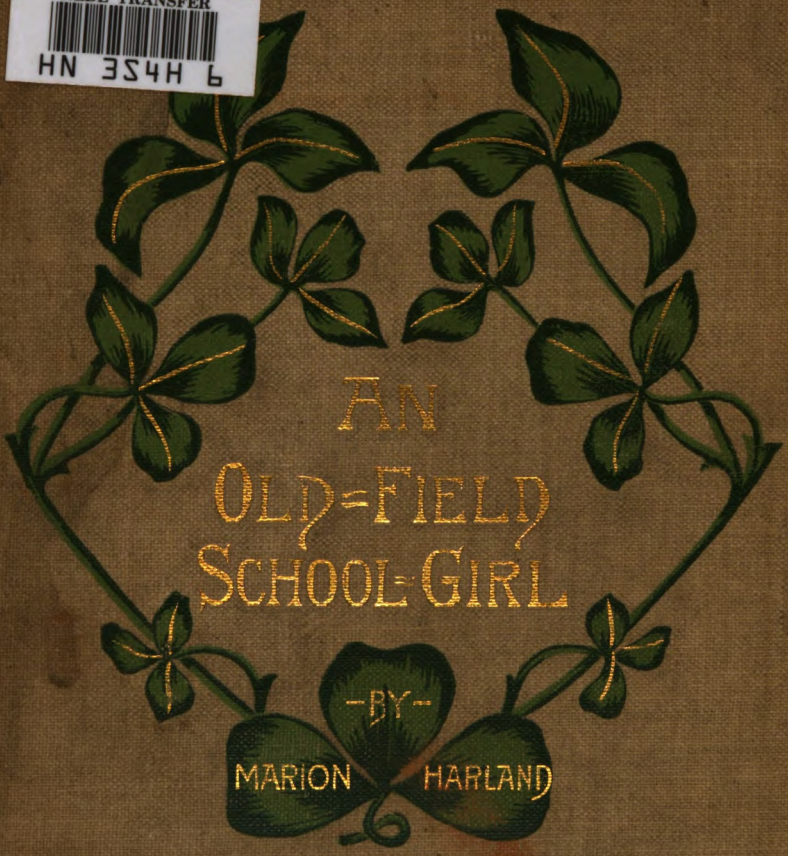

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AN OLD-FIELD SCHOOL-GIRL

WITH A CRY SHE COULD NOT QUITE STIFLE, SHE RUSHED AWAY INTO THE WOODS.

AN OLD-FIELD SCHOOL-GIRL

BY

MARION HARLAND

ILLUSTRATED

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PREFACE

WITH the desire of making this story a faithful representation of the life of an Old-Field School-Girl of fifty odd years ago, I have had it illustrated by scenes taken from that life as nearly as this could be done in our day. For the admirable photographs that served as the suggestions of the drawings I am indebted to MISS LOUISE WILLIAMS, of Richmond, Va. The most spirited of my illustrations are actual reproductions of her photographic work.

My readers will share in my gratitude to the young artist for the fidelity and grace with which she has carried out the author's wishes in this respect.

MARION HARLAND.

NEW YORK, October, 1897.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

AN OLD-FIELD SCHOOL-GIRL

CHAPTER I

EVERYBODY spoke of it as an "old-field school." * But the only field in sight was one hundred acres in extent and always under cultivation. On the early October morning with which my story begins it was tender green with fall wheat growing fast under the warm Virginia sunshine. A "worm-fence" of rails separated it from the copse of sassafras and chinquapin bushes, scrub-oaks, and persimmon trees, beyond which was the clearing lying about the school-house door. Many generations of schol-

* An "old-field" was a tract of land worn out by much bearing of wheat or tobacco, and given over for years to Nature's "rest-cure." Nothing sprang from the impoverished soil but broom-straw, sassafras bushes and scrub-pines, and it was alike unavailable for crops and for pasturage. When conveniently located to several plantations, an old-field was often selected as the site of the neighborhood school-house. Hence the title familiar to the Southerner of fifty years ago.

ars had trampled this area into dust that had not put forth a blade of grass in the month's vacation just ended. But for two tough-lived aspens planted close to the steps of the small building there was not a sign of vegetation nearer to it than the belt of brushwood.

The school-house was built of hewn logs, chinked with bits of wood half as long and twice as thick as a shingle. The spaces between these billets was filled in with mortar in which there was much red clay and little lime. Sun, rain, and wind had bleached the mortar to a dirty pink and darkened the logs to grayish black. Upon two sides of the one-roomed building were windows running horizontally two-thirds of the way across the walls, and but one pane deep. A log had been sawed out and a single long sash fitted into the space thus left. The sash hung from hinges made fast to the log above it, and when closed was hooked down to hasps set in the lower log. The inner walls and ceiling were plastered with the warmly colored mortar used in filling up the chinks. As far up as a boy could reach by standing upon a bench, the mottled surface was covered with pencillings and charcoal scrawls. There was but one movable desk. That stood at the head of the room. It had a hinged cover

with a padlock attached to it, and a wooden arm-chair was beside it. The rest of the room was furnished with backless benches of unpainted pine, mellow-brown with age, a big stove at the right of the teacher's chair, and a row of tall stools ranged in front of a sloping shelf made fast to the wall behind the desk. Upon these the scholars sat when they had their writing lessons. At intervals of about two feet apart, stone inkstands were set in hollows gouged out of the shelf, which was glossy at the outer edge from the friction of gowns and jackets. A rain of ink defaced it from end to end. The floor was similarly besprinkled, with here and there a bigger and irregular blotch, showing where an inkstand had come to grief. But for these blemishes the oaken boards were passably clean. The windows were open, and the place had a wholesome smell of pine-boards and woodland odors that had wandered through in the hot noon-tide from the forest back of the school-house.

A locust—"a dry-weather fly," the people thereabouts called it—had perched on the sill on the sunniest window and sang shrilly. But for his chirp, the room was very still until two men pushed back the door and strolled up the aisle. Their steps started up queer echoes,

like whispers and titters that chased one another from one corner to another; the locust stopped singing.

"Mrs. Duncombe sent a couple of women over yesterday to sweep and scrub," said the elder of the men. "It all looks fairly decent, I think."

He seated himself upon the teacher's desk, swinging one leg over a corner of it, the other foot upon the floor, and looked around the room, a smile half-humorous, half pensive, showing his white teeth and lighting up his eyes. He had a noble face; his age might have been fifty; his hair was iron gray; as from the force of early habit, he had pulled off his hat at the door, and now held it in his left hand, while with his right he tapped his boot with his riding-whip. This was Major Duncombe, of Greenslope, a fine specimen of the Virginia planter of 1840.

"All the learning I carried with me to college was flogged into me here," he went on musingly. "Old Byars Lowton reigned supreme from this desk then. I have heard my father say that when Byars applied for the place, Colonel Barton of Hurley, my nearest neighbor, said to him, 'Young gentleman, you are young and inexperienced. We should like

to know something of your proposed principles of government. How do you mean to manage your school?' 'By switch and suasion, sir,' said Byars. ''*Specially switch.*' The speech got him a berth he held for forty years, and in all that time his hand never lost its cunning"—laughing good-humoredly. "They do say that he jarred the old school-house down with vigorous applications of his cardinal rules. It fell one windy night, and my father had this put up in its stead. Nothing ornamental about it, you see, but it is substantial and comfortable, and will stand any amount of pounding and kicking. So you need not spare the rod. Our people are firm believers in Solomon's theories upon that head."

He laughed again, so lightly and pleasantly as to take any possible edge off his words.

His companion had thrown himself into the wooden arm-chair, and while listening to the Major, made good use of his eyes in scrutinizing room and contents. He smiled at the concluding sentence, a smile that curved his mouth upward and drew his brows together, deepening a crease which was always between them.

"We shall not disagree there, I reckon," he said. "Martinet practice in the school-room is the wisest in the long run."

He had a way of jerking out his words that agreed with the impression his face and frown left upon a girl who sat upon the floor in a far corner of the room, with a book on her knees. She had made a nook for herself by setting one bench upon the top of another, and, herself unseen in the shadow, surveyed the two men through the space left between the benches. She knew one well, and the other was undoubtedly the new teacher who was to take charge of the school next Monday. Her father had said the day before that he was at Greenslope. He had been in college with young Mr. Duncombe, and the families were old friends. Had Major Duncombe been alone, she would have come out of her covert and "made her manners," as our "Mammy" nurses used to say, for he had always a kind word for her, and his daughter, Miss Em'ly, was her Sunday-school teacher. The stranger who, in two days more, would have the right to whip her brother and to ferrule her hand, was another matter. She crouched back into the corner like a mouse and watched him with bright, startled eyes that were also mouse-like.

He was shorter than the Major by half a head and slight in build. His head was large in proportion to the rest of the body; his fore-

head was broad and thatched with straight, straw-colored hair; his eyes were large, and of a queer, faint blue in color. When he spoke he pursed up his mouth and wagged his head slightly from side to side; in walking he swung his arms and held his head high. Like the instructor of the "switch and suasion" story, he looked very young, not over two-and-twenty.

The girl in the corner had not expected to see this manner of man in the teacher of whom she had heard so much. The school had run down badly within the past year, and a committee composed of Mr. Barton of Hurley, Mr. Weldon of Eastover, and Major Duncombe of Greenslope, all plantations of note upon the river, had undertaken to secure a man of education and ability to bring it up to the former standard of excellence.

Unaware of the disapproving gaze of the mouse-like eyes, the new-comer resumed:

"I was brought up in the old way myself, and I see no reason to depart from it. Of course, it is best to make children love study if you can. If they will not—and few do—they must take the consequences of their bad taste."

The Major's eyes ran over the slight figure, and twinkled roguishly.

"There will be some strapping fellows—

pretty hard cases, too — in the school, who might not be easy to drive. They are tolerably good boys in the main, if taken in the right way, with no more spirit than one likes to see in lads of their age. You'll have no trouble with the girls."

"I'm not so sure of that. They need flogging as much as their brothers, sometimes more, and take advantage of the public sentiment that shields them—as it does everywhere."

"I should hope so, indeed," answered the Major, promptly. "I have never laid the weight of a finger upon one of my daughters. My boys"—the twinkle returning to his eyes—"will tell you that I have licked them out of their boots times without number. That is the reason they are so well grown. Their sinews are strengthened and lengthened by exercise. Eh! what is it?"

The stranger had started up and pointed to the distant corner.

"Who is that over there? Somebody is eavesdropping!"

Before the terrified girl could scramble to her feet, the two men were looking down at her over the uppermost bench.

"Why! why! why!" uttered the Major.

"Flea! is it you? What are you skulking in the corner for like an old hare in a hollow? Don't look so scared, child! we are not hunting you."

She was pulling herself up. She had been sitting with one foot doubled under her, and it had gone to sleep. She dropped a courtesy, first to the Major, then to his companion.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I didn't 'spose anybody would be here. I've often been here before. To read all alone, you know. Mother doesn't mind."

"That's all right, my child! all right. You came to knit, to-day, I see," seeing the long blue woollen stocking hanging from her hand.

"I knit and read at the same time. Mother doesn't mind unless I drop stitches."

"What book is that? The Bible?"

"No, sir; Shakespeare."

"So–ho–o!" The Major reached a long arm over the upper bench and brought up a large book that had lost the outer covers, the fly-leaves and the title-page. "Where did this come from?"

"Father bought it at Mr. Harrison's sale, year before last. One back was off, and he said I might have it."

"And you've read the other back off since? How far have you got in it?"

"I've been through it twice-and-a-half times."

"Twice-and-a-half times, eh?" with a whistle.

"How old are you, may I ask?"

"Twelve-and-a-half, sir."

"You are fond of fractions, it seems. Flea, this is Mr. Tayloe, who is going to teach you something besides Shakespeare next week. You saw Mr. Grigsby, this morning, Mr. Tayloe. This young lady who has read Shakespeare twice-and-a-half times and is twelve-and-a-half years old, is his daughter."

The girl courtesied again; Mr. Tayloe nodded and pursed up his mouth. The Major resumed his kindly raillery, dipping at random into the dog-eared book with the look and touch of one familiar with the contents.

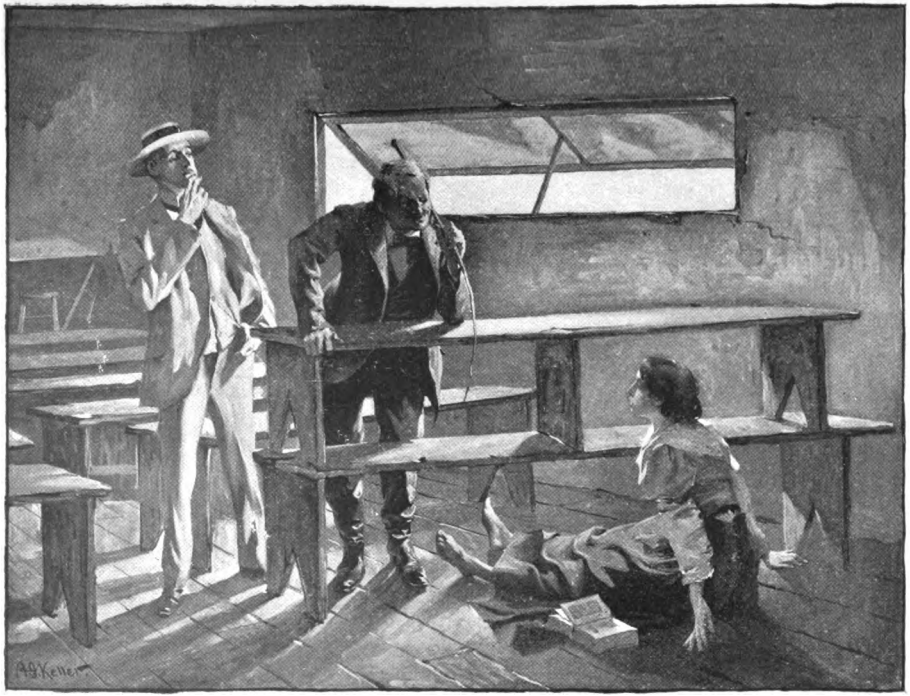
"What have you been reading to-day, my fractional damsel?"

"King Henry Fifth, sir."

"Whose son was he?"

"King Henry Fourth's, sir."

