in this way? Why don't you take steps at once to secure a tenant for the farm? We can get a family nicely settled here by September, if we set about it, and you can get away with me. I think you owe it to father's memory to carry out his designs.”

“No,” Lawrence had answered quietly, “I shall have to differ from you in that. I think I owe it to father's memory to stay where I am. I have decided not to make any change for the present. Mamie has been positively promised that she shall go to school with Cora this fall, and I should not think it right to leave our mother alone with strangers, even if all other obstacles to my going could be gotten out of the way. I shall go on here for another year just as I

## Some Bitter Memories

have been doing ; after that we shall see what we can plan.”

So they had gone on much as before. Mrs. Hammond, who had had her heart torn in two ways, sometimes with the fear that her eldest son had given up altogether his hopes for a collegiate education, and sometimes with the fear that he was intending to enter college that fall, had not liked to ask questions. But within a week after Lawrence's decision had been communicated to him, Porter relieved his mother's mind. He had in the meantime, been suffering some qualms of conscience, but he had stifled them with excellent reasonings, the result of which he gave his mother. They were to the effect that Lawrence had become so interested in the farm as to make himself believe that no one but himself could possibly manage it. He, Porter, had been urging him to rent it on shares, to a first-class farmer, and go back with him, but the fellow would have none of it.

## The Older Brother

“The truth is, mother, your oldest son is developing into a first-class farmer himself, and nothing else. I shouldn’t be surprised if he should give up his college aspirations altogether. He keeps on studying, it is true, but that is from the love of study, rather than with college in view, or else he could not so easily decide to put it off again. Perhaps it is just as well; if a fellow doesn’t want to go to college, I mean by that if he doesn’t feel that he *must* go, whether there is any money to go with or not, or whatever happens, why, he might almost as well stay away. There are lots of college fellows who don’t amount to anything, simply because they have been urged to go, when they would a little rather have done something else. I don’t mean that Lawrence’s way is at all clear; but you see how it is. He lets obstacles be obstacles; and I can’t; that is just the difference between us.”

“Yes,” the mother had agreed with a sigh. Lawrence did seem more willing to

## Some Bitter Memories

give up his ambitions than she had supposed he would be. "But it has been a great blessing to me that he felt so," she had added eagerly. "I don't like to think of what the past year would have been without him; and he has been a devoted brother to Mamie. She has really got on with her studies this past year better than she ever did in school. There are not many young men like your brother, Porter."

No, Porter had replied in all heartiness, he did not believe that there were. "As I say," he added with a touch of patronage in his voice that he did not himself recognize, "I don't know but he is in his right place. He will have education enough to enjoy himself; and he has such studious habits that he will be likely to add to it, as the years go by. I wouldn't say so to him for the world, but I have almost decided that it may be best for him to give up college. This notion about keeping up with my class, is all nonsense; one can do it for the first year, after

## The Older Brother

that it is out of the question. So you and Mamie may as well settle down, and plan for one gentleman farmer in the family. Lawrence will always be a gentleman; that is one comfort."

## V

### A SECOND OPPORTUNITY

So another winter had passed; not in all respects like its predecessor. Mamie had gone back to school with her friend Cora Felton, and Mrs. Hammond spent many of her evenings in writing long letters to her and to Porter, while Lawrence, who had brought his lamp and his books to the sitting-room in order that his mother might not feel lonely while she wrote, sat opposite her and studied with renewed energy. Not only during the long winter evenings was he thus employed, but he managed his farm work so that many hours of the day could be passed among his books. Even when the spring opened, he found himself able to secure such help with the work, that part of each day could be given to study. He by no means, however, neglected the farm; instead, he



## The Older Brother

worked on it with brains as well as hands, and with a success that at times surprised himself. Not only Mamie's but Porter's bills throughout the year had been met with promptness; even Porter's extras, with a little care and quiet self-denial had been managed. The young man had been somewhat less successful this year in keeping the extras within intended bounds. The question of proper clothing seeming to have disturbed him not a little. At one time he wrote a confidential letter to Lawrence to the effect that if it really was not possible for him to have a new overcoat, he believed he would give up and come home. He had decided not to go out again in company with anybody, in his present rig. Only the night before he had gone to one of the symphony concerts with some of the boys, and their sisters, and had actually felt ashamed of himself. Why of course the coat was warm enough,—this, in answer to questions previously asked, and it wasn't in rags, either,

## A Second Opportunity

but it was shabby looking; not nearly so long, for one thing, as was being worn; and it had never fitted him well. A miserable ready made affair. Most of the boys in his class would not think of such a thing as buying garments ready-made. The letter had closed with a quotation: "When you are 'in Rome,' old fellow, you have 'to do a little as the Romans do;,' though never having been there yourself, I don't suppose you understand it."

Lawrence had laughed outright when he reached that sentence, and said aloud, although he was quite alone. "Poor fellow! he really is only a boy; I must not forget that."

He wrote Porter a brotherly letter and sent a check that would cover the price of an overcoat, not only, but of a new hat in place of one which was decidedly not the shape much worn. In order to do this, he was compelled to take a sum of money that had been laid aside for the purchase of cer-

## The Older Brother

tain books that he had felt he ought to have. He could secure them for a week or two at the library and make that do for the present. Also his overcoat that had already served four winters and was not only too short but decidedly threadbare, should be made to do duty another year. Since he was not "in Rome" what did it matter?

And now we have reached that second moonlighted evening in which the brothers had escaped to their room for a confidential chat. Porter had not been at work on the farm that day, though he was reasonably industrious most of the time. But on that particular day he had joined a pleasure excursion up the river. Both brothers had been invited, but it had been a day in which it was extremely inconvenient for either of them to be spared from the farm, and both were out of the question; so as a matter of course Porter had been the one to go. That phrase "matter of course" is used advisedly. Even Mrs. Hammond, who certainly tried to

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be impartial and had no idea that she was not, when she learned that it was not feasible for both her sons to be absent, before a word had been spoken as to which should go, had said: "Well, Lawrence, I am sorry. It does seem to me that you need a day of rest, and pleasure. If I could see any way to plan for it, I should beg you to go."

And not one at the table had seen anything strange in this matter-of-course choice between the brothers.

The excursionists had returned at nightfall delighted with their day's outing, and so weary, at least on the part of Cora Felton and Mamie, that they had announced their intention of retiring as soon after supper as possible. Therefore came Porter early to his room with leisure to talk with his brother. Apparently he was not tired at all. His eyes sparkled, and his whole face expressed exultation and triumph.

"Did you ever see any one in your life change as Cora Felton has in a year's time?"

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he asked, squaring himself around in the wide window seat, to get a better view of his brother's face.

"I had not observed it," said Lawrence. "In what way do you mean?"

"Why in appearance, dress, and manner,—in every way in fact. Man alive! where are your eyes? She has blossomed from a little girl into a young lady; that's the amount of it. They do it in a year's time, too, these girls. But I had no idea that Cora would develop as she has. Isn't she beautiful?"

"I always thought her a beautiful girl," was Lawrence's quiet answer.

"You thought what I didn't, then; she was a nice enough little thing, always; but she was dumpy and hoydenish, and without any idea of dressing herself in a way to be charming. But I tell you she is lovely now; she was the centre of attraction to-day. The Norrises evidently admired her immensely, and their admiration is something worth

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having you know ; they represent the very highest circles. That young dude of a Tom Norris admired her almost too much ; he stared like a ploughboy. I should have enjoyed kicking him, the impudent puppy ! Is it possible, Lawrence, that you haven't seen what a charming creature she has become ? ”

Lawrence's answer was not ready. He hesitated a moment, then laughed in a slightly embarrassed way as he said,

“ I have noticed her a number of times my dear fellow, if that is what you mean. ”

“ Well it isn't ; ” said Porter, half angrily, “ I mean a great deal more than that. What a cold creature you are, Lawrence ! I wonder if you will ever care much for anybody ? I tell you she is magnificent ! The most fascinating girl I ever met. There wasn't a lady in the party, to-day, who began to compare with her ; or for that matter is there anywhere. I know ladies, I've seen scores of them in the last two years but I never saw

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one who is her equal. She is smart, too; it was great fun to watch her talking with some of those fellows who think they are witty; she had the best of them every time. It is all up with me, Lawrence, I may as well own it first as last. I've lost my head over that girl; and what is worse, my heart. It is queer; I never thought I should go away from home,—have opportunities and advantages, and all that sort of thing, and come back to give myself up heart and soul to my next neighbor! but that is exactly the way the matter stands. If I can't make her into Mrs. Porter Hammond, there will never be such a person, that is all."

If Porter expected a sympathetic response to this burst of confidence, he was disappointed. His brother maintained absolute silence. In no wise daunted however, the young man began again and poured forth a perfect rhapsody on the perfections of Cora Felton. Not an adjective that could be forced into service to express unbounded ad-

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miration escaped him. At length Lawrence asked a single question.

“Do you think she reciprocates your feeling, Porter?” It had an irritating effect, apparently.

“How in the world should I know?” Porter replied, with a slight frown. “Though I haven’t very grave fears in that direction. It doesn’t become me to say it, but I confess I think your humble servant stands as good a chance as any young man with whom she is likely to come in contact.”

“Then you have said nothing to her?”

“Of course not; and I don’t mean to, in so many words, for some time to come. I don’t believe in getting engaged while one is in college; at least when he has two years yet before him. Some of the fellows have done that, and made themselves laughing stocks. A spoony set they are; always writing letters to the same girl, and receiving them by the pail full; and they are afraid to speak to a young lady when they



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go out in company, for fear the one at home will hear of it and be jealous. I shouldn't like anything of that sort. Not that I care to speak to any girl I ever saw, if instead, I could have a chance of thinking of Cora; but all the same, I am going to observe common sense. We shall be together a good deal during the remainder of the season, of course, as we always are for that matter, and I shall give her to understand in every way but words, how matters are with me. But as for binding a girl down to pledges, I never thought it would be exactly honorable in a young man who didn't expect to be able to marry in a half score of years. Why did you ask me such a lugubrious question the very minute I gave you my confidence? Do you really think there is any fear of her not 'reciprocating the feeling' as you are pleased to call it?"

"I might answer you in your own words, brother: 'How should I know?'" said Lawrence, schooling his voice to utmost

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quiet, "I asked because I naturally had an interest in the matter."

"Oh! Well, as I say I haven't any fears in that direction. It seems to me perfectly reasonable that she should be more interested in me than in any other person. She hasn't been in society much. If she had met any one at school whom she admired, Mamie would be sure to know it, and I gather from her, that Cora is not only indifferent but exclusive. So, since no one has gotten ahead of me, now that I have made up my mind, I cannot see why I do not stand a better chance than any one else could. Proximity has a good deal to do with such things, Lawrence, and you may trust me to work it for all it is worth; for the rest of the season at least."

He talked on, not seeming to need even a word from his brother. He went over again and yet again the story of Cora Felton's superiority to all other people, and his determi-

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nation to show her in everything but words his feeling toward her

Once Lawrence interrupted him, "I beg your pardon, Porter, but is it quite fair to show such determined and continued preference for a lady, without speaking the word which shall give her opportunity to express her own mind in the matter?"

"Fair? of course it is. Where in the world did you get your ideas? Actions on the part of a gentleman can speak as plainly as words, and yet at the same time you do not formally bind her with pledges. You leave her a loophole in fact, through which she can deny without shading the truth, all the impudent questions that people seem to feel at liberty to ask on such subjects. It is some comfort to the man himself to have the same loophole, I can tell you. It is by all odds the best way to leave it. I mean, of course, the mere formal interchange of pledges. How could I, for instance, speak to her about marriage, when I haven't a

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penny in the world, and have five years of hard work, before I shall be ready for my profession? It will do her no harm to wait; she is barely eighteen, you know. However, I shall not wait for five years I promise you. Probably it will be all settled by the time I graduate; but to inveigle a schoolgirl into an engagement of marriage, never seemed to me the proper thing. At the same time I know exactly what I mean, and it will be queer if I cannot make her understand it; she is quick witted enough."

And now Lawrence had absolutely no words to offer. He arose after a very few minutes from his seat in the window, and proceeded to light his lamp, explaining that he had some work he must do. Then he drew his Greek lexicon toward him. Porter came and looked over his shoulder. "What a grind you are, Lawrie!" he said, "working away at Greek on a midsummer night, just after I have been telling you a thrilling story, too! I don't believe you will ever

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have such a story to tell concerning yourself."

"Perhaps not," said Lawrence with a quiet smile; then he seemed to give undivided attention to his lexicon.

Porter moved noisily about the room, making ready for rest. He kept constantly interrupting the student to add some item of Cora's charms which he fancied he had not mentioned, and to reiterate his hopes and plans concerning her. At last came the petition:

"I say, Lawrence, shade your light can't you? It glares in my eyes; and I want to go to sleep. I feel as though I could sleep eighteen hours on the stretch, now that the first excitement is over. I should think you would be tired, too. Jack told me what a day's work you had done. I'll pitch in to-morrow, old fellow, and help you."

Lawrence promptly shaded the light; but he only waited to make sure that his brother was sleeping, before he turned it out alto-

## A Second Opportunity

gether and returned to his station at the window. There was no use in trying to study; it seemed to him that he had been staring for hours at a page the letters of which danced before his eyes. This young man believed that he had had a good deal of experience of life, and perhaps prided himself somewhat on his powers of self-control; but there was no use in denying that they had been shaken to their utmost that evening. No more astounding piece of news than had been confided to him could have been imagined. Since their earliest childhood, Cora Felton and his brother Porter had played and quarreled together. There was barely two years difference in their ages, and Cora had been such an aggressive young person all her life, that even those were not distinguishable. Indeed, Lawrence had thought of her for some time as a young lady, while Porter seemed to him still a boy. Intimate as the two had been, rivals in school, and quarreling and making up a dozen times in

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a single day; it had never so much as occurred to Lawrence, nor did he believe it had to any one else, that they would ever have a closer friendship. Had any one suggested such an idea he felt that he would have scouted it as preposterous. Yet here had Porter been talking this evening as though there was not even a doubt of their future together! No wonder that the student could not get interested in his Greek. A new language, and yet one that was much older than Greek, had been spoken to him that night, and it had moved him as no other had power to do.

## VI

### “ FATHER, I WILL REMEMBER ”

HIS own heart made no startling revelations to him that evening. He had known, —when had he not known?—that the only woman in the world for whom he should ever care in a peculiar and sacred way, was Cora Felton. Looking back over his past, it seemed to him that he must have begun life, or memory at least, with the idea in view that Cora, in a special, tender, and never to be relinquished way, belonged to him. In their childhood Porter had frolicked with her, but he had cared for her. When it had suited Porter to pelt the little girl with great soft snowballs, laughing the while over her skill in pelting him in return, it had been Lawrence's part, after the frolic was over, to brush off the snow, settle the little hood and make all comfortable again. Later, when



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she and Porter had been friendly rivals in school, it was Lawrence who had helped her with troublesome examples and patiently explained grammatical rules that were obscure to her. Still later in life, she had developed into an unmerciful tease, so far as Porter was concerned; but never had she been other than kind and thoughtful of her words to him. As he thought of this he called himself a fool for imagining that this uniform kindness and almost deference on her part indicated any special regard for him. Very probably Porter was right, and had already won the first place in her heart. Or, if he had not, there was no reason why he should not succeed. He, Lawrence, had been a conceited ape to imagine a different state of things. Yet, while he told himself so, memory would recall words, and glances, and even tones which had seemed to reveal that Cora understood the place she occupied in his heart, and knew that when a proper time came he would tell her that wonderful

## “ Father, I Will Remember ”

old story so new and sweet to those whose hearts are attuned to understand it. A hundred times he had imagined himself speaking the formal words, and had translated for himself what her answer would be. She had given him in this way a great variety of replies, but they always had the same meaning.