The girl was now quite at home with him and her subject. Her sallow face warmed and dimpled with enjoyment of the mock-examination. She stood erect, her arms crossed upon



"DON'T LOOK SO SCARED, CHILD!"

the upper bench, her eyes dancing with amusement.

"Let me see! He was a nice, steady, well-behaved young fellow?"

"Very nice, sir, but he wasn't a bit steady. He was right wild before he got to be King. After that he was *splendid.*"

The Major affected to read, running his finger along the lines.

"Right wild — was he? I don't see anything about the pranks played by Henry Fifth."

"They are in King Henry Fourth, sir. He just *carried on* with Falstaff and Pistol and Bartolph and Poins and Peto and all of them. But he made up for it afterwards. He never broke the promise he made to his father when he was dying."

"Humph! Didn't he steal the crown from the old gentleman's head before the breath was out of his body? I don't call that nice behavior."

"Because he thought his father was dead," cried the girl, forgetting jest and herself in defence of her hero. "If he had been dead, the crown would have belonged to his son. When Prince Henry found out that his father was only in a faint and was coming to, don't you

remember how he knelt down and begged pardon and said—

> 'There is your crown,
> And He that wears the crown eternally——'

(That meant GOD, you know)

> 'Long guard it yours.'

"It wouldn't be fair to lay *that* up against him, sir."

The Major laid the book gently upon the bench, sighing as he did it.

"You are right, my child," he said in an altered tone. "An older book than Shakespeare says—'Remember not the sins of my youth.' We won't be hard upon your dear Prince Hal. Your father tells me he is going to send three of you to school."

"Yes, sir. Bea and Dee and me."

"What!" ejaculated Mr. Tayloe, with a short, sharp laugh.

He had not spoken during the Shakespearian talk, but fidgetted about the aisle, inspecting the notches and initials cut in the benches, and frowning at the inscriptions upon the walls. "And you called her 'Flea,' didn't you?" he continued. "I never heard anything more ridiculous. Haven't they Christian names?"

"Very Christian, I believe," answered the Major, invincibly good-natured. "At least I can answer for Dee, who was christened 'David.' I was his godfather. And your name, Flea, is——"

"Felicia, sir," said the girl, as he hesitated, "and my sister's is Beatrice."

Mr. Tayloe's laugh was almost a vulgar sniff, and he walked to the door, as if impatient to be gone.

"Well, good-morning to you," said the Major to Flea. "We won't interrupt your reading any longer. Mr. Tayloe is very much gratified to know that he will have such an intelligent and industrious scholar. You will be a comfort and a pride to him."

"Possibly Mr. Tayloe may take a different view of the case," observed that gentleman, as they mounted the horses they had left tied to the aspen-trees. "I am afraid that young person will have to forget a great deal before she can learn anything. She is puffed up with the notion that she is a prodigy. I would wager my head that she suspected we would go to the school-house to-day, and planned to be found there with her Shakespeare and her stocking. But what could one expect from the child of a father who turns an eleven-year-old girl loose

in Shakespeare, and a mother who has her daughters christened Felicia and Beatrice, and nicknames them Flea and Bea?"

"Oh, come now! you are hard upon my worthy overseer and his wife," rejoined the Major, diverted by the teacher's indignation. "They are excellent folks, who mind their own business, attend church regularly, and mean to have their children well educated. Grigsby is a man of remarkable intelligence for his position —a great reader and a clear thinker. As to the nicknames, it is a trick of this region to deck up children in fancy names, and then, as if they were ashamed of the sentimentality, to make the high-sounding titles ridiculous by nicking and contorting them. The more absurd the nickname, the tighter it sticks. I have known two handsome young men, natives and residents of different counties, who went by the name of 'Toby,' nobody knew why. One was christened 'Lawrence Littlepage,' the other 'Sterling Randolph.' Another, whose godfathers and godmothers bestowed upon him the stately name of 'Carrington Cabell,' is dubbed 'Cooney.'"

Mr. Tayloe made no immediate answer. They had left the copse flanking the school-house play-ground, and were pacing between the

banks of a sunken red-clay road, topped by pines, when he broke the silence:

"The old-field school is a horrible leveller of social distinctions. Where else would your children and Mr. Barton's meet, as equals, those of an illiterate overseer? These things must be right in a so-called Republic, but I confess they go against the grain with me."

"They dry straight," said the Major, oracularly. "If the planter's children cannot keep abreast, if not ahead, of the overseer's, they must fall behind in the race. In this country every man ought to have a fair chance."

When the sound of hoofs and voicês died away upon her ears, Flea Grigsby pushed aside her barricade and came out of her hiding-place. Her fear in building it was that some mischievous boy or passing negro might peep in at the school-house door and disturb her reading and thinking. She had often hidden for a delicious hour among the branches of trees, being an expert climber, and beaten down the undergrowth in the hearts of jungles to make a cosey nest, where she could lie and dream all the summer afternoons. These were "ways" and pleasures of which she never talked. People would make fun of them, and if there was one thing she dreaded above all others it was ridicule.

Now that she had left her shadowy nook it could be seen that she was tall for her age, thin and dark. She had outgrown her frock of mixed blue homespun, "Virginia cloth," as it was called. Children then wore their skirts down to their heels. Flea's had been let down three times, each letting-down registering itself in a band of unfaded stuff, yet the hem left exposed a pair of slim ankles and bare brown feet. She had shoes and stockings at home for Sunday and holiday wear, and her mother had notified her yesterday that she was "getting too old to go to school barefoot." At home, she and three younger children ran upon naked soles (except on Sundays), from the first of May to the first of November, and revelled in their freedom from cramping shoes.

Her cheeks were burning and her heart was thumping with vain-glorious delight, such as she had never felt before. Major Duncombe, "the illustrious Major Duncombe," as she called him in her quaint, bookish way, had pronounced her "industrious and intelligent." She hoped that he would say it at his own supper-table that evening, and that her dear Miss Em'ly would hear it. She could fancy how Miss Em'ly's blue eyes would flash and her pretty

mouth smile at the praises of the scholar who "just adored her."

Long afterward Flea recalled and thought it strange, in view of what happened in later months, that she should have thought so much of Miss Em'ly, that October afternoon, when she sat dreaming happily upon the log door-step of the school-house, the hundred-acre field of wheat at her right, stretching away almost to the river, and before her, beyond the play-ground and belt of brushwood, the dark forest, in the depths of which she felt almost as much at home as in her father's house. Of Miss Em'ly's auburn curls, which Bea had once made her sister furious by calling "red;" her complexion, like roses and cream; the many kind things she had said to Flea on Sundays and week-days, and how pleased she would be when the child to whom she had taught the Catechism and Psalter should be at the head of all her classes and then grow up to be "distinguished!" Like Maria Edgeworth, or Queen Elizabeth, or Boadicea, or Hannah More, or Mrs. Sigourney!

The day was unseasonably warm, and in the sultry stillness the dry-weather flies were fiercely defying the threats of a cloud that was rising from the west to swallow up the sun. The log door-step was quite hot to the girl's

bare feet. The leaves of the scrub-oaks were red-brown, and those of the sumac scarlet, although there had been no frost as yet, and the colors dulled as the sunshine left them. The aspen leaves lay back against their stems, exposing their white linings. Every breath of air was hushed, as if the unrolling cloud were a gray blanket and suffocating the earth.

Presently, a low growl of thunder seemed, as it passed, to deaden the calm.

"We are going to have a shower," Flea said aloud, looking up.

She did not budge. She could not get home before the rain, and she was extremely comfortable where she was. Wrapping her bare arms about her knees, another of her "ways," she hugged herself and her fancies, caring nothing for heat or threatening storm. From babyhood she had created a world of her own, and lived in it at least half of the time. She called this dreaming, for the lack of a better term, "playing ladies." Nobody else knew of the play, much less of the "ladies" in it. She believed that she had invented it, and in it she always took the chief part. She especially enjoyed it upon stormy nights, when, snuggled down warmly in her bed, with Bea asleep beside her, she listened to the wind howling around the

gables and whistling between the window-sashes and crying in the chimney. It was delicious to feel the waking reverie melt into and mingle with, and at last be lost in sleep-land visions.

In her present day-dream, Major Duncombe was a conspicuous actor, and the school-room was the stage. Under the new teacher, prizes would be offered, and she would win them all. She had read of such things, and of Examination-day. She would coax her mother into giving her a new Swiss muslin frock—not an old one of Bea's. She had never had a really new Sunday frock of her very own. Bea grew as fast as she, and could not be outstripped. The frock would have a full "baby waist," low in the neck and short-sleeved. There must be a pink ribbon sash, with fringed ends. And perhaps her mother might buy for her a pair of India cotton stockings and slippers with rosettes upon them. At the imagination she hugged her knees the harder. She did not own a pair of "bought" stockings. Bea had but two pairs, and wore them upon grand occasions.

Thus dressed, she would leave her modest seat in the school-room and walk up the aisle when Major Duncombe in his finest manner called up "Miss Felicia Grigsby" to receive, first one, then another of the prizes offered for

— say Reading, Writing, History — and there ought to be a fourth. Four were none too many. Oh, for Shakespeare, of course! When all had been given, the Major would make a speech.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" he would say in his deep, round voice. "As our revered preceptor will bear me witness"—(here he would bow to Mr. Tayloe, who would bow and smile)— "I told him six months ago that our fair young friend here would prove herself the most intelligent and industrious of his pupils. He is proud of her, ladies and gentlemen, and you and I, and, indeed, everybody in this county is—" (or would "are" sound better?) "justly proud of our distinguished citizen, Miss Felicia Jean Grigsby."

Then she would courtesy—very low and gracefully — and say, in a voice mellow with emotion (another bookish phrase she had picked up): "You do me too much honor, I assure you, sir."

A tremendous roar of thunder awoke her. At the ripping and rending of the laden clouds the rain rushed down in a volume, washing out the view of everything in the landscape except the nearest bushes and the aspen-trees.

CHAPTER II

FLEA was a hardy, country-bred child, and as little afraid of thunder, lightning, and flood as of the loneliness of the deserted school-house. She laughed low and gleefully as she drew her skirt up to her knees and stuck out both thin, brown legs in the warm rain, wriggling her toes contentedly in the shower-bath. A broad reddish pool was spread out in front of the door in three minutes, and the heavy drops plashing into it raised tiny bobbing bubbles.

"They are fairies dancing at a ball!" ejaculated Flea. "How featly they foot it!"

She often talked aloud to herself when sure that no one was near by to hear, taking such opportunities to air what she supposed, from her desultory reading, was the language in common use among ladies and gentlemen in polite society. The society in which she meant to move some day.

The rain poured on, the dull rumble on the roof stirring up hollow echoes in the room

behind her; the fairies danced more and more wildly as a sharp shower of hail mixed with the rain-drops. The falling pellets stung Flea's legs, and she drew them in, still laughingly, drying them imperfectly with a blue cotton handkerchief she took from her pocket. Sitting farther back out of the spray, she doubled her legs under her to warm them, and began to croon to a tune of her own making:

"Full fathom five thy father lies.
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.
Hark! now I hear them—ding, dong, bell!
Ding-dong! ding-dong!"

The rain streamed steadily, beating the wind down; the sky darkened slowly, with no alternations of lighter glimpses. In happy unconsciousness of the lapse of time, Flea waited patiently for the "holding-up" that could not be far away.

"When it rains so hard, it doesn't last long," she thought, surprised to find herself yawning.

The monotonous patter upon the roof, the dash and drip from the unguttered eaves, had made her drowsy. She would take a short nap,

and find it clear upon awakening. Then there would be a merry tramp through the puddles and pines and wet old-field broom-straw to her supper at sunset.

She shut the door, went back to her corner, and stretched herself upon a bench, putting the bulky Shakespeare under her head for a pillow.

"What rich and strange dreams I ought to have!" she murmured, shut her eyes and took up the Examination-day scene where she had left it off.

Yes! that would be just the right thing to say. She must speak distinctly so that other people would hear it, as well as the dear Major who would stand there smiling down at her.

"You do me too — much — honor — I — assure——"

The soughing of the weak gusts in the aspen-boughs; the plashing from the eaves and the thud upon the clapboarded roof, steady as a drum-beat, had made quick work of waking dreams.

An hour went by. The wind shifted to the east and blew the door ajar, but the interior was no lighter for the opening. Darkness settled within and without the lonely building; a night in which there would be neither moon nor star to light the child, should she awake, to

attempt the measured mile that lay between the school-house and her home.

Before preceding her thither, I must try to explain to the young reader of this generation what was the social position of an overseer upon a Virginia plantation at a time when all the house and field servants were negro slaves.

"Negro traders," whose business was to buy and sell slaves, were heartily despised by the very men who sold negroes to them to be shipped in droves to rice and sugar plantations in the far South. Negro traders and their families, no matter how wealthy, could not get a footing in society made up of refined and educated people. The stigma of "nigger-dealer" clung to the third and fourth generation of their descendants. The overseer who conducted the sale of a "field-hand" who thieved, or was incurably disorderly, or of young men and women for whom there was no work on the plantation, or whose master could not afford to keep them—would not have received the trader into his house as an equal. Yet the overseer rested under a similar, although lighter shadow, perhaps because of his constant association with the negroes. The enslaved race seem to us, in looking back to those days—happily over now and forever—to have tainted

whatever had most to do with them. It is odd, to our way of thinking, that the planter who valued his overseer's services in proportion to the amount of work he got out of the slaves under his management looked down upon him as vulgar and brutal if he were cruelly strict, and with utter contempt if he were lax and familiar in his intercourse with the dusky "gang."

Mrs. Duncombe might visit her servants' cabins, and chat pleasantly and joke with old and young. The young ladies, on returning home after a long absence, would throw themselves into the arms of the "Mammy" who had been their foster mother, while it was a common custom for the colored maid to sleep upon a pallet in her young mistress's room. The gulf between the stations of owner and slave was so wide that there was no danger of confounding one with the other. The overseer was as white as his employer, yet much nearer the slave's level, unwilling as he might be to admit it, and his social rank suffered accordingly.

The Duncombes were too secure in their position in State, county, and neighborhood to be supercilious to inferiors, and too sensible not to appreciate the fact that the Grigsbys were most respectable in their walk of life.

The father was a faithful and valuable official upon the great estate, which comprised five of the best farms upon the river. Miss Emily and Miss Eliza were often at the overseer's house upon one errand or another, and sat for half an hour in as friendly chat with Mrs. Grigsby as if she had belonged to their visiting-list. Every spring and autumn she was engaged at Greenslope to help with the cutting out and making up of the clothes for the army of servants who must be looked after and cared for as if they were children. Sometimes Mrs. Grigsby did not return to her home for several days, receiving cordial kindness from all of the Duncombes. She did not, it is true, eat with the family, but she had her own work-room in which her meals were served, and was waited upon as respectfully as if she had been the greatest lady in the land. One and all, the Duncombes were thoroughbreds, and such are proverbially considerate to subordinates. It is the underbred man or woman who thinks it necessary to impress other people with his or her claims to notice and honor.

The Major had built his overseer a new house when Flea was eight years old—a neat frame dwelling two stories in height. The situation was rather picturesque, a knoll slop-

ing from the front down to a bayou, or arm of the river, and backed by an orchard and fertile fields. The windows of a room on the ground-floor were red with the flame of a "lightwood knot" fire on the evening of the Saturday that had been chosen for Mr. James Tayloe's first visit to his school-house. There were four rooms upon the first floor, two upon each side of a hall that ran from the front to the back porch. Upon the right were dining-room and store-room. Across the hall was the Chamber in which the parents slept. In most Virginia country houses this was the gathering place of the family, the very heart of the home. The Grigsbys had no other parlor. Men who called on business were received by Mr. Grigsby in the porch in summer, in the dining-room in winter. Two of the younger children slept in the back room adjoining the Chamber. Bea and Flea had a room up-stairs, and Dee, their eldest brother, one all to himself upon the same floor with theirs. The baby's cradle stood by the mother's bed when he was in it, under the bed when he was out of it. The custom of assigning a separate bed, and, when practicable, a separate room, to each member of the household is the outcome of modern ideas of decency and healthfulness.

The Chamber in the Grigsby house was spacious and the furniture simple. Besides the four-post bedstead and the cradle, there were a table in the middle of the room, a candle-stand, two rocking-chairs and five upright, all of wood with "stick backs;" a couple of crickets, or stools, and a walnut chest of drawers with a looking-glass on top. A strip of rag carpet lay before the hearth, and another at the side of the bed. The rest of the floor was bare and as clean as hands could make it. Calico curtains were drawn over the lower sashes of the four windows.

The room looked full, even crowded, to-night. The fire was always laid ready for lighting in the old Virginia country house, whatever the season. In the low countries, and the tide-water region, foggy evenings often made the blazing logs a prudent precaution in mid-summer. The night was chilly after the hail-storm, and the rain had not ceased. All the children, except Flea, were clustered in the Chamber, where was a glow of heat and light. The baby was creeping over the floor and babbling loudly. The next older children, a girl and a boy, were playing checks (not checquers) upon a shawl spread in the space between the bed and the fire-place.

Dee, a sturdy chap of ten, sat upon a cricket whittling a bow out of a hickory stick. Bea was embroidering a nankeen cape with scarlet crewels, for the every-day wear of her shapely shoulders. She had the candle-stand and two candles upon it for her own use. The blaze of the fat pitch-pine gave light enough for the rest to carry on their work and play. The crackling of the fire, the clatter of the marbles, the comments and disputes of the players, with the baby's babble, filled the room with sound.

Bea complained of it as "a racket." She was a pretty girl, and was believed by her fond mother and herself to be in a fair way to become a beauty. Her hair was of a peculiar shade of yellow of which she was very vain, because nobody else had hair of that color. Her father was Scotch by birth, and, like all Scotchmen, proud of his native land. He called Bea's luxuriant locks "Caledonian yellow." Chaney, the colored cook—who, with her husband, Dick, had belonged to Mrs. Grigsby's mother, the two being all the fortune his bride brought to the thrifty overseer—said that the two long braids hanging down Bea's back were "jes' like stewed molasses pulled *real* light." Bea's dress was light-blue calico, clean and holding

the starch, although she had worn it four days; a white apron, ruffled at the bottom, was tied about her trim waist, and she sat up straight in one of the high-backed chairs, her feet upon a stool. Altogether she was a goodly picture to the eyes of a mother who loved order and hated untidiness of every kind.

The fire was getting so hot that Bea pushed her chair back and set the candle-stand farther away from it, and demanded of Calley (short for Caledonia) "what she was thinkin' about to let the baby roast his brains by crawlin' so close to the hearth?

"He'll ketch fire, if you don't mind," she added. "Move him to the other side of the room."

"Do it yourself!" retorted the checks player. "It's my turn now, an' I can't stop for nothin'. One! two! three!"

"We'll see 'bout that, my lady, when ma comes in," said the other, in an elder-sisterly tone, and a step in the passage giving notice of the threatened coming, Calley missed the marble she had meant to catch upon the back of her hand, and turning over on her side, made a long arm to drag the baby by his frock away from the hearth.

Thus suddenly attacked in the rear, the luck-

less infant lost his balance and pitched over upon his forehead. The thump was followed by a terrific howl.

"I declar' you children are enough to w'ar anybody's life out of her!" exclaimed Mrs. Grigsby, picking up the screaming child and beginning to rub his forehead hard with the palm of her hand—"to scatter the bruise," she would have said if asked why she did it. "Thar'! thar'! deary! Ma's sugar-pie! I should 'a' thought some on you might 'a' hendered him from ketchin' sech a fall as that. Calley! give me one o' them sugar-rags to stop his mouth!"

The sugar-rags were small squares of old linen or muslin, in which were tied up cold boiled rice, or stale bread, and brown sugar. Each was of the shape and size of a marble, and before it was given to the baby was dipped in milk, or, if milk were not at hand, in water. Babies liked them, and would suck vigorously at one until it became so dry that it had to be re-dipped, or so small that there was danger of choking the little one. Mrs. Grigsby made the day's supply of twenty-five or thirty every morning, ready for use. If the baby gave signs of colic, the sugar-rag was dipped in paregoric-and-water, or in diluted fennel-seed brandy. Mothers and babies of that day

"took a heap of comfort" in sugar-rags. The smallest Grigsby's howl subsided into a queer whine, like that of a choking puppy, and this into an intermittent grunt, as his mother trotted him on her knee, holding the sugar-rag in his mouth all the while.

"I come to arsk ef any you children has any idea whar' your sister Flea is," she was saying when she could talk down the baby. "I've been a-callin' of her up-sta'rs an' down-sta'rs, an' all over the place, an' she ain't nowhar' to be foun'. Your pa, he's gone to the stable to see ef she's crawled up inter the hay lof', or some sech outlandish place, and gone to sleep. That chile's as wild's a hawk. You never know what she'll be up to next. She'll get los', sure 'nough, some o' these days, an' then *thar* it will be!"

"She's got the right name," giggled Bea. "She's jest like a flea—when you put your finger on her she ain't there."

"It's no laughin' matter, I ken tell you, Mr. Dee!" retorted his mother, as Dee's snicker answered his sister's giggle.

Mrs. Grigsby always scolded some other child for her favorite's misbehavior. As is the case with many a wiser mother, her eldest daughter was well-nigh perfect in her eyes.

"Ef that girl has los' herself in the woods, or ef anything has happen' to her out-'a'-doors an' on a night like this, dark as a stack o' black cats an' rainin' like fury, you'd, maybe, wish you hadn't a' made fun o' your poor ma's uneasiness. Well, Pa!" as her husband entered. "Any sign o' her?"

Mr. Grigsby, a tall, lean man, with sandy hair and whiskers, who looked and spoke like a person with more sense and far more education than the wife he had married fifteen years before for her pretty face and good housekeeping, stalked up to the hearth, shaking the wet from his coat into the fire, after the manner of a huge water-dog. Dee drew back to escape from the flying drops, and Bea put her embroidery behind her. Neither ventured to complain. Their father was kind and just to them, but he was master in his own house, and not to be trifled with when his face was as black as they now saw it. His voice was naturally harsh and he had a touch of the Scotch "burr" in his speech. He spoke roughly and angrily:

"Sign of her! No! Things have come to a pretty pass if all of you together can't keep the run of one child while I'm off on the plantation working like a horse to put bit and sup into your mouths. Chaney tells me she saw her

go off toward the woods right after dinner with a book under her arm and her knitting in her hand. Have any of you seen her since?"

The children looked from one to the other and then to their mother, who looked at them in the same way. Nobody said a word. Mr. Grigsby reached up for a lantern that stood on the chimney-piece, opened it and lighted the candle within with a coal taken from the fire with the tongs. He snapped to the lantern door, crossed the room in three strides, and in another instant was heard outside shouting to Dick to saddle his horse and bring him around.

When the horse was ready he whistled up a couple of dogs and swung himself into the saddle. As he did so a voice called shrilly to him, and his wife ran out into the rain, throwing her apron over her head as she came.

"Pa! Pa! Stop!" she panted. "Bea says she's 'most certain Flea's gone to see Miss Em'ly. The child's jes' distracted after her, you know, an' Bea says she was sayin' this mornin' how she'd promised to gether a heap o' life-everlastin' for Miss Em'ly to stuff a piller with. Bea says, sure's you're born, thar's whar the run-mad thing has gone to, an' they've kep' her all night, on 'count o' the rain, Bea says. If that's so, it don't seem wuth your while to

resk gettin' wet an' ketchin' your death o' cold an' fever-'n'-ager goin' out this time o' night to hunt for the little limb. An' Bea says——"

Mr. Grigsby's patience and temper were often tried by his children's mother. Sometimes he spoke his mind to her. Oftener he did not express his feelings in words. They found vent now in a single harsh "Pshaw!" a Scotch snort, which she might have divided equally between herself and her oracle, Bea. As he blew it out he struck his spur into the horse's side and vanished into the rainy darkness, the dogs racing after him.

"I never saw your pa more heady 'n he is to-night," sighed the mother, returning to the waiting group that filled the lighted front door. "He's hard's a rock when he's sot upon anything."

The hard head was turned in the direction of Greenslope. The father might "pshaw" at Bea's suggestions and her mother's conclusions, but his sound sense told him they had given him a likely clew to the whereabouts of the missing child. If she had carried what he named in his displeasure, "old-field trash," to "the house," she would have been detained there by the storm. Miss Emily made a pet of the lassie, and they might take it for granted

that her family knew where she was. She got caught in a snow-storm up there last winter and Miss Emily would not let her go home for three days. The idea became more and more plausible as he pushed on, the dogs at his heels, his big umbrella over his head. By the time the lights of the great house on the hill glimmered through the straight lines of rain he was quite sure he should find his daughter under that safe shelter.

He rode to the stable and put his horse under cover; then made his way to the front door. It stood wide open, and so did that of the drawing-room, the broad red light flashing out into the hall telling that a fire had been kindled there. They never closed inner or outer doors in Old Virginia until the snow began to fly. Even in winter it was a common experience to have one side of the body half roasted by a roaring log-fire while the other side was half frozen in the draughts pouring in through cracks in window frames and the gaps left by doors ajar.

A burst of music from the drawing-room arrested Mr. Grigsby's hand as he raised it to the knocker. Miss Emily and Miss Eliza were singing at the piano, and a man's voice joined in with theirs. The listener's knowledge of

music was slight, but he had a good ear and he knew that the unfamiliar voice was remarkably fine. It was strong and clear and sweet, and each word was articulated distinctly. The three were singing one of Moore's Melodies arranged as a fugue, or, as unmusical people used to call it, "a chasing tune."

"Meet me by moonlight alo–o–o–ne!"

sang Miss Emily's small voice, as tunefully as a bobolink. And while she went on with—

"And then I will tell thee a tale,"—

Miss Eliza took up — "Meet me by moonlight alone." As she let go of the last word, the man's voice caught it and followed hard after her through the second and third lines,—

"And then I will tell thee a tale,
Must be told in the moonlight alone,"—

overtaking the young ladies at the fourth line, where they were waiting for him, and all three voices blended, and rose and swelled harmoniously in—

"In the grove at the end of the vale."

Before they could begin the second verse Mr. Grigsby let the knocker fall smartly and

Major Duncombe himself came out into the hall.

"Ah, Mr. Grigsby!" he said, cordially, but looking surprised. "Good-evening! Walk in! Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"I hope not, sir. But I was in hope of finding my little girl here. Fl—Felicia, my second daughter. She has not come home and I thought she might have come up here on some errand or other, and been kept by the rain."

In the hush that followed his knock, what he said was heard plainly in the drawing-room, and all the home-party, headed by Miss Emily, now appeared, questioning and anxious.

Miss Emily flew up to the overseer, her blue eyes large, her red lips apart. She was out of breath and quite pale with alarm.

"What *did* you say, Mr. Grigsby? *Is* my little scholar lost? She isn't here. She hasn't been here all day—no, not for a *week* and more. Oh, the *poor* little dear! I *hope* nothing has happened to her. Won't you *all* go right off and look for her?"

She wrung her tiny white hands, and turned, first to her father, then to her grown brother, and lastly to Mr. Tayloe, who was nearest to her.

"Can't *I* go, too?" she pleaded, and her eyes

had real tears of real distress in them. A little more and she would be crying outright.

Three or four people began to speak all at once, but Mr. Tayloe's voice arose above the rest.

"Isn't that the child we saw at the schoolhouse to-day, Major? We left her there at half-past three, Mr. Grigsby. She must have been caught there by the rain."

In some way, which nobody could have explained, his cool, matter-of-fact manner was like a wet blanket upon the excitement caused by the news of the child's disappearance. Even Mr. Grigsby felt for an instant that much ado had been made over a very little matter. Miss Emily tittered nervously.

"How *very* clever in you to recollect it, Mr. Tayloe!" gazing gratefully at him. "I *do* hope she is safe and sound there! But the poor thing must be *mighty* hungry and scared almost to *death* by this time. *Please*, Papa, order ever so many of the men to go right *straight* after her, with lights and blankets and hot coffee and things, and bring her *right* here. I can find some dry clothes for her, and she can sleep in my room, and ——"

"That will do, Emily," said her father, quietly. "Joe!" to the colored footman, who had been

summoned by the knocker, "tell Jack and Emanuel to get lightwood knots, and Cæsar to have my gig ready at once. Mr. Grigsby, I will go with you. As Mr. Tayloe suggests, we shall probably find the child at the school-house."

Mr. Grigsby's eyes and ears were quick. He was near enough to Miss Emily to overhear her say, in an undertone to Mr. Tayloe,

"Won't you go, too, *please!* You would be sure to know *just* what to do—if anything *had* happened to her, you know! Though that would be *too* dreadful to think of. She is quite a favorite of mine, and *so* attached to me! Do go! It will be a *real* favor to me!"