Occasionally during the past winter, when he was finishing a long letter for Mamie and Cora, the thought had passed through his mind, “ What if, after all, Cora should not understand, and should come in contact this winter with some one who would win her away from me ? ” And then he had smiled in a superior way and assured himself that there was no fear ; of course Cora knew ; her own heart would tell her. He would wait, as an honorable man should. Yet, when Porter had proposed that same method of waiting to him, had he not questioned its honor ? Still, that was different. He knew instinctively that his brother’s manner of

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keeping silence would be different from his. It would be such a silence as would hold her bound as firmly as an honest woman could be bound, and yet keep her from saying frankly even to her mother: "I have been asked in marriage, and have given my pledge." Such silence as that, he felt that he could not approve.

What was now to be done? Should he tell Porter, frankly, that they were rivals; that he had all his life looked upon Cora as his own, and that he should not lightly give her up to any one. Would this be right? He bowed his head on his hands and tried in singleness of heart to weigh the question without putting self into the scales. Sitting there in the silence, he seemed to be once more in a dimly lighted chamber keeping watch over his father on that last night of his life. They had not known that it would be the last night, and the mother had been persuaded to take a few hours of rest while her son kept guard. It was all vividly be-

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fore him, once more ; the shaded lamp, the quiet room, the steady tick tick of his own watch lying open on the little table, and the low breathing of the sick one. He heard his father's voice again.

“ Lawrence, my son, I have comfort in leaving everything to your care. I know you will be true to the trust ; not mother and Mamie alone, dear boy, but Porter as well. You will always remember that you are the older brother ? ”

There had been a rising inflection in his tone, yet the father had smiled as though he needed no answer. Lawrence, but dimly understanding what the trust could mean, so far as his brother was concerned, had yet been anxious to give his father all possible comfort, and also to keep him from exhausting himself with speech. He had made haste to say :

“ Father I give you my promise to do everything for them all, that I possibly can.”

“ Yes,” the father had said, “ I trust you.”

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Then he had pressed his hand; the last pressure that true hand ever gave.

And Lawrence was living it all over; listening to his father's voice. Oh, had he meant this? *Must* he give up this sweetest hope of his life? He had sacrificed much already for Lawrence, if his father were here would he counsel yet another? If he could be sure that Cora was not in the least degree involved in the sacrifice; but probably she was not. She had blossomed, as Porter said, into a young lady during the past year; and he had been separated from her. Probably she thought of him almost as she thought of her brother Robert. And Porter was good, and noble, and educated, and handsome; was in every way worthy of her; he could win her, without doubt, if he had opportunity.

“You will always remember that you are the *older brother?*” Did the words repeat themselves in audible voice, or was it his excited imagination that made them sound so distinctly on the midnight air? After a still-

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ness that seemed to him afterward must have lasted for an hour, but which was in reality only a few minutes, he said aloud and solemnly :

“ Father, I will remember. God help me.” At the sound of his voice Porter turned sleepily on his pillow. “ Are you muttering Greek verbs yet?” he asked. “ It must be almost time to be in the hay field ; give it up, old fellow, and come to bed.”

It is not certain that any member of the Hammond family realized to any extent the change in Lawrence’s demeanor from that night. If they did, none of them imagined its cause ; least of all Porter.

The eldest son of the house had the name of being often silent and preoccupied, even when others were in full tide of talk. Was this habit rapidly increasing upon him ? The mother asked herself the question occasionally. Certainly he used to give himself more holidays than he took this summer. However busy his days on the farm, by evening

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he had been as ready as any of the young people for a walk, or a drive, or a row on the river. Even the summer before, when the responsibility of the farm had rested heavily upon him, and he had done, Porter said, the work of two hired men, he had yet given himself two or three entire afternoons to join the young people in excursion, or picnic, or some other form of amusement which was always being planned. Neither picnic nor evening entertainment of any sort beguiled him this summer. He was prolific in plausible excuses. Work was unusually pressing on the farm that day; or he had a new man who needed watching; or he was unusually tired and could not think of an entertainment which would induce him to dress, and drive to town; or he had business letters, that must be answered at once. It must be confessed that the young people who belonged especially to the farm circle, appeared to take very little notice of this state of things; Porter and his sister, with Robert

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Felton and his sister formed so satisfactory a quartette, that beyond a bit of raillery occasionally indulged in by Porter or Mamie, as to his growing old before his time, or his being a hopeless bookworm, he was left very much to himself.

One thing began to be noticeable, that on Thursday evenings this young man was never too tired or too busy to attend his mother; but took her regularly to the midweek prayer meeting. Both Mamie and Porter accompanied them occasionally; though both of these young people were liable to have a pressing engagement elsewhere, or they might be over wearied on that particular evening, and feel it their duty to stay at home and rest.

One evening their brother's regularity at the prayer meeting was commented on after this manner.

“Won't your brother come?” Cora had asked, meaning Lawrence; they had been talking over together a little entertainment



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that was to be held at the Feltons, on the evening following. "I know he hasn't been to any of our frolics this summer, but I thought if we made a special assault upon him we might get him out once."

"I don't think we can," Mamie had said. "I'm discouraged with him. You see he digs over those horrid books every evening. One would think he was a professor of some forgotten tongue that he felt compelled to unearth once more. The only evening that he gives himself is Thursday. Have you noticed that he is never absent from prayer meeting?"

Yes, Cora admitted that she had noticed it; and added that he was an example to them in that as in other things. "Oh he is a blessed old example in everything;" said Mamie, "there never was a better boy made than Lawrence; everybody knows that; but I do wish he would give himself a little fun. Yesterday I hunted for a grey hair in his brown head; I told him that it seemed to me

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he must be fifty; he had grown so grave and dignified.”

“Is it because he has more responsibility than one ought, at his age, do you think?” Cora had asked timidly.

“Oh I don’t know,” said ignorant Mamie, “no it cannot be that; his responsibility is no greater than it was last year; it isn’t so heavy in one sense, because he is more used to it and knows so much better how to manage everything. And he has managed splendidly. The farm hasn’t done so well in years; and all his new plans work beautifully. Why Cora you know even your father says that ours is the best managed farm in the country. It is just books, I think. Poor Lawrie! I suppose it was more of a trial to him not to go to college, than we thought.”

“Will he go, sometime?” Cora had asked.

“Oh I don’t think he will. Porter believes that he has given it up; they couldn’t both be spared you know; and after Porter

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graduates he will have his profession to study; so I am sure I don't see how Lawrence can ever go. It is too bad, isn't it?" And then, "Oh Cora don't you want me to come over to-morrow afternoon and make some of those lovely chocolate caramels for your company?" And Lawrence and his broken education were dismissed from their minds.

When the summer waned, and the time came for Porter to return to college, the idea of Lawrence's accompanying him was not even mentioned; apparently no one thought of it, but the mother did. She lay awake that last night Porter was to be at home, thinking, wishing, planning. Wishing that she had the courage to propose to Lawrence to go, and leave the farm in her care. She might manage it, perhaps, with good men to do the work; other women had. If Lawrence had asked her, she would have undertaken it; though she shrank back appalled over the mere idea and was grateful to him

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for not asking; and felt that she never could of her own will bring it to pass. Yet the mother rose above the coward, at last. Just before breakfast the next morning she way-laid Lawrence in the woodshed to ask if he did not think it could be managed, with the man that they now had and another as good, and her to superintend it all, to work the farm without him for a year, and let him go with Porter.

She did not soon forget the sense of relief that Lawrence's prompt reply gave her. They must not think of such a thing for that year, he assured her. His plans were so arranged that it could not be done. They must wait and see what the future would bring. Then he had bent his tall head and kissed her on either cheek as he added: “Thank you, mother, for your great, unselfish thought. It has helped me.”