The overseer faced her abruptly.

"Excuse me, Miss Emily, but I hope you won't persuade Mr. Tayloe to go out this wet night. There is no need whatever for him to do it. Indeed, Major Duncombe, if you will kindly let one of the hands go along with a lightwood torch, it is all I could ask. I am very sorry to cause such a disturbance."

"I shall go, if Major Duncombe will allow me—because it is Miss Duncombe's desire," said Mr. Tayloe, stiffly.

It would be foolish and useless to discuss the matter further. The canny Scotchman knew

the impropriety of disputing with one who was now a member of his employer's family. With a brief "good-night" to the ladies, he went off to get his horse.

CHAPTER III

IT was only half-past eight o'clock when the search party left Greenslope, but it would be no darker at midnight. The two negroes who led the way down the avenue and out into the public road carried blazing lightwood knots—that is, long, thick pieces of "fat" pine cut from the heart of the tree, and, when lighted, burning for hours with a fierce flame fed by the turpentine and resin which were the sap of the tree. The torches, shining through the rain, changed it into rose-red gauze curtains, and the broad sheets of muddy water, through which the bearers plashed, into pools of blood. The crooked fences glistened with wet; when the men passed into the woods the lower branches were suddenly illuminated, seeming to start forward and stoop toward the heads of the party.

Close behind the torch-bearers rode Mr. Grigsby, the dogs trotting beside him, and almost upon his horse's heels was the "top-gig"

containing the Major and Mr. Tayloe. The scene was striking and even solemn, and except that the Major and his companion now and then exchanged a sentence in subdued tones, not a word was uttered until they arrived at the open space surrounding the school-house. There, Mr. Grigsby dismounted and Major Duncombe and Mr. Tayloe got out of the gig. The negroes were left with the horses, Mr. Grigsby and the Major taking their torches.

"We will go in quietly—you first—" said the thoughtful employer softly to the overseer, "so as not to frighten her should she be awake, or, should she be asleep, not to awaken her too abruptly."

They trod lightly, and the soaked ground made no noise under their feet. Pushing the door farther open, they entered, holding their torches high to throw the light into the room. The glare reached the figure of the sleeping girl in the far corner, and with a whispered congratulation to the father, the Major led the way to her. She lay upon her side, facing them, her head pillowed upon her book, her hand under her cheek. She slumbered soundly and sweetly, not stirring when the full blaze of the fat pine struck her closed eyelids.

At the second glance both men exclaimed in

horror. Coiled right across her naked ankles and feet was what looked like a striped gray and brown rope. The spectators knew it instantly for a moccasin snake, next to the rattlesnake and copper-head, the most deadly of Virginia reptiles. Attracted by the warmth of the child's body, he had curled himself up for his nightly rest, and, raising an ugly head, hissed viciously as the light was reflected from a pair of wicked eyes. Then, instead of striking at the unconscious sleeper, he dropped to the floor and glided swiftly under the benches to a darker corner. Mr. Grigsby sprang after him and planted his heel upon his head. Had he missed him, or put his foot upon any other part of the snake, he must have been bitten. He ground his heel into the creature's head with all his might, until the convulsed body, that had wrapped itself about his leg and writhed up and down like a curling whip-lash, ceased to twist and quiver.

"Bravely done!" said Mr. Tayloe, in honest admiration. "But you ran a great risk."

"I did not think of that," answered the Scotchman, briefly.

He was deadly pale and his jaw was rigid. The sweat dropped from his chin as he stepped off the dead snake and turned back to the bench

where his child lay. It was strange that the exclamations and stamping had not aroused her. Had she been bitten? and was this heavy sleep the stupor of death? The same thought was in the minds of the others while they watched him in breathless silence. He knelt down by the still figure and laid his hand gently upon her head.

"Daughter! Father's lassie!" he said, his lips close to her ear.

His voice was husky and unnatural, but she knew it in her sleep. Her eyes unclosed slowly upon his face, and widened as she saw Major Duncombe and Mr. Tayloe behind him. Still dreaming, she smiled slowly and lifted her hand to wave it. It was all a part of Examination-day. She was still "playing ladies."

"You do me too much honor, I assure you, sir," she murmured.

She had not been bitten by the moccasin. But for the necessity of ascertaining this, she would not have been told what danger she had escaped. Short work was made with explanations and no time was lost in hurrying her from the place. Major Duncombe lifted her with his own hands to her seat in front of her father upon his broad-backed horse, and insisted upon sending one of the torch-bearers all the way home with them. Flea was wrapped to her

heels in a shawl that had been put into the gig by Mrs. Duncombe's order. It was soft and fluffy and thick, and the folds felt like a caress to her chilled limbs, Her father's arm held her close to his breast; her head lay against his strong shoulder—how strong and safe she had never guessed until now. The rain pattered upon the umbrella that covered them both; now and then it struck a projecting bough or bush and there was a dash of cool water into her face. The light-bearer trudged ahead of them, the hot blaze, that defied the rain to extinguish it, blown backward by his motion until she could smell the burning resin.

Flea never forgot that ride and her awed enjoyment of each feature of it. Her father's silence did not surprise her. He was never talkative, and, assured by his gentleness at the moment of her awakening, and the clasp of his arm about her now, that he was not displeased, she was glad to lean back in his embrace and indulge the fancies born of the night's event. She was almost sorry when the dogs ran before them as they neared the house and the clamor of the welcome they received from the dogs who had stayed at home drew out Chaney and Dick from the kitchen and was the signal for the opening of the front door. It was full of

heads, seen blackly against the lighted interior, and Mrs. Grigsby's high-pitched voice rang out shrilly:

"'Got her—ain't you, Pa?"

"Aye! aye! all's right!" he answered.

Carrying the muffled form in his arms, he walked up the path leading from the yard-gate, into the house, and set her down before the chamber fire as he might a roll of carpet.

"Don't you look too funny!" laughed Bea, as Flea began to disengage herself. "Lor'! if you ain't got on Mrs. Duncombe's winter shawl!"

"An' trouble enough she has given, I'll be boun'!" scolded the mother, heedless of her husband's gravity and silence. "I should 'a' thought yer Pa would 'a' left you at Greenslope tell mawnin'. Me and Bea, we told him he'd fin' you thar. You *have* given us a pretty skeer with your life-everlastin's an' your Miss Em'ly's and what not. Seems to me, you might think, oncet-in-a-while, of them that's blood-an'-flesh-kin to you."

"Peace, wife!" interposed Mr. Grigsby, sternly. "All of you come in here and be still!"

They trooped into the chamber, Chaney, Dick, and the Greenslope negro bringing up the rear, all curiosity and expectation, subdued by his tone and action. For he had taken a well-

worn prayer-book from the mantel-shelf and was turning the leaves while he spoke. Finding what he sought there, he put out his arm to draw Flea to his side, and knelt with her in the middle of the room.

"Let us pray!"

Everybody knelt where he or she chanced to be standing—Mrs. Grigsby by the cradle of her sleeping baby, Bea and Calley at the foot of the bed, Dee before a chair, the negroes crouching upon the floor. The candles flared and guttered, the blaze in the fire-place was beaten this way and that by the damp wind pouring in through the open doors, the drip and dash of the rain without were a low accompaniment to the father's voice, weighted with emotion. While he prayed he kept his hand upon Flea's head.

"*Almighty God and Heavenly Father, we give Thee humble thanks that Thou hast been graciously pleased to deliver from great danger the child in whose behalf we bless and praise Thy Name in the presence of Thy people. Grant, we beseech Thee, O Gracious Father, that she, through Thy help, may both faithfully live in this world according to Thy will and also may be partaker of everlasting glory in the life to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!*"

When all had arisen he told, in few and strong words, where and how he had found the girl, now sobbing with excitement in his arms.

"Now," he concluded, "we will talk no more of this matter to-night, and I will have no questions asked this child. She is tired and nervous. In nothing is she to blame. We have great cause for thankfulness for her safety. Mother! have you had supper while we were away?"

He never called her "Ma." Flea was the only one of the children who imitated him in this respect. Even she spoke less correctly than he, try though she did to talk as he and her books talked. The rest had caught much of their mother's slovenly provincial speech. Bea cultivated what she thought was a fine lady-like drawl, to which her lapses in grammar and pronunciation gave the effect of dirty finery. Mrs. Grigsby was fussy and in many things foolish, but she obeyed her husband's orders in not questioning the runaway, and, wiping her eyes more than was quite necessary, led the way meekly to the dining-room. It was an unusually silent meal, the father setting the example of saying little while he ate. When supper was over he kissed Flea, which he seldom did to any of the children, and bade her "Go right up to bed, and not to forget to say her prayers."

"And you, Beatrice, when you go up do not talk to her. She needs rest and sleep."

He was a sensible man, and his behavior on this occasion was what seemed wise and becoming according to his judgment. If he had intended to establish poor Flea in her dignity as an important personage and to stuff her head with absurd notions, he could not have done it more surely. When her bare feet trod the short crooked staircase leading to her bed-room, it was with the measured pace of one who has a position to fill and means to fill it. She was not the nobody who had "jumped into her clothes," to borrow Bea's words, that morning in the meanly furnished upper chamber and who had combed her thick mane of short, brown hair before the square looking-glass with the imitation mahogany frame, hung between the windows. She was almost surprised that the mirror to-night reflected the face she was used to seeing in it.

Bea followed her shortly, brimming over with curiosity and resolution to hear all there was to tell.

"Say!" she said, in a half-whisper, coming up to her sister, "how big was the moccasin? It must have felt mighty heavy on your feet. Seems if he must have woke you up. Chaney

says he breathed in your face and made you sort o' stupid, or else he charmed you to sleep, to begin with. She says snakes often do that and wait till they're ready befo' they bite you. What did Pa kill him with?"

Flea looked at her with owl-like seriousness, and laid her finger upon her lip.

"Don't be a fool!" returned the other, contemptuously. "Pa can't hear us."

Whereupon, the newly made heroine lifted her hand and pointed upward, rebukingly.

"GOD can hear you!" was what she meant.

"Bah!" sneered Bea. "You needn't preach to your betters. Keep your old story to yourself. I ain't a-going to put up with your airs. Mother ain't, neither. Any runaway nigger can go to sleep in the woods and wake up with a snake lyin' 'longside o' him. 'Tain't as if you had *done* anything!"

This was rough talk, but Flea was, in her own opinion, so high above her sister's level that she could afford to despise it. Long after Bea had fallen asleep the younger girl lay listening to the "drip! *drop!* drip!" of the rain overhead, her cheeks on fire, her brain in a whirl, and her eyelids feeling as if they were buttoned back and would not shut.

She was a heroine! The former life had

slipped off and away from her as her friend the moccasin had shed his skin last spring. She must recast her thoughts and her manners, make them over, through and through, in order to live up to her new character. She even felt that there had been something different in her way of saying her prayers that night, as if her Heavenly Father must be more interested in an industrious and intelligent pupil who was to be a comfort and pride to her teacher, and who had narrowly escaped a horrible death, than in the plain slip of a girl she was twelve hours ago. She hoped the rain would hold up by morning, so that she could go to church.

In imagination she saw how every head would turn toward her when she should walk up the aisle. How people would stare and nudge one another during the service, and crowd around her when it was over. Perhaps —and she thrilled all over with merely thinking of it—Mr. Slaughter, the rector, would return thanks publicly for her deliverance! It would be just like Major Duncombe to ask him to do it. A church prayer said in a white surplice, with all the congregation saying "Amen" at the end, was not too great an honor for a girl who had had an Adventure.

That was what the Major had said—"an Ad-

venture." She went carefully over every word of his speech, sucking honey from each.

"We are only too thankful to an overruling Providence that our little heroine's Adventure was not also a catastrophe, Mr. Grigsby."

He had rolled it out in a grand, solemn way, quite as he read prayers every morning and night at Greenslope.

Again, when he lifted her upon the horse before her father—"I congratulate you, sir, upon having a daughter who has shown such self-control under such trying circumstances. Most young ladies of her age would have screamed or gone into hysterics at sight of that ugly creature on the floor in there, and upon hearing that she had had it for a bed-fellow. This little maid has the right stuff in her."

Everything had conspired to turn the little maid's brains topsy-turvy. Her head felt actually light at her morning awakening from the sound sleep that finally overcame her. There was a queer strained aching all through her, and—I grieve to admit it—she had never been crosser in her life.

It was still raining. The ground was sodden; the trees drooped miserably under the weight of wet leaves; the sky was one sullen, obstinate cloud, heaviest and most obstinate

toward the west faced by her bed-room windows.

No church or Sunday-school to-day! No show of her famous self to an admiring congregation. Dreams and hopes came down with a cruel thump to the realities of every-day home life. True, she put on, of her own accord, stockings and shoes, and there were always clean clothes for Sunday, but they were week-day clothes, and there were fried middling and corn bread for breakfast, just as if nothing had happened. The coarse food stuck in her throat; the common crockery—white, with fluted green edges—the pewter spoons, the tin coffee-pot, the heavy grayish-blue mug out of which she drank her "hot-water-tea" (*i.e.*, milk-and-water sweetened) had not offended her taste yesterday, or ever before. Now they were disgusting and humiliating.

"You ain't eatin' nothin'," remarked the mother, as the girl sat back in her chair, after a vain attempt to behave as usual. "Do you feel sick?"

"No, ma'am. I'm just not hungry. I don't know why. I reckon I'll go up-stairs and lie down."

"Let her alone! She'll be all right after awhile!" said her father, as her mother began

to scold, and Flea got herself out of the room as quickly as possible.

She could never come all right in this house, she was sure. Nobody understood, or sympathized with her. She was stifled and cramped. The worst of it was that there was for her no hope of anything better. Her father was a good man, and more fond of her than of his other children, but he had no ambition for any higher life than this, and her mother cared even less. So far as the discouraged heroine could foresee, every day to come would be like this and all those that had gone by—all rag carpet and green-edged crockery, and sugar-raggy babies, and Bea's old frocks made over and let down, and fault-finding—

"Flea!" screamed her mother from the bottom of the stairs, "ain't you coming down to-day? Here's your sister with all the things to wash up and put away."

Flea was lying, face downward (why do all heroines take that attitude?) on the unmade feather-bed, dry-eyed and wretched, when the call came. In sinking and sickness of heart she obeyed the summons, the very click of her shoes on the stairs expressive of unwillingness. Nothing she had read or heard of heroine-ic behavior helped her to go through with the drudg-

ery of scraping greasy plates, rinsing, washing and wiping crockery and pewter.