What the immediate future brought to him was hard work, and a great deal of it; especially among his books.

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Early in the winter, there came into his life a blessing the full value of which he did not appreciate until years afterward. A new pastor came to the church that the Hammonds attended; a young, strong man, both mentally and spiritually. He explained afterward that with the first hand-clasp his heart went out to Lawrence Hammond, and forthwith there sprang up between them a friendship destined to last through eternity.

Very early in their acquaintance, Lawrence found that he was making a confidant of this new friend, so far as his belated education was concerned. His story was listened to with the most sympathetic interest, and he was questioned and cross-questioned, not only as to his plans, but his actual progress.

"I believe you can do it!" the minister had exclaimed at last, "your success thus far is phenomenal. As a rule I should discourage any such hope as yours, but as an exception I believe it might be done."

"You see," explained Lawrence apologetic-

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ally, “my preparatory course was peculiar. I had unusually fine teachers, and then when I dropped out twice, for a year at a time, to teach, I worked on in the line that my tastes indicated, and really took up some college studies in advance.”

“I understand,” said the minister, “I believe it can be done. I’ll tell you, Hammond, I have a fine scheme. That is my own college, you know, the one for which you are planning; and I have been through the work so recently that it would be a real pleasure to me to review it and give you points. I understand the machinery of the recitation rooms thoroughly; there hasn’t even been a new professor since I was there. And I have loads of text books that you will need. Come and study with me; say I give you two evenings a week, as a tutor you understand? That will help you, and me too; I shall watch your scheme with the very deepest interest.” In this way was a new world opened to Lawrence Hammond.

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To make his satisfaction complete, the minister's mother conceived almost as much of a liking for Mrs. Hammond, as her son had for Lawrence; so that very often indeed while the two men were hard at work in the study, they had the satisfaction of knowing that their mothers were in happy enjoyment of each other's society.

If, during that winter, the student infringed occasionally upon the hours that are supposed to be given to sleep, no one was really the wiser for it, as he took care to keep within fairly reasonable bounds; and work among the books went on with such zest as the solitary worker had not known before. He had need of some all-engrossing work that winter, and welcomed it eagerly.

About the time that Porter Hammond was "cramming" for the approaching examinations, and being so nervous over some of them as to augur failure, the minister said one evening to his pupil,

"There sir! you have passed your ex-

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aminations. An ‘honor’ man, at that; and a good four weeks ahead of time. We can begin at once on the senior year.”

It was on that same evening that Porter finished reading a letter from his brother, and tossing it down with a yawn, said: “Poor old Lawrie! I guess he has given up the fight. Not a single question have I been asked this term, about text book or professor. Perhaps it is just as well. He doesn’t know what an everlasting grind it is. Oh hum! I must go to work.”



## VII

### “FOR ONE BLISSFUL NIGHT”

LAWRENCE had laughed at the minister's announcement that he could commence at once to study for the senior year, and advised him not to be too sanguine. Nevertheless he had gone home that night in a state of much excitement. To complete the full college course, in company with other young men and enjoy the class spirit of which Porter talked so much, and win his share of the class honors, had become almost a passion with this young man; but he held himself well in check, so that even his nearest and dearest had no conception of its power.

He took the next day to consider it; gave himself a holiday from books, and spent the evening with his mother in order to acquaint her fully with his plans and hopes. He gave

## “For One Blissful Night”

her the exact condition of their present finances, and estimated what they might hope for from the summer's crops, judging by present appearances, and by the past; and then showed her a careful estimate of the amount of money that would be required to carry him through that all-important year at college. She listened thoughtfully, and her few questions were intelligent and to the point. Once she called her son's attention to the fact that the sum of money he had set down for himself was less by many dollars than that which Porter had needed each year.

“I know,” he said, “but Porter had certain expenses that will not come to me. I have been able to profit by his experiences; class suppers, club taxes, fraternity dues and all matters of that sort I have counted out; such things would be pleasant enough, no doubt, but in my present circumstances they will be omitted. Then I shall not need as much money for clothing as Porter did. I am older than he, you remember, consider-

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ably older than he was when he entered college, and am able to get along without some expenditures that he used to think necessary. I have considered it carefully, and added a reasonable sum for incidentals, and I think it can be done without any very great strain."

Then he had entered into careful details as to his plans for the farm, in which the mother could see that no smallest item which had to do with her comfort had been forgotten. She rose to the occasion, and was glad with him, and said no word about the sense of desolation that swept over her at the thought of being without him for an entire year.

For one blissful night Lawrence lived in the brightness of his prospects. The next day came a letter from his almost forgotten Aunt Sarah, whose home since his childhood had been in California. The habit of letter writing seemed to have been one that Aunt Sarah had long laid aside, so that to hear

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from her was an event. But his mother read her letter just as they were leaving the breakfast table, and passed it to Lawrence without note or comment. He waited to read it, laid it beside her, without speaking, and went his way. The letter was short and brusque as Aunt Sarah's had always been. She had been a widow for several years; now she wrote that she was alone in the world and having nothing to keep her, had decided to come home; provided there was any home for her to come to. She had always thought that she should come back to her brother Lawrence when she got old; but that was not to be. Would his widow and children receive her? Perhaps though, they had no more room than her richer relatives had. “I know you are poor,” the letter said, “I have kept track of you, although I haven't written many letters to you, any more than you have to me. I know you are still on the old place, and have a struggle to get along. I suppose it is for that reason I am writing to you; it is

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struggling people that we have to look to in this world when we want anything. I have had a characteristic letter from my rich brother, Stuart. It is a beautiful letter of course; Stuart knows how to write them, but the meaning of it is that his wife's mother and father live with them, and there is neither room nor money to waste on me. He might have saved himself that trouble; I don't want to live with him. Unless he and I have both changed a good deal, it wouldn't be paradise for either of us; I haven't grown angelic, and I don't believe he has. I should like him better if he had told me in plain English that he didn't want me, instead of regretting so deeply, on paper, that he couldn't arrange so as to make it comfortable for me! I expect the plain truth from you; therefore I ask: Can I come and spend the rest of my days with you, or can't I? I am older than I was, and lame, beside; have to hobble about on crutches most of the time; but you and I used to get

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along fairly well when we were girls,—or when you was a girl, I don't forget that I am ninety or a hundred years older than you—and perhaps we can again. If it isn't convenient, or you are not willing to try it, say so. I cannot imagine my brother Lawrence's wife and children speaking anything but the truth. It is queer what a difference there can be in brothers. I'm the only 'sister' so I don't know whether there would have been a difference in them, or not. Let me hear from you promptly.

“AUNT SARAH.”

Not a word passed between mother and son concerning this letter, until, after a busy day on the farm they met at the tea table. Then Lawrence asked his mother what she was going to say to Aunt Sarah.

“Don't ask *me*,” she had answered nervously, “I am waiting to hear what you have to say.”

“She is the only sister my father ever had,

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isn't she?" he said, "I remember she used to be very fond of him."

"She idolized him;" said Mrs. Hammond. "The other boys used to say that she cared for nobody but Lawrence; she is ten years older than he, and she had a sort of protective love for him. Did you notice that she spoke of her lameness? Poor woman! I suppose she has had a hard life. We knew very little about her husband; Stuart did not approve of the marriage, and would have nothing to do with his sister for years afterward. I suppose that will account in part for his being unwilling to receive her now."

"My father's house ought always to be open to his only sister, ought it not, mother? Especially when she is old, and alone in the world." His mother looked up quickly with the expression that he liked to see on her face.

"I feel so, Lawrence," she said, "but how can we do it?"

"She would not be able to go up and

## “For One Blissful Night”

downstairs if she is lame,” he said quietly, “she ought to have the large room back of the parlor; that is a sunny room, too, and comfortable in every way.”