"I don't see why mother don't use her silver spoons every day," she grumbled to Bea, wiping and laying down a pewter spoon disdainfully.

"She's goin' to leave 'em to me when she dies," returned that prudent young person. "I'm glad she doesn't wear 'em out, or maybe get one of 'em lost, before then."

There were only six teaspoons in all, and Mrs. Grigsby kept them in a locked drawer. It was all of a piece with the mean, skimpy, tiresome round of her daily life. There was no help for it—none!

The day dragged by more wearily and slowly than ever day had gone before. Her father could have told her, if she had confessed her misery to him, that much of it was the reaction after last night's excitement. As she did not speak of it, he paid little or no attention to her sober face and unwonted silence. She performed her share of dish-washing, table-setting and table-clearing, listlessly, but without complaint, and when not thus employed, spent most of the time up-stairs. Nobody asked what she did there; still less was anybody concerned to know what she felt there.

Mrs. Grigsby had her say as to Flea's moods during her husband's absence from the chamber, and then let the matter slip from her mind.

"Flea's in the dumps to-day. Hum—*hum!*" This to the baby she was churning to sleep upon her knee. "That's her, all over. Up in the garret one day, down in the cellar the next."

"'Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down!'" sang Bea to a camp-meeting tune. *She* never had the blues. "Just like her namesake!"

The play upon the unfortunate nickname was a poor joke when new, but, like some better educated and older people, Bea never knew when her jokes were clean worn out and only fit for the dust-heap.

Dee—which is, by interpretation, David—had had a stupid day, too. The Grigsby Sunday rules bore hard upon story books and toys, and an active boy of ten was soon at the end of his resources. His mother had scolded him a dozen times for making a noise and getting in her way, and boxed his ears twice, the first time with soapy hands, wet from the baby's bath. That was for tripping up Calley, as she passed him. The second offence was teasing the baby until he threw himself yelling on the floor and butted it with his forehead because

Dee trailed a bunch of bright leaves tied to a string from end to end of the room, always just out of reach of the active little creeper. It was not a brotherly trick, but what was a fellow to do cooped up all day in the house of a Sunday?

After the last buffet Dee took refuge in the barn and the society of Dick and the horses. His father would not have approved of it, but his father was not at home. Coming in at dusk, the boy stole upstairs on tip-toe and peeped into his sister's room. The sun was fighting bravely with the bank of clouds on the horizon and the world was bathed in lurid mist. By this flushed fogginess Dee could see Flea lying in a sort of crumpled heap on the floor by the window. She started up at the noise he made in entering.

"What do you want?" she demanded, crossly.

"You needn't get mad about it," returned her brother. "I'm just sick of Sunday, and I reckon you are, too. Monday's worth fifty of it, if you do have to go to school. Ma's cross as two sticks and Pa's gone to look after things up at 'the house,' and Bea's on her high horse, and the young ones are worse'n a pack of bees for noise 'n swarmin'."

He sat down sociably upon the floor by his sister.

"I say, Flea, what you s'pose you *were* sparred for?"

"Spared for? What are you talking about?"

"Dick says that Chaney says that ma says you were sparred for somethin' real big. Hadn't 'a' been for that the moccasin would 'a' bit you, sure, and you'd been dead before anybody could 'a' got to you for to draw the p'ison out. What you s'pose they meant? What you goin' to do?"

Flea sat upright, looking straight out of the window. As Dee stopped speaking she raised the sash and let in a wave of warm, sweet, damp air. The pink light streamed in with it, flooding the girl's figure and face. Her hair was touzled, and the dust of the bare boards had mixed with her tears to streak her cheeks. Yet the boy stared at her, open-mouthed and puzzled. Light that did not come through the window shone in her face; her eyes were two stars; her fingers were knotted tightly upon one another.

"You are sure that you are not fibbing, Dee? Did they really say that?"

"Certain sure. And Dick says it's true as Gawspil. He know'd a baby oncet they thought

was clean dead, and all on a suddint it come to, and sot up 'n' walked. Like a maracle, you know. And his mother, she said right straight off, 'He will be somethin' wonderful.' And so he was. He fit in the las' war, an' killed, oh, thousands of the British; but girls can't fight, you know. That's cause-why I arsked you what you s'posed you could 'a' been sparred for."

Flea put her arm about her brother's neck and pulled the rough head to her shoulder. She and apple-cheeked, slow-witted Dee always got on well together.

"I love you, Dee!" she said, in a gush of tenderness. "No matter how great a lady I get to be—and I'm going to be something very great some day—you and I will always be good friends. You won't tell anybody if I tell you a secret?"

The much-impressed Dee gave the desired promise.

"Then—I'm a *heroine*, Dee!" sinking her voice. "A sure-enough heroine. And wonderful, beautiful things always happen to heroines. Like Miranda, and Olivia, and Portia, and Cordelia, and Perdita, and Juliet, and Hermione, and Rosalind—and ever and ever so many more ladies I've read about. I'll tell you

about some of them to-morrow. They are not Sunday stories, you know."

Neither, for that matter, was that Sunday talk into which she now launched, holding the boy spell-bound while the sun went down clear, and the bright clouds grew pale, then dark. Into Dee's greedy ears she poured the tales of what she meant to do and to be in the wondrous To-come of her dreams—the prize scholar; the neighborhood prodigy; Miss Em'ly's friend and equal—courted, beloved, rich, and a leader in the neighborhood that now looked down upon the overseer's family. Of ways and means neither of the credulous creatures spoke or thought. The golden dream was possible and easy of fulfilment to the two clinging together in the low-ceiled room, another man's roof over their heads and nothing but their father's life between them and the poor-house. Such ignorance is bliss without alloy while it lasts.

The talk with her brother, the hopes rekindled by it, and his faith in her and in her future, made the outgoings of the unhappy day to rejoice. She laid her head upon her pillow that night in tolerable content with home and kindred. They had sung hymns together as was the Sunday night custom, and re-

cited, each, a psalm and three questions in the Church Catechism to their father, who had then granted them the treat of a long story of his early life in Glasgow.

No misgivings as to to-morrow held her eyes waking as she nestled down under the patch-work coverlet she and Bea had put together and helped their mother quilt last winter. The school-room would be her own territory. As the only girl in the school who knew Mr. Tayloe and had been particularly recommended to him by his patron (she had borrowed that word from an English story-book)—she would be foremost in his esteem. In "playing ladies" before sleep got fast hold of her, she saw herself introducing less fortunate scholars to his favorable notice.

"My sister, Beatrice, Mr. Tayloe," she would say. Perhaps he would answer—"I hope she is as intelligent and industrious as her sister."

Flea's was a generous nature, but she did feel that that would pay off Bea well for certain things she had said to her in days past. As for Dee, who was dull at his lessons, her heart warmed and yearned over him in the thought of the good she could do him through her influence with the teacher. Mr. Tayloe looked

as if he might be severe with a dull pupil. She would stand between Dee and trouble. He was such a loving little fellow, and her best crony, even if he did not care for books.

Bea was going to wear a white gown to school if the weather were warm enough. Flea's frock, a brown calico with round white spots on it, with an apron of the same, was new and strong and clean. As the prize scholar she could afford to be indifferent to dress. One of these days she would make people who now laughed at her plain clothes open their eyes, with her satins—and—laces—and—India cotton stockings—and oh, yes! the pink sash should be just the color of a peach blossom—and—have—fringed—

Flea was clean off to Slumberland where nobody expects to dream of sensible and probable happenings.

CHAPTER IV

THE Foggs lived on a funny little piece of land wedged in between two of the Greenslope farms. How the first Fogg got it nobody alive knew. The deed by which they held the three acres was dated a hundred and sixty years back. Major Duncombe's father and grandfather had tried to buy the family out, and had not succeeded. The Fogg ground made an ugly nick in the plantation and, being directly upon the public highway, was an eyesore to everybody. The house was a cabin of two rooms, with a stone chimney built on the outside, but the Foggs boasted that fifty-three children had been born and brought up in it. How they lived was a partial mystery to the neighborhood. They raised corn and potatoes and little else in the ground enclosed by a "worm-fence," built, it was more than suspected, of rails, stolen, a few at a time, from the Greenslope fences. An acre of woodland behind the house was supposed to furnish them with fuel, and there were

always pigs and chickens running wild, with a dozen or so children, in the road and fields.

They were "poor white folks" in a county where nearly everybody was respectable and well-to-do. No member of the family was ever convicted of an offence that took him into the courts. They might be suspected of stealing chickens, pigs, and wood, and even of robbing a smoke-house once in a while, but nothing was ever proved against them. When, one after another, the fifty-three children grew up into men and women, they drifted away into other counties, the women marrying husbands in their own station, the men finding some kind of employment up and down the river, or in Norfolk, Richmond, or Petersburg. Not one of them, so far as was known, had ever been in prison, and not one had ever grown rich or really respectable.

As the Grigsby children, neat and trim, lunch-bags and books in hand, passed the Fogg cabin on the Monday morning of the school opening, two women and four children were in and about the yard. Mrs. Fogg, the mistress of the house, stood on the porch, her married daughter, with two dirty babies holding to her skirt, leaned against a corner of the chimney; a barefoot boy was chopping sticks upon a log, a smaller

boy was trying to sharpen his knife upon a grindstone. All stopped in what they were doing to stare at the sisters and brother, and the elder matron hailed them in a coarse voice more like a man's than a woman's.

"Goin' t' school—ain't you?"

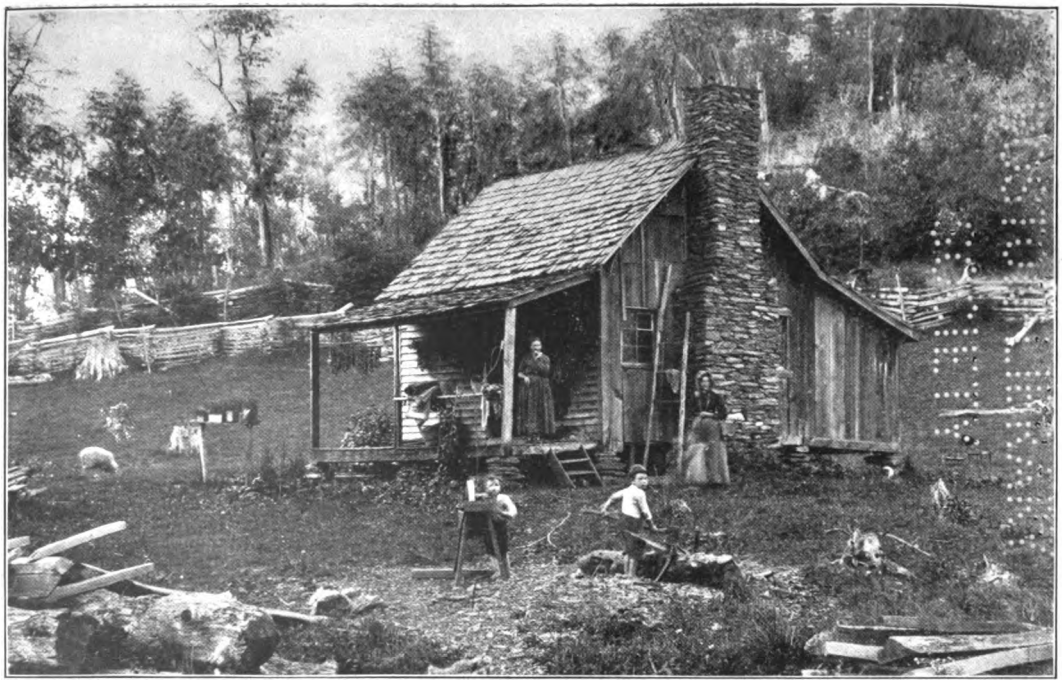
Dee nodded without halting; Bea walked straight onward, her chin level, her white sunbonnet hiding her face. To her horror and displeasure Flea stopped and replied politely over the tumble-down fence:

"Good-morning, Mrs. Fogg! I hope you are all well to-day?"

"Tolerable, thank God!" said the old woman, changing her tone into a snuffling whine. "Ain't you too soon fo' school? The teacher ain' gone by yet."

"We like to be in good time," rejoined Flea, affably. "Aren't your boys going?"

"No, bless you, honey. Major Duncombe won't let them go in on the county, an' pore folks ain't got no money to pay teachers with. Now, your pa is real well-off, I been hear', with wukkin' all these years on a great, big plantation, an' ken sen' all on you, ef he chooses. 'S fur my pore gran'chillen, they mus' grow up without so much as knowin' how to read an' write. Ah, well! Th' Al-



THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE STOOD ON THE PORCH.

mighty, He knows! The new teacher's real spry—ain' he?"

"Flea Grigsby!" called Bea, over her shoulder. "Come right along, or I'll tell Ma when I go home."

Flea noticed her as little as she noticed Mrs. Fogg's remark on the new teacher's spryness. She had an idea, and was in a hurry to air it.

"Major Duncombe!" she repeated. "Could he let the children in free if he liked?"

"Cert'nly, honey! He has the fus' word in all the county. Nobody dar' say his soul's his own 'less he lets 'um. 'Lord! how long? how long?'"

"I am *very* well acquainted with Major Duncombe," rushed on Flea, with an important air. "And you may be sure, Mrs. Fogg, that I'll speak to him about your grandchildren. Good-morning!"

She was out of breath when she overtook her sister. Bea had walked fast purposely to make the others run, loyal Dee having loitered behind with Flea.

"I should think you'd be 'shamed of yourself, stoppin' to talk with poor white folks 'long the road," commented the elder sister.

Flea smiled mysteriously.

"I had business with Mrs. Fogg."

"Business! Well, I never! The less you have to do with that kind, the better."

"Mrs. Fogg is not a bad woman, Bea," said Flea, seriously. "When you ask how she is, she always says, 'Pretty well, thank God!' just like Mrs. Elton in 'Anna Ross.' I think she is a very pious person, and it is not her fault that she is poor. I stopped in the porch once when it was raining, and she talked a great deal about the trouble she had had, and how much she prayed, and so on. If I could I'd be a benefactor to people like that."

"I think, sometimes, you ain't got the sense you were born with, Flea Grigsby. The idea o' you *benefacting* anything or anybody!"