“Lawrence, do you remember that there is no furniture for that room, not even a carpet? And it isn’t papered.”

“I remember, it would have to be thoroughly renovated and furnished. We should have to get new furniture in any case, mother; we have no bed, for instance, that would be comfortable for an old lady. We should need to get a stove, too. One of these days we will have this house heated by a furnace, but for the present we shall certainly have to depend on stoves.”

“But Lawrence how can we do any of it in view of what you were talking about last night? You showed me the figures, you know; there was no margin left for all these expenses.”

Instead of answering, he went on thinking aloud. “We ought to send her money to



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come with, ought we not? At least to help her in coming; I suppose she has very little." Then, after a moment, he looked full at his mother, and his smile was free and sweet. "About those plans of mine, mother, they will have to step into the background again. This is a manifest duty. I confess I am glad that it is so plain as to leave no room for questioning."

"O Lawrence!" it was every word the poor mother could utter. There came to her a certain sentence of Porter's, "Lawrence lets obstacles be obstacles, and I can't; that is just the difference between us." Perhaps so, but what was the name of the trait that refused all obstacles? Mrs. Hammond was growing better acquainted with her eldest born during these years. He answered the tears in her eyes.

"Never mind, mother; it is only for another year, perhaps. Aunt Sarah may even help to open the way for me by that time. Who knows?"

## “For One Blissful Night”

The weeks immediately following were much taken up with writing and reading letters. Porter, being written to in detail, expressed himself fully in unmistakable language.

He had not been told of the decision, but had been left to take it for granted that what his aunt asked would be done. He by no means took it for granted.

“Of course you will write to her that it is simply impossible for us to receive her permanently,” he wrote. “From the tone of your letter I should imagine that you might be indulging in some romantic notion that we ought to do so. I hope you have recovered by this time, if you had any such idea, or that mother has been good ballast for you. The absurdity of Aunt Sarah thinking of coming to us, when Uncle Stuart lives in a fine house and has a definite income! That is her place, of course, and she ought to know it. It is not likely that he will let his own sister go to the poorhouse, even if

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we don't interfere. Interference from us is the last thing he can expect. He knows very well what our circumstances are. I have never forgiven him for being so cool about it all, when our trouble came. His invitation to mother and Mamie was only a half way one; I felt it at the time. Let him take care of his sister, as he ought; and tell him that his sister-in-law will never trouble him; she has sons to take care of her, thank goodness! I wish you would let me write to Aunt Sarah, and to Uncle Stuart too. I think I should like to give him, at least, a piece of my mind. It is queer that Uncle Stuart couldn't have been a little more like father. Perhaps it is no queerer though, than that there isn't another woman in the world like our mother." It was with pleasant little touches like these, that Porter always softened his asperities.

He had by no means, however, exhausted the subject. When he found that Lawrence had actually written to invite their aunt to

## “For One Blissful Night”

the farm, and had sent a generous check to help bring her, he wrote more letters in such a tone that at last his mother was almost vexed with him.

“What can Porter mean?” she asked indignantly, “he writes as though he had no heart.” Lawrence was obliged to explain for him. “He doesn’t mean half he says, mother; I suspect the secret of his indignation lies in the fear that you are going to have extra burdens heaped upon you. It will be all right with him when he gets accustomed to the new state of things.”

The large room back of the parlor was thoroughly renovated and furnished throughout in comfort, and some degree of luxury. None too soon; for Aunt Sarah was found to be waiting for permission, and no sooner did she receive it than she started on her journey. By the time Porter and Mamie were due, she had been established in her new quarters for a week, and was inclined to welcome them as the newcomers.

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It was found to be very hard for Porter to adjust himself to the new state of things. It was evident during the first dozen hours after their meeting that he and Aunt Sarah repelled each other. Within a week, the young man confided to Mamie that he detested his aunt, who on her part had already informed him that he was the best illustration of out and out selfishness that she had ever seen.

Aunt Sarah was given to speaking her mind. She had been a large woman, with a strong and vigorous frame; it was bowed now with rheumatism, and her deep set grey eyes that had flashed brightly when she was a girl, seemed now to be only sharp and severe. She wore the plainest of dresses without regard to the prevailing fashion and her grey hair was stretched straight back from a forehead naturally high, and worn in an uncompromising knot on the top of her head. In short she offended Porter's ideas of propriety, not only, but his sense of beauty

## “For One Blissful Night”

at every point; and he took no pains to conceal the positive dislike that he felt toward her.

When he learned, as he did from his mother, of the plans Lawrence had had for returning with him to college, and which had to be abandoned on account of Aunt Sarah, his disappointment and indignation knew no bounds. Poor fellow, he was genuinely disappointed. He had not that mean nature which is liberal to itself and penurious for others. He heartily approved of Lawrence's taking what money there was, and beginning his college career.

“It is high time;” he grumbled, “talk about waiting another year! What have you been doing these half dozen years but waiting? You will be a second Methusaleh by the time you graduate, at this rate. If I had been at home this should not have happened.” It will be observed that the college-bred youth took no stock in the belief that his brother could shorten his course by

## The Older Brother

his previous studies; and also that he had a very high opinion of his ability to manage the family, if he had only been there to manage.

In many respects the summer was a hard one for Porter; and his brother bore patiently with his outbursts of irritability, because he realized what a trial it must be to him to miss one face of more importance to him than all the others; for Cora Felton, instead of returning home as usual at the close of the school year, had been joined by several members of her family, and gone with them on an extended tour, from which she expected to return for her last year at school, without coming home at all. Lawrence, who had asked no questions and for some time had received no confidences, was yet aware that frequent letters passed between the two, and inferred that their relations to each other were much as Porter had planned that they should be. Occasionally he wondered that Porter, who had been so communicative at

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first, should maintain utter silence with him now, but decided at last that this, too, was natural. Porter was older, and his feelings were growing deeper. He would not be likely to wear them on the surface any more. As for himself, he could only be thankful for the respite of silence. He had taken up that cross with the others,—withdrawn as utterly as possible from even the ordinary friendly attentions to which Cora had been used from him all her life, and given her up to his brother. He expected, in time, to get accustomed to thinking of, and caring for her as a sister. He *must* school himself to it, and he would. But he confessed to his heart that that time had not yet come, and so was glad not only of her absence, but of Porter's silence. It all made him more patient with and tender of Porter. He shielded him as much as possible from Aunt Sarah's never complimentary tongue, and made the summer as pleasant for him in every way as he could. Was he not the older brother?



## VIII

### AN UNEXPECTED CROSS

“**HISTORY** repeats itself.” What could the author of that sentence have meant, save that there are certain coincidences in marked periods of time, which coincidences are themselves more strongly marked because of the contrasts? In point of fact no history either of nations or individuals is ever quite repeated. Yet the Hammond brothers thought of the phrase as they stood together among the fallen leaves that November afternoon.

Five years before, almost to a day, they had stood in that same spot talking over their plans for the future, and thinking of a new made grave. And to-day beside that grave over which the lovely grasses had waved for five summers, there was another, so new that the earth heaped about it was still fresh and

## An Unexpected Cross

moist. And the brothers were talking over college plans. No wonder they thought, but did not say, that "History repeats itself."

Yet there were sharp contrasts between this experience and that one five years in the background.

It was just a year and a half since Aunt Sarah had arrived to make her home with them, and it had been to the Hammond family eventful time.

The autumn following her arrival had begun in a commonplace enough way. In September Porter and Mamie had departed, the one to college, the other to boarding school, and Lawrence had stayed at home and moved steadily on in the course he had mapped out for himself. He had continued his studies, apparently with as much zest as ever, with the minister for a tutor. It was about this time that he began to realize that he was also being tutored in higher knowledge than that derived from books; and that the minister's vigorous religious life which

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expressed itself in action as well as in mental processes, was taking vital hold of his pupil. He used to say in after life, that during those days he was busy preparing himself for college, and being prepared in a way that he did not understand, for all that followed.