Flea's smile was yet more mysterious. In her glee over her new scheme she squeezed Dee's arm.

"You wait and see! *We* know—don't we, Dee?"

"Yes, *sir-r-r!*" said Dee, stoutly.

The prospective benefactress was still swelling with her secret when they arrived at the school-house. The boys sat on one side of the room, the girls on the other, a narrow aisle separating them. Dee dropped into a seat near the door; the girls walked well forward and took places close to the aisle. Three minutes

afterward the teacher appeared in the doorway and Major Duncombe with him. Whispers and shuffling ceased instantly; all eyes were fixed upon the two gentlemen as they went up to the top of the room, turning there to face the school. It was all quite proper and dignified until the Major, having motioned to Mr. Tayloe to take the chair ready for him, hung himself, as it were, across the corner of the desk, as Flea had seen him do last Saturday.

"For all the world like a pair of saddle-bags," Bea told her mother afterward.

Sitting thus, he watched the assembling of the motley crowd with kindly interest. Now and then he smiled and bowed, and it was always a girl whom he noticed in this way. Flea flushed delightedly at seeing that his smile and salutation to her were especially friendly. His eyes said that he was glad she was here and no worse for her Adventure. His presence was to all the scholars a sort of guarantee that they would not fare badly in the hands of the strange instructor. Children are generally uneasy in entering the service of an untried teacher. In the old-field school of fifty or sixty years ago, this uneasiness was but too well-founded. There was not a boy there that October day who had not smarted under the rod wielded by a pre-

ceptor's arm, and more than one girlish palm had tingled at the whack of the glossy ruler used to lay out lines upon slate and copy-book. Many recollected, in after days, how sombre was the aspect of the new teacher by contrast with the Major's sunny face. One recalled that he had looked at her and frowned when she returned Major Duncombe's bow and smile.

At the time, the frown gave her no concern. Her patron had distinguished her from the common herd by special courtesy. It was a promise of the eminence that would be hers from this time onward. She was already set apart and above her schoolmates.

The Major made a little speech by way of opening the session of the school. It was like himself, informal and pleasant.

"Young ladies and boys"—he said, not rising from the desk, and even switching his boot lightly with his riding-whip while he talked—"I have gone security for your good behavior to the gentleman who takes charge of you for the year to come. I know you won't disappoint him or me. I have proved my faith in him as a gentleman and a scholar by putting my two boys under his care. I have told him to be strict with them. The teacher who does his duty is bound to be strict. A school is like

an army. Orders must be carried out and no questions asked, and no tales told out of school. That was the law in my school-days, and it is a good law. Learning is work, not play. So much of your future welfare depends upon the way you do your work in this school-house that I beg you, as your friend and well-wisher, to do your best every hour of every day of the session. From the very start you must believe that your teacher is your friend, and that he is doing *his* best. Take my word for that until you find it out for yourselves. I go his security, too. I know all about him. I knew his grandfather and his father. They were true Virginia gentlemen from crown to toe. And a Virginia gentleman of the right sort is the best specimen of a man ever made. Never forget that, boys. I know Mr. Tayloe's mother, also, young ladies."

In addressing them he arose to his feet, and his voice was gentler:—

"She is a lady such as a man takes his hat off to when he so much as thinks of her. For her sake, I know that her son will treat you kindly and respectfully. For my sake, I hope that you will prove yourselves, as young ladies always do, the most obedient and diligent students in the school. Upon my word—" abandoning the

attempt at formal gallantry and relapsing into his every-day manner — "when I look into these bright eyes and rosy faces, I envy Mr. Tayloe the privilege of leading you along the flowery paths of learning."

In saying it, his eye fell, intentionally or accidentally, upon Flea Grigsby, and under the genial ray she felt her cheeks grow hot and the muscles of her face twitch in the effort she made to look demure and unconscious.

"This is all I have to say to you, at present," continued the Major. "All I ought to say, I mean, for I could talk for hours, it is so delightful to see you, and to live over for the time my own school-days in this very place. And so, good-day, and God bless every one of you!"

In passing down the aisle he laid his hand lightly upon what her father called, "Flea's Shetland-pony mane," and sent a merry flash of his gray eyes into hers uplifted in enchanted surprise.

Mr. Tayloe rapped smartly upon his desk with the ruler, and flourished it at the beginning and the end of his short speech.

"Children! I am here to teach. You are here to be taught. I mean to do my duty. I shall make it my business to see that you do yours. I shall treat you, one and all, boys and

girls, exactly alike. I shall have no favorites and show no partiality to anybody. If you are lazy and disobedient and saucy, you will be punished without fear or favor. If you study well and behave well, you will not be punished.

"The school will be opened every morning by reading the Scriptures and with prayer. Open your Bibles at the first chapter of Genesis."

Every scholar had a Bible. Some had brought no other book with them. The question as to the propriety of reading the Holy Scriptures in schools did not come up until a quarter-century later. The rustling of leaves caused by the command subsided and the teacher read distinctly, in a metallic tone, the first verse:

"'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.'

"What is your name?" addressing, in precisely the same voice, a boy who sat at the extreme left of the front row of benches.

"Tom Carter, sir!" faltered the startled lad.

"Thomas Carter will read the second verse, the scholar next to him the third, and so on, right across the room to the end of the front bench where those girls are sitting. Then, the girl next to the wall on the second bench will

take her turn and so on, clear across the room back to the other wall. Go on, Thomas Carter."

He understood how to give orders; that was clear. It was as clear that he meant to have his orders obeyed.

Some of the scholars read badly; some tolerably well. With one exception none of them did themselves justice. They were diffident under the gaze of the pale-blue eyes, or flustered by the sound of their own voices in the dead stillness that had fallen upon the school-room. Flea Grigsby alone kept a steady head and a steady voice. She read uncommonly well for a girl of her age, and she knew it. The boy across the aisle from her had fallen over the word "firmament," and the teacher had helped him to pass it, by obliging him to spell the word twice, then to re-read the verse. Flea was the first girl who was called upon to read. She felt the importance of her position and the honor of being able to redeem the reputation of the school from the slur cast upon it by the mumbling and the stumbling of the boys. What must Mr. Tayloe think of them all?

In her zeal she spoke more loudly than she was conscious of doing, emphasized certain words in a marked way and did not forget to

count "one" silently at the comma, and "one, two, three" at the colon.

"And God made the *firmament*, and divided the waters which were *under* the firmament from the waters which were *above* the firmament: and it was *so*."

Bea's pretty lips were parting to begin the next verse when the teacher's gesture arrested her. An unpleasant smile drew up the corners of his mouth; his eyes were fixed upon Flea's face. To the amazement of the school, he proceeded to read aloud the verse she had just finished, mimicking her girlish pipe, and exaggerating into absurdity the emphasis she had meant to make effective.

Some of the boys snickered; a few girls giggled. The rest looked scared and puzzled.

"That is not reading. That is mouthing," Mr. Tayloe ended the imitation by saying. "The sooner you get rid of that sort of affectation, Felicia Grigsby, the better for yourself. It may do for your private Shakespeare studies. It will not do for the Bible and this school. You think it very fine; it is really ridiculous. Next girl! read the eighth verse."

The blow was brutal. It cut, as he had meant it should, down to the quick of the child's sensibilities. True, her self-conceit and

her mannerisms had drawn it upon her. When children are thus "taken down" by their superiors in age and position, we say, "It *hurts*, but it is good for them. But for such rubs they would be prigs; but for such pricks to vanity, they would grow up to be cads. We all had to go through the same mill. In after years we are the wiser for it."

Perhaps so. But as one upon whom the aforesaid mill worked the will of those who ran it, years and years ago, I plead for the tender little hearts that are torn; the feelings that are bruised and hardened by the grinding stones. Correction is needful for the child, he is told, and therefore wholesome. It is quite possible to make discipline what David says the smiting at the hand of the righteous was to him—an excellent oil. Sarcasm is oil of vitriol, that eats deep and leaves a scar. A sneer is always an insult. When the object of the sneer is a defenceless child, it is cowardly barbarity.

Had Felicia Grigsby dropped from the bench in a dead swoon, it would have been a merciful relief from what she endured, as, with eyes bent upon the page which she could not see for the hot haze that swam between her and it, she sat perfectly still and let teacher and pupils

"THAT IS NOT READING."

think what they might of her. A slap in the face would not have astounded her more. It would have shocked her much less. She heard nothing for five minutes but the confused ringing in her ears of various voices, uttering sounds that had no meaning for her. Now and then, the metallic tone of the teacher cut across the confusion like the hiss of a lash.

At last, she was dully awake to the fact that the boys on the front bench were upon their second round. Her turn would be upon her again before she could stop breathing fast, or swallow the burning ball in her throat. She could not speak; she would not try. In her desperation she would have run away—out of the school-house into the deep, dark woods where nobody could find her, but her feet were like cold lumps of lead, and seemed to be glued to the floor. Nearer and nearer came the husky, reedy voices of the big boys. There were five on the front bench. The smallest of the five sat next to the aisle. His name was Senalius Snead. They called him "Snail" for short. He had a high, squeaking voice, like a pig's squeal. She had not turned a leaf. She could not have read a line if she had, but her ears, grown all at once acute, lost not one of the stammered words. Senalius Snead read

horribly. She had pitied him when he read awhile ago. She could wish now that he would go on forever.

"And, the, evening, and, the, morning, were, the——"

"Spell it!" ordered the teacher, as the boy brought up short.

Without looking at him, Flea knew that he used a stubby forefinger with a dirty nail as a "pointer."

"S-i-x-t-h!" he squeaked. "*Sixtieth* day!"

"It would have been the sixtieth if you had had a hand in the job," said the master, smiling his unpleasant smile. "As it is, 's, i, x, t, h,' spells 'sixth.' Let us pray! The scholars will kneel."

The chapter was ended, then! Flea grew sick all over. Her head felt queer and the sweat started out in icy drops upon her forehead and upper lip. She never knew how she got upon her knees, but she was there, her face in her hands, her elbows upon the bench. Mr. Tayloe stood up and read a short prayer from a book. It asked, among other things, that "our hands may be kept from picking and stealing." There was nothing about breaking the hearts and casting down the dreams of others, or trampling under foot the small,

sweet courtesies that make working-day-lives tolerable. If there had been, Mr. James Tayloe would have read it all in the one tone—a tone as void of feeling and sympathy as the "rat-a-tat-tat" of a spoon upon a dish-pan.

The morning was given up to examination and arrangement of the scholars into classes. There was good stuff in our heroine, for, by the time she was called forward with six other girls about the same age and size with herself, to show what she knew, she had plucked up spirit to answer clearly every question put to her. Except that her eyes were dull, and the lip lines sagged somewhat, she looked like her usual self. The questions that fell to her were many, and the questioner pressed them closely, taking nothing for granted. He even laid traps for her by varying the forms of the queries.

"You said that General Washington fought the battle of the Cowpens, I believe?" he said once.

"No, sir, *Colonel* Washington."

And again, "You don't pretend to tell me that Cornwallis did not give his sword to Washington after the battle of Trenton?"

"No, sir. That was at Yorktown."

Or—"Who beat at the battle of Monmouth?"

"Neither side, sir."

"What do you mean?" testily.

"It was a drawn battle."

By and by—"The sun is nearer to the earth than the moon, or it would not be so much hotter. That is so—isn't it?"

Flea's dull eyes did not light up, but a slight smile contracted her mouth.

"The sun is ninety-five millions of miles from the earth. The moon is twenty-four thousand."

It was small game for a grown man, but the exchange of question and reply became, presently, a sort of wordy duel. The girl was on her mettle—Scotch mettle—and showed no sign of confusion when sure of her ground. Hers was an excellent mind, retentive as well as quick. What she had learned she kept, and understood how to use it.

Her father would have been proud of his lassie's proficiency in geography, history, and grammar, of her reading, her spelling, and her writing, had he been there. His heart would have been sore for her when the inquisitor, at length, probed her weak spot. She disliked arithmetic, and was hardly farther advanced in it than the little girls beside her who had heard, with hanging jaws and round eyes, what was to them a miraculous show of learning.

Mr. James Tayloe's faint blue eyes shone and twinkled at the first blunder. At the fifth he laughed out, the short, harsh snarl his pupils were to learn to dread.

"Aha!" He actually snapped his fingers with glee. "You *don't* know everything then, if you *are* to be a 'comfort and a pride' to your teacher! his one 'industrious and intelligent pupil!' I began to be afraid I should have to give you my chair and take a seat upon your bench—you seemed so certain that you had nothing more to learn. When I meet with a boy—and especially with a girl—who thinks she can tell me more than I ever thought of learning, I like to take her down a peg or two!"

He need not have said it. The whole school, looking on, partly in alarm, partly, I am sorry to say, in amusement that was the livelier for a dash of envy, understood already that for some reason he would enjoy lowering the girl in her own eyes and in the sight of others.

He was a man of strong prejudices and overbearing temper. He had been brought up as a rich man's son, and his father had died poor just as his son left the University. In order to get the means for studying law, he must teach school for a couple of years, and Major

Duncombe, who knew his story, offered him the neighborhood school, doubling the salary out of his own pocket, without letting this be known to the young teacher. Mr. Tayloe had naturally supposed that the school would be made up of the children of wealthy planters and of professional men, and it was a blow to his pride to discover that overseers and country storekeepers had the right to set their boys and girls upon the same benches with those born and bred in his own rank. His much learning had not enlarged a narrow nature; the "blue blood" poured into his veins by generations of distinguished ancestors had not refined his sensibilities or taught him to control his irritability. He felt dangerous to-day, and it was safe to be savage here.

He had taken a positive dislike to our poor Flea on Saturday, upon what seemed to him good grounds. Her forced composure under the severe examination to which he had subjected her was, in his opinion, sheer effrontery. She thought too much of herself and should be taught her proper place. If she had trembled and cried, as several of the other girls had, he would have let her off more easily. She was as vain as a peacock and as stubborn as a mule, in his opinion. Such behavior was rank

rebellion and he meant to put it down with a strong hand.

I am thus frank in the exposure of the reasons for a persecution my readers may think improbable and unnatural, because this specimen of an Old-Field school tyrant is not a fancy sketch. I shall, in this story, set down nothing concerning him that did not actually happen in that misty Long Time Ago.