Aunt Sarah from whose keen grey eyes little escaped that she cared to see, had come to know much about her nephew's hopes and disappointments. She learned by some means, as people do without being told, that she herself had been the last obstacle in his way. Not unnaturally his way of managing this had increased the interest which she already felt for the namesake of her beloved brother. She became his pronounced and persistent admirer; and he on his part was as tender to her as a son could have been. It was toward the end of January that the winter's routine was suddenly interrupted. Porter, who on account of expense had not come home for the holidays suddenly appeared to them.

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“Expelled!” he said gaily, in response to their exclamations. It appeared, presently, that he had come by the advice of the college authorities, and the peremptory orders of his physician, to get “rested up,” as he phrased it. He had been out of sorts for several weeks, and there was fever in town, and the amount of it was, some of his friends had got frightened and sent him home; he considered it a piece of folly, and he wanted his mother to nurse him up, so that he could go back in a week at the latest. But he did not go back at the end of the week. Instead, by that time, ordinary occupations had been laid aside and the routine which belongs to prolonged and serious illness fairly established. There followed weeks of careful nursing and grave anxiety, during which time, Aunt Sarah proved herself a veritable angel of mercy. She was able to lay aside her brusqueness and her sarcasms, and become the skillful practical nurse, taking her turn and indeed more than her turn with the

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others, and compelling the anxious mother to take such rest as she needed. There came at last certain not soon to be forgotten days and nights when all three remained at their posts as watchers, unable to do much it is true, but watch and wait. Mother and son told each other in mournful undertone, whenever there was opportunity to speak apart, that they wished they had braved all fear of contagion and sent for Mamie. Would the child ever forgive them if—and they did not finish the sentence.

Following these, had come that day which beggars all description, in which the doctor spoke in cheerful tones, and congratulated everybody he met, and the blinds of the front room were thrown wide open, and Mrs. Hammond had sat down in her own little rocking-chair and cried; and Aunt Sarah had said: “What in the world do you want to waste your strength in crying for *now*? You might better laugh. And I advise you to keep all the strength you’ve

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got; there'll be lots of nursing up to do before he'll get around I can tell you."

Aunt Sarah had been right. Indeed the sick one by no means rallied as the doctor thought he ought. It developed gradually that he had been overdoing in more ways than one. Not only had he studied hard during those last weeks in college, but had been very faithful to all his social duties. Going out sometimes to party or concert every evening in the week, and making up for it by studying until toward morning, in order to maintain his standing in the class.

"And I did it too," he had said gloomily to Lawrence, "but to what purpose? It is all up with me now; I don't suppose I shall ever graduate." In short he had needed constant attention and care almost as much as during those weeks when the disease held him in its power. At last the doctor lost all patience with the tardy recovery and ordered change of air. A stay at the seashore of months, or at least weeks he had decided

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was imperative. Porter had grumbled and resisted. It would take tons of money. He knew all about expenses at the seashore; lots of the college fellows went there every season. There *were* no quiet inexpensive places that were civilized enough for a fellow to stay in; he wouldn't go a step.

Lawrence took the matter in hand and sat down beside him with pencil and paper to show that there was money enough to meet this added expense. He had a reserve fund he explained, for just such emergencies. But this had made Porter more determined than before.

"I know all about that 'reserve fund,'" he had growled, "you are going in for another year of waiting. First it is Aunt Sarah, and then it is I. You have kept yourself out of college long enough, without my coming in to help you. If you are ever going it is time you started. I say I won't go a step."

But of course he went. Lawrence had accompanied him and seen him comfortably.

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settled in a place not too quiet, and surrounded by the luxuries which his invalid state demanded and then had returned to his work. For the first few weeks letters from him had been filled with homesickness and general discomfort; then he had seemed suddenly to grow contented, and wrote of steady improvement in appetite and strength. He had not come home until summer and the summer work were fairly upon them, and had brought in his strong lithe frame and sun browned face abundant proof of the value of the remedy. He had declared himself ready for ploughing or haying or whatever came next, and thrown himself into the work with energy. Lawrence had supposed that he would have other plans. During his long illness the brother had written daily bulletins to the absent Mamie, always remembering that she and Cora Felton were roommates and destined to be sisters. She would undoubtedly share the letters with Cora. As soon as Porter was able to write



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for himself, these daily epistles had been discontinued, and Lawrence had returned to his former custom of a fortnightly letter to his sister. Meantime the day had drawn near in which both Mamie and Cora were to graduate, and Lawrence had taken it for granted that Porter would of course be present on that occasion. At one time he had feared indeed that the stay at the seashore would have to be prolonged beyond the appointed date, but Porter had returned just in time.

And then he had astonished his brother by flatly refusing to go. His mother must be there, of course, but Lawrence was the one to escort her. He himself had been away enough, and spent money enough. He wanted no more railroad trips at present. He wouldn't go for the sake of seeing all the girls in the United States graduate at once. But he would assume command of the farm in Lawrence's absence, and show that he knew how to order men around as well as his brother did.

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Of course the brother had protested, and argued, and brought forward reasons enough to convince any reasonable man that he could not be spared; besides hinting that it was Porter's place to be there. He might as well have talked to the stone fence on which they were sitting. Porter sturdily maintained his ground, and declared that whether Lawrence went or not, he shouldn't.

At last Lawrence brought forward the argument that had been uppermost all the while. He had been not a little hurt at his brother's continued withdrawal of confidence, and had resolved not to be the first to mention Cora's name to him; but he put aside his feeling sufficiently to say plainly at last that Porter owed it to another as well as to Mamie, to be present at the graduation.

Porter chewed a fragrant sweet clover for some seconds before replying, then he said: "If you mean Cora Felton, there is no reason in the world why I should go to see her graduate. I wonder, Lawrence, if you think that

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old notion of mine holds yet? I remember that I went on like a lunatic about her at one time. But that was all over with long ago. I assure you that Cora and I are excellent friends, and that is all. To convince you of it, old fellow, for you look as though you didn't believe a word I said, I'll tell you a secret. I am engaged, sure and fast, but it isn't to Cora Felton. I've been trying to get a chance to talk with you about it. I met her at the shore; they came down a couple of weeks after I did. Lawrence, I hadn't talked with her half an hour before I knew that it was all up with me. And she felt the same, that was strange, wasn't it? It *was* to be, you see. It has all been settled between us for several weeks; and settled formally for a few days. I stopped to see her father and mother on my way home. Oh, we are not to be married until after I am fairly established, of course; she understands that, but we are about as solemnly engaged to each other as two people could

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be. I'm in a hurry to have you know her, Lawrence; you would admire her I am sure; she is one of your kind."

He had talked on nervously, as one who would forestall any questionings; but Lawrence who had no congratulations to offer, had interrupted him at last, with stern questions. What was he to understand? How long had there been such an utter change of relations between Cora and himself? He supposed, and thought he had a right to suppose, that the two understood each other as fully as Porter had declared his intention that they should. Had he dared to play with that young lady's feelings?

"Nonsense!" Porter had said; there was nothing of the sort, of course. Lawrence must remember that he had not seen them together in a long time, or he would have understood that that boyish notion had been given up. Why yes, he corresponded with her, always had. Why not? He would as soon think of not writing to his sister, as

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Cora. No, he hadn't written very regularly, not lately at least. In fact he had not written at all, in several weeks. He was sure he did not know what she thought, except that he had been too busy to write. He had never written very special letters to her. How could he, not being engaged? He had told Lawrence that he meant to be perfectly honorable in his management of the affair, and he had been. He didn't see—and here Lawrence had interrupted him again, his face pale and his voice unmistakably cold and stern. Did Porter mean him to understand that he had managed the affair so honorably as never to give the lady reason to suppose that he wanted to marry her, and meant to do so if he could? Had he not boasted that although he should not definitely engage himself, yet he meant to be plainly understood? Which of these "honorable" and contradictory courses had he pursued? Porter had chewed more sweet clover for some seconds before attempting a

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reply. Then he had tossed it aside and squared around on the fence, and made his confession.

“Lawrence, I suspect I have acted like a fool. I seem to have been a fool the most of my life. I was as devoted to Cora as a fellow could be, and I suppose she understood me; I do not know how a girl could well help it. Of course you know what I mean; I never forgot that she was a lady, and I was a gentleman. Nevertheless I confess that if she cares for me as I thought I did for her, I have done her harm, and the thought poisons my happiness. I don't know how to get out of it. Or,—that isn't it, either, there is nothing to get out of; but I mean I don't know how to meet her. No explanation can be made; yet she ought to know what I have been telling you; and I am afraid it may hurt her. You know what I mean, Lawrence. This thing isn't sudden, you see. I have known for a long time that I had made a mistake. I believe brooding

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over it had a good deal to do with my getting ill. I had no reason to change in my feelings toward her; it was just one of my fool blunders, Lawrence, mistaking a feeling of pleasure in the society of the first pretty girl I met, for real love. It is an awful mess I have made of life, thus far. I shouldn't have any hope of myself if it were not for Mary; wait until you know Mary, and you will understand what I mean. Meantime you must come to my aid, as you have a thousand times before. I can't go to the commencement, don't you see that I can't? and you must; and what is more, you must explain how it is with me; without seeming to explain, you understand. I own frankly that I have been a fool, and am afraid I have done her serious mischief. The only thing I can say is that I didn't mean it, and I want her to know it. Yet don't you see that for me to tell her so, would seem almost insulting?

“I'm telling you the whole story, Law-

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rence. I told Mary all about her; I read her the last letter I wrote to Cora that she might see it was only a friendly one; but still I explained just what a consummate idiot I had been, and just what I feared; and she agreed with me that the least I could do now was to be entirely frank with regard to my present position and hopes. Moreover, Lawrie, she owned that if you were the sort of brother I described to her, you were just the one to make the explanations in a wise, kind way, and cause as little embarrassment and pain as possible. So you see I have come to you as usual. It is a miserable mess I have made for myself, but I'm sure you will help me out. You always have, you know."

It had been throughout the old refrain. The handsome fellow had not known how weak it sounded; had not realized even while he sued for help, that he had always been limping through the world, using his older brother as a crutch.



## IX

### A "CHANGED CROSS"

THE hay had taken care of itself that afternoon, at least so far as the owners of the farm were concerned. Porter had felt compelled to write an important letter to Mary, and Lawrence had had a battle to fight with himself. He had gone off into the woods leaving his men to do as they pleased, while he tramped for miles struggling with his fierce anger and bitter pain.

*Could* he perform this task which had been thrust upon him? This was, for awhile the chief question with him. He shrank from it as he had from no other ordeal of his life, yet with strange inconsistency could not be willing that any one else should do it for him. Never, since they were children had his anger burned so hotly as it did against Porter that afternoon. He to say that he

## A "Changed Cross"

had been honorable! the villain! had not his brother watched him many a time as he bent over Cora, and told himself that he would have known even had he not been taken into confidence that she was the woman of his choice? Of course Cora had understood what she had a right to understand. Of course she believed that she was coming home to receive this homage still. And he, who felt that he could willingly have died to save her an hour of pain, had been the one chosen to stab her!

He had tramped about like an insane man for hours, and then in sheer exhaustion had thrown himself down on a grey old log and groaned aloud in his agony. After a little, the bitterest part of the conflict had been that he could feel only hatred for his brother. The younger brother who had been left in his care, and who through all the years he had not failed!

Down on his knees he went at last, and cried to the blessed "Elder brother" to

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come and save him. To come and help him, not only to do his duty but to do it with a brother's heart.

Of course he went to commencement; more than that, he shook hands with his brother at parting. He had known when he arose from his knees and made his way out of the woods, just what his duty was, and that he should try to perform it.

Among the pictures folded away in the portfolio of Lawrence Hammond's memory there will always be one of that evening when, the first greetings over, and his mother in her room, resting, preparatory to the great to-morrow, and Mamie waiting to ask a few more questions before she went to her, he had brought forth his startling news.

He had thought of a hundred ways to tell it, had even tried to plan the words he should use, but had finally determined to tell Mamie in an off-hand manner, merely as if it were a part of other home news, and learn from her volunteer exclamations perhaps, how



“‘ENGAGED!’ EXCLAIMED MAMIE. ‘HOW DELIGHTFUL!’”

## A "Changed Cross"

Cora would be likely to receive it. After that, Mamie's womanly tact would help him out. He had turned the gas low by Mamie's direction, preparatory to leaving the room, and neither of them saw that Cora, who had returned for a forgotten package, stood in the doorway when Lawrence said :

"By the way, Mamie, I have an item of home news that I think will astonish you ; Porter is engaged."

"Engaged!" exclaimed Mamie. "How delightful! now we shall have a wedding." But chiming in with her voice had come Cora's who did not know that she was supposed to be absent.

"Dear me! I'm so glad! I was afraid Porter would never find any one to suit him. Who is she? Is she nice? Tell us all about her, quick!"

Then Mamie—"Did you bring her picture? You absurd boy! why not? Didn't you know that we would want to see how she looked, right away?"

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"Never mind," Cora had interrupted. "We can wait until we get home, and make Porter show it to us himself; that will be more interesting."

Was this consummate acting? There was no tremor of voice nor any appearance of covering emotion of any sort. And not Mamie herself was more eagerly interested in trying to gather from him all sorts of particulars,—which he could not give—than she had been.

They had gone away at last, but he has sat long, studying over this new phase of the problem, and trying to take counsel of common sense, instead of opening his heart to the wild rush of hope that was knocking for admittance. If Cora really had thought of Porter simply as a brother, was it not more than probable that he also occupied a like place in her heart?

The next day both young ladies had been too much occupied, apparently, even to remember his wonderful piece of news, the

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planning to tell which had kept him awake for two wretched nights. They had had another interest and excitement in the arrival of Robert Felton from the Western college where he was teaching. Lawrence, as he watched that young man's reception, had felt quite sure of the place that he occupied in Mamie's heart. But that had required no great penetration, for neither of them had taken any pains to conceal their sense of proprietorship. Could he help a little feeling of envy when he thought of the smoothness of their course? He had had no opportunity to exchange so much as a sentence in private with Cora, until the great day was over, and he had been taking her home from the class reception. Directly they were away from the crowds, Cora had begun at once in sisterly fashion to speak of Porter.

"I am glad for him," she had said, "at least I think I am; if I knew the lady I could be surer. Porter needs a very choice wife don't you think? One who will help

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him, in certain directions, ever so much. Why all men do, of course,"—with a gay little laugh,—“but I mean I have been so anxious that Porter should choose just right. I think I have worried about him a little, as I used to about Robert. Do you think he has chosen just the one?”

The sentence had made the listener's heart so light that he could not help but laugh.

“We will hope so,” he said. “But do you know I thought for a long time, I may say for years, that you were destined to be my sister?” He had tried to make his voice sound easy and careless, but had known that before he reached the last word it trembled. It sometimes seems to him that he can hear yet the music of her laughter as she replied.

“Did you? What a pity we both disappointed you so! I'll tell you a secret; I think Porter practiced on me for a while. I have laughed many a time at the thought that he was, unconsciously to himself, perhaps, treating me to the special attentions



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that he would like to bestow on a person of whom he was very fond. A sort of sophomore performance you know. It was an excellent imitation sometimes, but I never escaped the feeling that it was only imitation. I do not mean, of course, that he ever spoke other to me than he would have a perfect right to do, to as intimate a friend as I am, but—why it is nonsense—but as I say I used to think in an amused way that Porter was practicing in view of the time when he should meet the real person.’