CHAPTER V

EVERY hour of that black Monday cast Flea into deeper darkness. Because she was found wanting in arithmetic, she was put, in all her classes, with girls whose ignorance she despised For two years she had studied the same lessons with Bea and recited them as well. Yet Bea smiled sweetly down upon her from the head of the "big girls'" bench, and Flea swelled with angry mortification between Lucy Wilson, who could not read to herself without whispering the words, and Emma Jones, whose recitation of——

"Vermont is a small, *ro*-mantick and pictures*quee* State," was one of last session's jokes.

At "playtime" Mr. Tayloe went to Greenslope, less than half a mile distant, for a comfortable luncheon. As soon as he was out of sight every tongue was loosened. The boys whooped and raced to and fro; the girls knotted together in groups under the trees and upon the steps to eat their "snacks" and discuss the incidents of the morning.

Flea slipped away unperceived, luncheon bag in hand, to the welcome cover of the woods. She thought she was glad that nobody stopped or stayed her. Really, the indifference of her mates to what she had endured and what she now suffered, pierced her with a new sorrow.

"Nobody cares! nobody cares!" she cried aloud, plunging into the forest until the voices of the shouting boys could not be heard. She was alone at last. Casting herself down in the friendly shade, she let all the waves of wounded feeling, the billows of wounded pride, go over her head.

Up to this morning she had been a happy child, making much of her few and simple pleasures. She liked everybody she knew in her small world and loved nearly everybody. She had never been guilty of a wilful unkindness; hatred and revenge were unknown passions. The unpleasant smile that curved the schoolmaster's lips so far upward as partly to close his eyes, would have straightened into a laugh of genuine amusement had he watched from behind the tree-boles the look that settled upon the face blotched with weeping when, by and by, the girl sat up, her knees drawn up to her chin, her arms gripping her legs. She had cried

her eyes dry. She believed that she could never cry again. Certainly not in that man's presence. No! not if he were to beat her to death.

"If he ever strikes me I will *kill* him!" she muttered, her lips curling back from the locked teeth. "It would be as right as father's killing that snake. I hope I shall have a chance to pay him back some day. I am in his power, now, but a time may come! a time may come!"

She was genuinely miserable, yet she could not help being melodramatic. She was still living in her story, but the complexion of the story was changed. Yesterday, she would not have harmed the meanest thing that lived. This morning to make and see others happy was the purest joy she knew. Her heart seemed, until this dreadful day, to have been a placid pool, clear because it had never been stirred up from the bottom. This man — the first creature she had ever hated — had brought to the top such mire and dirt as she had never dreamed were there.

By and by she ate her luncheon. She was only a child, and with childhood the sharpest edge of the sharpest grief is soon dulled. When her hunger was somewhat appeased she became critical of the remnants of her snack.

"Cold batter-bread!" turning it over with the tips of her fingers. "I wonder who, mother thinks, cares for *cold* batter-bread!"

Batter-bread is a mixture of Indian meal, milk and eggs, beaten light and baked in a mould. When hot and fresh, it is puffy and delicious. In cooling, it becomes heavy and sticky. Flea's misery was settling into crossness, very much after the fashion of the bread. She took one bite out of the solid chunk and tossed the rest as far as she could send it over the bushes. It was aimed at the creek that flowed a dozen yards away, but fell short and landed in the sand. Flea could see it lying there while she crunched a crisp ginger-cake with teeth that snapped pettishly upon it.

"I'll tell mother not to put cold batter-bread into my snack to-morrow," she resolved.

At the thought, a home-picture arose in her mind. Of her mother, with tired eyes and wrinkled forehead, the baby tugging at her skirts and whining to be taken up, while the busy housewife stood at the dining-room table, cutting ham and buttering bread and selecting the nicest ginger-cakes for her daughters' midday meal. She had forgotten nothing, not even the clean napkin, although Calley was teasing her on one side and the baby on the

other, and Dee was asking everybody where he could have put his slate, and Chaney was waiting, a wooden bread-tray on her hip, for "Mistis to give out dinner." Flea concluded that she had a good mother. If she did scold, sometimes, she had reason enough for it, and, Flea, at least, whatever might be said of the other children, richly deserved all the fault-finding she got at home. Her mother had said to herself when she cut and buttered that slice of batter-bread:

"How my hungry little girl will enjoy this at play-time!"

And the ungrateful little wretch had thrown it away.

The Flea Grigsby who, ten minutes ago, was planning revenge and even murder, got up meekly, crept under the hazel and sweet-gum bushes, picked up the despised chunk, carried it back to her seat at the foot of a hickory-tree and proceeded to eat it. Every mouthful went against palate and stomach. The butter had soaked into it, and left it clammy. The sand stuck to it, and Flea could not brush it quite clean. The gritty morsels set her teeth on edge and reminded her of stories she had read of penances done for sins committed; hair-cloth shirts, and peas in one's shoes, and floggings

upon the naked shoulders, and all that. The stories helped her to persevere until the last crumb was swallowed. The task was further lightened by meditation upon her mother's many sterling virtues. For instance, how she took especial pains to give the children who went to school something to eat that was a little better than the children left at home would have. She said "studying was hungry work."

In reality Mrs. Grigsby had said "stedyin' is mighty hongry work." Flea would not think of that or other peculiarities that had sometimes made her ashamed of her mother. Her mother was not to blame that her parents had not sent her to school for as many years as she meant to send her children.

At this point of her musings something bitter and burning arose in the girl's softened heart.

"Poor mother!" she muttered. "Wouldn't she be mad if she knew what has happened to-day? As for father, he'd be ready to mash him like he did the moccasin."

The young reader of to-day may think it strange that she never thought of carrying home the tale of her troubles, and that nobody else was likely to do it. The rule quoted as "a good law" by Major Duncombe, never to tell tales out of school, was one of the first lessons

learned by every boy and girl of that time. Traditions of awful floggings administered by former teachers for violations of the rule were familiar to all. A large majority of parents were in league with the schoolmasters in this matter. Many fathers not only refused to listen to their children's complaints, but punished them for bringing them. Boys actually carried for weeks the marks of the whip and took pains to hide them from their parents lest they might be obliged to tell how they got them. A tell-tale was despised everywhere. To tell tales out of school branded boy or girl as for a disgraceful crime.

If Flea had battles to fight, she must fight them single-handed. The authority of the old-field schoolmaster was what she had learned in Olney's Geography to call, "absolute despotism."

"He's worse than Turkey and China," she said, drawing the strings of her snack-bag viciously tight. "He's meaner and crueller than a satrap—or—a *Mameluke!*"

The sound of voices and laughter broke in upon her gloomy reverie. Peeping between the overhanging boughs she saw what made her crouch lower in her covert.

The creek was wide, and at this season shal-

low at this point. When swollen by winter and spring rains, it was so deep and swift that a bridge had been built over it high above the present level. Coming from the direction of Greenslope two women and a man had just reached the bridge. They were Miss Emily and Miss Eliza Duncombe, and Mr. Tayloe. He was on his way back to school and the young ladies had walked part of the way with him. The party stopped on the bridge and leaned over the railing.

"If Miss Emily had seen him this morning, she wouldn't let him stand so close to her," reflected Flea. "She'd sooner push him into the water."

Miss Emily had no present intention of doing anything of the sort. She seemed upon the best possible terms with her brothers' teacher. He had a gun upon his shoulder. The woods were full of game, and he might knock over a bird or "an old hare" in his walks back and forth to the school-house. In the noon stillness, Flea could hear what Miss Emily's high-pitched voice was saying.

"I tell you I *can* shoot, beautifully. Just let me try."

And in answer to something he said——

"I *dare* you to hit that stump in the water

over yonder. The stump with the *red* leaves on it."

Mr. Tayloe raised the gun and fired. The leaves flew in every direction and the shot pattered in the water.

Miss Emily clapped her hands and screamed with delight; there was a confused chatter for a moment, all three talking together while Mr. Tayloe reloaded the gun and handed it to the young lady.

"She ain't aiming it right," thought Flea, regretfully, as Miss Emily raised the short fowling-piece awkwardly but boldly to her shoulder, and laid her cheek down upon the stock. There was a report, and a rain of bird-shot fell, not into the water this time, but upon the clump of bushy shrubs in which Flea was hiding, and she felt a sharp cut across her cheek. With a cry she could not quite stifle, she rushed away into the woods, too much frightened to do anything but fly from the chance of a second shot.

She did not hear the shout of laughter from the bridge.

"You peppered a pig that time, Miss Emily," said the teacher to the unskilful sportswoman. "You did not come within fifty feet of the stump. It's lucky the pig was so far off. I heard

him squeal as he scampered into the woods. So, you did hit something after all. That's a good one!"

He went off into another fit of laughter.

The blood was oozing from the cut when Flea stopped running and put up her hand to feel how much she was hurt. It was a mere scratch, for the shot was light and almost spent by the time it reached her. Her fright over, her spirits arose with a bound. A happy thought had entered her ever-active brain.

Major Duncombe had no patience with carelessness in the use of firearms. She had seen him angry but once in her life, and that was when one of his boys pointed an empty gun at his brother. The father had laid his riding-whip smartly about the boy's shoulders and forbidden him to touch a gun again for a month.

"I would cowhide any man who aimed even a broomstick at me," he said. "'Gun' and 'fun' should never go together, except in a rhyme."

Miss Emily would be scolded by her father and made fun of by everybody else, and feel dreadfully besides if anybody ever found out what she had done. Flea would lock up the secret in the recesses of her own heart, as any

other heroine would, for the sake of the beloved object. She hoped the scratch would leave a scar—just a tiny thread of a scar—that would not disfigure her and would always be a token of how much she loved her dear, dear Miss Emily.

"It would be a badge of merit—an honorable scar!" she said aloud. "I am *glad* it happened!"

A quarter-mile from the school-house the hill on which it stood fell away abruptly in a bank out of which a clear little spring ran through a pipe into a trough below. There Flea paused to wash her face and hands and to rinse the handkerchief she had used to stanch the blood. She even took pains to make herself look more tidy than usual, wetting her "Shetland pony" forelock and combing it back with the round comb which she wore for the first time that day. Then she smoothed her apron, and, swinging her luncheon-bag around and around as she went, she tripped blithely up the slope into the clearing that made the play-ground. At the same instant the figure of the teacher came into view from the opposite quarter and there was a rush and a scuffle among boys and girls to get into the school-room before he arrived.

Thus it happened that nobody noticed the raw scratch crossing Flea's left cheek, about an inch below the eye, until the dictionary class was called up to recite. Much attention was paid in the old-field school to spelling and definition, the text-book being Walker's Dictionary. Two columns of words and definitions under the head of A were assigned to the class of five girls and six boys, who had been busy studying the lesson ever since the beginning of the afternoon session. For no reason, except that it pleased him to put down in every way the girl to whom he had taken a dislike, Mr. Tayloe placed Flea Grigsby at the foot of the row ranged in front of his chair. The scholars stood while reciting, their hands close to their sides, their chins level and shoulders back. When a word was misspelled or a wrong definition given, it was passed down the line until somebody supplied the proper spelling and meaning, and went above those who had failed.

Flea mounted steadily and rapidly in this exercise, spelling being one of her strong points. She was the fourth from the head of the class when the word "adolescence" was given out. The first one who tried it put in two *d*'s, the second left out the first *c*, the third spelled the word right, but had forgotten the meaning.

Flea instinctively cast her eyes down and tried with all her generous might not to look elated as the trial, in which she knew she would succeed, drew nearer and nearer.

"Felicia Grigsby," said the teacher, "ado— Instead of staring that ink-spot out of countenance, suppose you have the politeness to look at me when I speak to you?" He broke off to stare at her. "What have you been doing to your face?"

Flea put her hand up to her wounded cheek and felt that it was wet. The water had checked the bleeding for awhile, but now, specks of blood, like tiny beads, were starting out along the line of the cut. Her blush at the discovery looked to the master like the confusion of guilt.

"Can't you speak?" he said, roughly. "You are usually over-ready with your tongue. With whom have you been fighting *now?*"

A titter from the school behind her made Flea color yet more deeply.

"With nobody," she answered in a low tone. "My face got scratched in the woods."

"Got scratched! That does pretty well for the crack scholar of the county who is going to make us all proud of her some day. Why don't you say what scratched you? It seems

that it requires more education than even you have to answer a plain question properly."

Flea was mute. Not with alarm, although she would not have been surprised had he hurled the dictionary at her head. She had seen that done to a girl by a former teacher. The book had knocked the girl down. In falling, she had cut her head against the corner of a bench and lain quite still for a minute before she could get up. The place on her head had bled profusely. The girl had on a blue dress, and the red blood was purple as it ran over the blue. Flea recollected it all in a flash, yet without being afraid. Her eyes, fixed upon the teacher, were bright; her lips were compressed. No torture should force from her what might grieve and annoy Miss Emily. Stories from *Fox's Book of Martyrs* and *Tales of the Covenanters*, and a Sunday-school book, *The Lives of the Saints*, which she read last summer, thronged her mind. It was grand to be a heroine to save one she loved. It was sublime to be a martyr. Who was it who had written of somebody who "played the man in the fire?"

Mr. Tayloe's eyes faded almost white, the glow of metal seven times heated, that gave him an ominous look. The scholars ceased tittering and held their breaths. He took out

his watch. Flea noticed that it was gold and very handsome, and was fastened to a heavy gold chain of curious workmanship, like the scales of a fish. There were initials on the back of the watch. She wondered if it had been his father's and was left to him as the oldest son.

"I will give you exactly three minutes, Felicia Grigsby, to say — 'Mr. Tayloe, a thorn scratched my face as I came through the woods.' Obstinacy is what I will not stand."

In the death-like hush of the room, the ticking of the watch in his hand was painfully audible to the scholars on the back benches. Each tick seemed to go into one of Flea's ears and out at the other, trailing a red-hot wire with it. She could not stop counting them, try though she might. There was no thought of yielding in her mind, but she was getting faint with suspenseful dread. Never, until now, had she openly defied lawful authority. What was going to happen?

"Three!" said the teacher, returning the watch to his pocket. "Are you ready to do as you are told?"

Flea swept her dry lips with her tongue, and swallowed hard.

"I can't say what you want me to say. It wouldn't be true."

"Aha! what *is* true, then?"

Again she was dumb.

"Go to your seat, and do not touch a book, or move, until I give you leave, if you have to sit there until to-morrow morning."

When the school was dismissed an hour later, the rest of the scholars filed out of the room, staring hard at Flea as they passed.