And then this wise and prudent young man—who had assured himself in the grey of that very morning that if he should discover Cora Felton to be still heart-free, he would bide his time, saying no word that could frighten her, and that perhaps, oh perhaps! sometime—had proceeded then and there to speak words like these:

“Cora, I have never ‘practiced’ on anybody. There was never but one woman, and there will never be another, whom I could

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want for my wife; that one I have wanted, it seems to me, forever. The only thing that has kept me silent, has been the belief that my brother and she—Oh Cora! Don't you *know* whom I mean?"

The traveling party had been at home for about three hours; and the brothers were in the stable engaged in the unromantic work of caring for the horses, when Porter, in response to a communication that Lawrence had just made him, had turned himself about, curry comb in hand, amazement on his face, and had given vent to the following.

"Well! upon my word! if that isn't a little ahead of anything I ever heard in my life! I must say, Lawrie, I think you might have given me a hint of it. I assure you I was in dead earnest, and have spent a miserable week in thinking about it; and made a guy of myself to Mary. What on earth will *she* think of me? And you are actually engaged to her! Well now old fellow I'm

## A "Changed Cross"

awfully glad. She wouldn't suit me for a wife, but she will for a sister."

They had had good times together, those brothers, the remainder of that summer. As they worked all day on the farm, many plans with regard to the future had been discussed genially. Porter had been, of course all eagerness to get back to college. He wanted the entire year there, owing that the first half of his senior year hadn't amounted to much. He had been upset generally, and done nothing well. He had expressed astonishment that his brother still firmly adhered to his determination to have a collegiate education. He frankly owned that he had thought that Cora would spoil all that; and hinted that four years in college and three spent in studying a profession would—— and then he had broken off to inquire whether Lawrence meant to study for a profession. No, Lawrence had explained; he had quite given up that idea. He meant not to desert the farm. That, he had determined would

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be much the pleasanter way to plan for mother ; and in fact he was quite content ; having resolved to give his leisure time to writing for the press. He had learned by experience that a man could manage a farm, and do several other things. In the past two years he had written papers on subjects connected with his studies, and they had been received with flattering success ; he believed there was an opening for him in that direction, and meant, after he had graduated to give himself to certain studies with a view to expressing himself helpfully on paper about them.

Porter had been surprised, but interested. And then he had reminded his brother that it would still be three years, at best, before he could begin his special work. He believed it possible with all the home study he had done, to pass examination for the junior year, but anything better than that was preposterous. By all means, with such plans in view he must get started that fall. And

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Lawrence had irritated him by shaking his head and saying that there were obstacles in the way. He must wait one more year.

"Oh obstacles!" the younger brother had replied irritably. "Of course there are, and I know the name of them. *I'm* the great old obstacle, Lawrence, and I'm tired of it. I say I won't be any longer. You ought to have gone in the first place; you are the older and it was your right. If I hadn't been a selfish fellow I should have known it. I'll stay now and run the farm, and you shall go."

Lawrence had laughed genially, and stopped his plow to lay a caressing hand on his brother's arm while he replied. He had not for a moment thought of accepting the offered sacrifice, but he liked the idea that it had been offered.

But it came to pass that the brothers had departed that September, for college. Aunt Sarah had come suddenly to the front and removed obstacles. One evening, when it wanted but a few weeks of term time, she

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had sought a private interview with Lawrence. That money he had sent her to come East with, did he remember? Well, she hadn't needed it; she wasn't quite so badly off as he had thought; all the same, she had liked his sending it to her. That, and a few hundred more were in the bank and she wanted him to take it and go back with his brother. She had decided that it could not be put to a better use. There had been unbounded astonishment, and a great deal of discussion; but it had ended in Aunt Sarah's having her own way.

A few weeks later something had happened that caused Porter Hammond immense astonishment; indeed he has not recovered from it yet. He will tell, on occasion, to this day, how that incomparable brother of his actually spent but one year in college in his life; and not only graduated, but carried off the very highest honors of his class! That, however, is anticipating our story.

## A "Changed Cross"

We have reached that November afternoon when the brothers stood together among the leaves and spoke of that newly made grave. It was Aunt Sarah's bent and weary body that had been laid to rest beside the brother whom she had loved so well. And so much, before this time, had she become a part of their family, that she was not only missed but mourned.

The brothers had been but six weeks in college when they were summoned home to bid her good bye. Suddenly, unexpectedly, as she had done things all her life, she had sickened, and within a few hours after the arrival of the students, whom she had much desired to see, she died.

"I am glad you came in time," she had said to Lawrence, "I was afraid you wouldn't. I wrote a letter that I want your mother to read aloud when the fuss is over and they are all gone, and you are alone. It says some things that I want you to know. Now Lawrence, when your father was a boy

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he used to put his strong young arms around my neck and kiss me. Not many people have done it since; if you don't mind I would be glad to have you kiss me good-bye."

Then the young man, his eyes dim with tears, had put his arms about her, and kissed her tenderly.

"There!" she had said, "now kneel and pray; it is good to have a strong young nephew who can kiss you good-bye, and pray for you as you go."

And while he was praying, Aunt Sarah went away.

They were talking it over, among other things, that afternoon. Uncle Stuart had come and said his platitudes, and told the brothers how well they were looking, and how happy he was in their success, and told their mother how sorry he had been that he could not share the burden of poor Sarah with her, but he had an expensive family, and there had been losses, of one sort and



## A "Changed Cross"

another; and he had offered Lawrence a ten dollar bill to help defray the funeral expenses,—and it had been declined;—then he had gone on his way, and the family were alone. And there was that letter to be read.

"I dread that;" Porter said. "It will be hard for mother. She will think all the time of father. What can Aunt Sarah have wanted to say to us? Some good advice I presume. And she has left her cat to the care of some one, without doubt. I think it will be you, Lawrence, you were her favorite. She had not much else to leave, poor old auntie. She gave you all she had, I suppose? It was a grand thing for her to do. Who imagined that she had so much."

In the evening they gathered as Aunt Sarah had desired, to hear the letter read. It was not long.

"My dear children;" it began.

"That means all of you, Elizabeth and all. I feel as though you were mine, somehow. I'm a good deal older than Elizabeth,

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and I'm sure she has been like a daughter to me."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Hammond pausing to wipe her eyes, "I could do very little for her."

"I am a woman of few words," the letter continued, "but I want to tell you that you have made the old woman happy; God bless every one of you. I have a few gifts I want to make. You will find my will in the northwest corner of my lower bureau drawer in a black chest. The chest is locked and the key is in the pocket of my brown wrapper that hangs in my closet on the fourth hook from the door." Porter, with Aunt Sarah's grey cat in his arms, bent over it to hide a smile; this all seemed so queer to him.—"But you will have to go through a lot of red tape I suppose, before you can have the will read, and I'd rather tell you in my own words any how, what it says. It seems more homelike.

"I want Elizabeth to have five thousand

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dollars for herself;” exclamations of surprise, delight, and, from Mrs. Hammond almost of dismay,—“and I want Mamie and Porter to each have a thousand dollars as a wedding present from Aunt Sarah, who though they didn’t love her very much I guess, and it’s no great wonder,—managed to be kind to her.”—A low mortified whistle from Porter, and a burst of regretful tears from Mamie. She thought of so many things she might have done for Aunt Sarah:—“And now to Lawrence, my dear boy, my brother’s namesake and exact likeness, not only in his handsome face but in his noble unselfish heart, I’m going to leave the rest. If I was a painter I’d paint a verse to go with it; the one that I reckon he must have taken to live by: ‘*Even Christ pleased not Himself.*’ After he has paid my funeral expenses and set up a decent stone in the graveyard, large enough to stand for the whole family, there will be a trifle over fifty thousand dollars left for him. I’m glad I’ve got it for

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him. I was a stranger, and he thought I was poor, and he gave up his plans, and took me in. God bless him. Amen.

“AUNT SARAH STEEL.”

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The Older Brother  
Mrs. Isabella M. Alden  
(Pansy)

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