Mr. Tayloe had letters to write, and fell at once to work upon them. Not a sound was heard for the next half-hour except the scratching of his pen and the rustling of the dried aspen-leaves blown by the wind into the open door and along the aisle. Flea watched them in a miserable, mechanical way. An odd stupor was stealing over her. Many a heroine of tragedy does not suffer as much and as keenly through a whole volume of fiction as this humbly born country child had suffered since she left her bed that morning. Her nerves were well-nigh worn to threads, and although the stout heart stood firm, the waiting for an unknown punishment was horrible, and used up what strength positive disgrace had left to her.

Mr. Tayloe wrote on briskly. If Flea had

read the letter over his shoulder, she would have seen that it began—"My dear Mother," and was full of merry, affectionate sayings.

Presently, he looked up suddenly toward the door, smiled, hustled his papers into his desk, caught up his hat and walked quickly down the aisle. In going out, he slammed the door behind him.

She was, then, to be left there all night!

CHAPTER VI

"Do not move until I give you leave, if you have to sit there until to-morrow morning."

Flea recalled the exact words, and said them over as her death-sentence. For she would be dead when they opened the school-house to-morrow morning. Even her father would not interfere when he heard that she was kept in. He always upheld the teacher's authority, and this teacher was put into his place and backed by Major Duncombe. Her father would not dare to come for her to-night.

She slid from the bench to the floor, resting her aching head within her arms upon the seat. The roaring and singing in her head hindered her from hearing the sound of the door as it opened and shut softly. The rustling of a skirt and fall of feet upon the floor were not louder than the play of the dead leaves had been. She did start and spring to her feet as a hand was laid on her head. She found herself face to face with Miss Em'ly.

"Why, my *dear* little scholar!" cooed the visitor. "What *is* all this about? I *can't* believe you mean to be naughty."

She pulled Flea to a seat beside her and kept hold of her hand. She had never looked prettier than now. Her blue riding-habit and cap became her fair skin and bright curls; her cheeks were like roses, her eyes were kind. As she drew the girl to the bench she gave her a little squeeze that opened the sluiceway of the tears Flea had believed would never flow again.

"Tut! tut!" coaxed Miss Em'ly. "This will *never* do. Eliza and Robert and I came to get Mr. Taylor to go riding with us. We've got his horse out yonder. He says he *can't* go because you must stay in until you say something he told you to say. Now, dearie, you *won't* spoil my ride, will you?"

Flea could not speak, but she shook her head vehemently.

"That's what I *said!* and I ran *right* off here to get you to say whatever it is to me—don't you *see?* Then, I'll *make* him let you off. What is it? Say it, *quick!*"

Flea's wet eyes looked straight into her friend's.

"He wants me to say: 'A thorn scratched

my face as I came through the woods.' It isn't true, Miss Em'ly."

"How *did* you get hurt, then? Tell me that."

The child took a sudden resolution.

"You'll never, never tell, Miss Em'ly? Upon your word of honor?"

"Never, once! Never, twice! Never, *three* times!" crossing her heart playfully.

"And you won't feel bad about it?"

"You little *goose!* Why *should* I feel bad about what *you* have done?"

When she had heard the short story, artlessly told, the young lady's tone and countenance altered. Tears gathered in the blue eyes and rolled down upon Flea's upturned face as the listener kissed her once and again upon the scratched cheek.

"You dear, brave, *splendid* child! To think you have done all this for *me!* I'll never forget it to my dying day."

"I would have died before I would have told on you, Miss Em'ly!" cried the excited girl, her eyes shining with the enthusiasm of self-sacrifice.

Miss Em'ly's serious mood had passed already. She called Flea "a little goose" again, and bade her "get her books and things and run along home."

"I'll settle everything with Mr. Tayloe. Kiss me 'Good-by' and be off.

"It's all right!" she called gaily from the school-house steps. "May she go? She's said it."

"If you go security for her," answered Mr. Tayloe, coming toward them, and Flea was off like an arrow out of a bow. He should not see that she had been crying.

The teacher was not altogether satisfied.

"You really made her repeat what I said she must before she could go?" he said, in settling Miss Emily in her saddle.

She pouted prettily.

"I *really* made her say—'A, thorn, scratched, my, face, as, I, came, through, the, woods,' dropping the words in mock solemnity. Now let us talk of pleasanter things than school-worries."

Not one of the horseback party gave another thought to the overseer's daughter, racing through woods and over ploughed fields in an air-line for home, her heart as light as a bird, and as full of music.

"I'll never forget it to my dying day," was to her a solemn pledge of eternal friendship. To have won it was worth all she had borne that day. As she ran, she sang and smiled like

"YOU DEAR, BRAVE, SPLENDID CHILD!"

the owner of a blissful secret. In the fulness of her joy she even forgot to hate Mr. Tayloe.

Her short cut took her through a matted wilderness of shrubs and weeds past a deserted cabin, set back from the main road. A negro, driven crazy by drink, had murdered his wife and child there years ago, and the hut had never been occupied since. The negroes believed it to be haunted. Not a colored man, woman, or child in the region would have ventured within a hundred yards of it after nightfall. The deserted hovel had a weird charm for Flea, and, finding herself a little tired after her run, she sat down upon the stone door-step to enjoy the sunset and to go on with a "poem" inspired last week by the haunted house. Four lines were already composed, written and hidden away in the hair trunk, where she kept her clothes at home. A nameless diffidence kept her from speaking of the fragments of stories and rhyme entombed under flannel petticoats and home-knit stockings. She said the four lines aloud while she rested. Unpruned trees grew over the grass-grown path leading to the closed door. Sumac bushes, vivid with scarlet leaves and maroon velvet cones, had sprung up close to the walls; in what was once a garden wild sunflowers bloomed rankly.

The girl's poetic soul felt the charm of a melancholy she could not define; she longed to clothe with language the feelings excited by mellow light, rich colors and silence that yet spoke to her. She recited her rhymes in a low, deep voice:

> "It stands beside the weedy way;
> Shingles are mossy, walls are gray;
> Gnarled apple-branches guard the door,
> Wild vines have bound it o'er and o'er."

Then and there two more lines came to her with a rush that sent the blood throbbing to her cheeks:

> " The sumac whispers with its tongues of flame,
> ' Here once was done a deed without a name.' "

She leaned against the door, weak and trembling. It was as if virtue had gone out of her. She had *breathed* poetry! When grown-up people have such flushes and thrills we call them "poetic fire" and "the divine afflatus." The halting lines were not poetry, but the child believed that they were. That did quite as well—for her.

While she sat and exulted, the sound of a doleful whistle arose on the evening air. Shaking off the spell that bound her, she tore her

way through a web of vines, sunflowers, and purple brush, jumped over the broken palings and ran down the steep field to the road. Dee sat upon a stone in a corner of the fence, whistling "Balerma." His hat was off and he looked tired and out of spirits.

"Why, Dee!" cried his sister, "I thought you were at home hours ago."

"I warn't a-goin' without you, ef I stayed here till plump night. An', Flea!" as she kissed his freckled face, "I tole Bea she might's well let 'em think at home 'twas me that was kep' in. 'Twouldn't be no rarity for me to be kep' in, you see. One or two times more wouldn't make no difference."

"Wouldn't that be acting a lie, Dee?"

She could not scold him, but conscience urged her not to let the matter pass without notice.

"And I couldn't let you be scolded instead of me. Perhaps father and mother may not ask any questions. Maybe my luck has turned."

Their hopes were not disappointed. Mrs. Grigsby was busy in the kitchen helping Chaney to make soap, and had not seen Bea return without the other children. Mr. Grigsby did not get in from the plantation until supper was on the table, and was too weary to ask

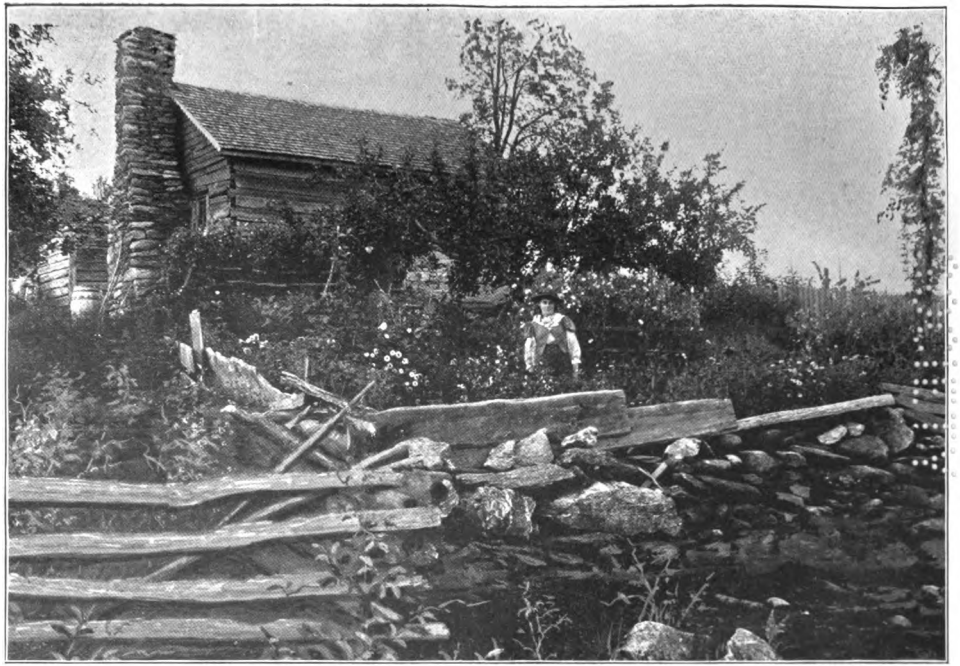
questions. Flea's secret was safe for the time.

"To-morrow will be another day," she said to Bea who "reckoned," as they were undressing that night, that Flea "had made a bad start with the new teacher." "I'm going to do my best, and, as Chaney is always saying—'Angels can't do no more.'"

People did not talk of "pluck" and "grit" and "sand" then. But our heroine had an abundance of what the slang words imply.

The school settled down to the business of the session in a surprisingly short time. With all his faults, Mr. Tayloe had the knack of imparting knowledge. He was strict to severity, never letting an imperfect lesson or a breach of discipline pass unpunished, and his pupils quickly learned that they must work and obey rules or get into serious trouble. Flea studied as she had never studied before, partly from sheer love of learning, partly because she had determined to prove her fitness to enter the higher classes in the face of the teacher's unwillingness to promote her. Courage and spirits arose with every new obstacle.

On the last day of the month the severest test of will and courage was laid upon her. At the close of the afternoon arithmetic lesson



SHE TORE HER WAY THROUGH A WEB OF VINES.

Mr. Tayloe asked for her slate, worked at it for awhile, and returned it to her. The curve of his smile was like a horseshoe as he saw her eyes dilate with alarm at what she read there:

1844) 3688737615752315O4(

He had written the same upon Annie Douthat's slate and also upon Fanny Tabb's.

"If you three girls can do it by to-morrow morning, you can go into the next higher class. If not, you stay where you are. And look here, all of you! nobody must help you. If I find that you have been helped to so much as a single figure, you will be publicly disgraced."

On the same afternoon the first monthly reports were given out. It was a new measure to all the scholars, and when they learned that the papers were to be taken home, signed by the parents and brought back next day, the most careless were impressed with the sense of the dignity of the transaction. The roll was called, each boy and girl in turn marched up to the desk, received a folded paper, and marched out of the school-house. Flea Grigsby got with hers a glance that went to her heart like the stab of ice-cold steel. It was unexpected, for her recitations had been perfect throughout the month,

and she had striven hard to carry herself modestly and respectfully toward the despot of the little domain. Warned by the peculiar gleam of the light-blue eyes, she tucked the report between the leaves of her geography instead of opening it as everyone else did, on the way to the door, or as soon as he or she gained the outer air. Bea had walked on with another girl, but Dee was waiting for Flea at the bottom of the steps. She wished that he had not hung back to go with her. Even his honest, affectionate gaze would add to the humiliation which she felt was in store for her when that fatal bit of paper should be opened. She longed, yet dreaded, to know exactly what form the new shame would take. No one seemed to think of asking her what was in her report. The other scholars were too busy discussing their own, and rejoicing or lamenting over the contents. Dee was naturally incurious. He showed his report. It said, "*Lessons indifferent. Conduct good.*"

"It mought 'a' been worse," observed Dee, philosophically. "I don' see what good the *doggoned* things do, anyhow."

Flea changed the subject, chatting of anything and everything except the report she fancied she could hear rustling between the

leaves of Olney's Geography, her nerves more tense every minute. By the time they reached the haunted house (they had taken the short cut across the field) she could bear the suspense no longer.

She sat down upon the flat stone that did duty for a door-step, took off her hat and stretched her arms out, yawningly.

"Don't wait for me, Dee. It is so nice and quiet here that I think I'll begin to work at that horrid sum. I can think better than at home with the children around. Tell mother I'll be in before supper-time."

The little fellow obeyed dutifully. He was growing daily more fond of the sister who helped him with his lessons, and never scolded him for being slow, and told him secrets of what they would do together when she became famous. Her conscience smote her slightly as he trudged off, his hands in his pockets, his bag of books slung over his shoulder by a twine string and bumping his calves as he walked. He knew but one tune and that was "Balerma." He began to whistle it as soon as he turned his back. He would whistle it all the way home. He called it, "O-happy-is-the-soul."

Flea laid down the slate she had carried carefully, lest the test-sum should get rubbed out,

upon the stone beside her, and took Olney's Geography from her bag. The report was written upon an oblong piece of foolscap, folded once. Mr. Tayloe wrote a round, clear hand:

October 31st, 184-

Felicia Jean Grigsby:
Lessons, usually fair.
Conduct——room for improvement.

James Tayloe.

There was a sneer for Flea in each of the three words that came after the dash. The line that emphasized them was heavy and black, and raised a welt upon her heart.

The sun had gone down and the recessed door-step was dim with the shadows of the neglected vines overgrowing it before she lifted her head from her knees to listen to footsteps in the dry weeds at the back of the cabin. Some laborer was, probably, passing by on his way home from the field. If she did not move he would go on without seeing her. The steps came closer to her, until somebody stooped under the overhanging creepers shutting out the light of the sky, and Flea felt hot breath upon her very face. She jumped up.

"Who are you?" she began—

A strong hand gripped her arm, another covered her mouth, and she was lifted bodily from her hiding-place. As the light showed her features the rough hold was slackened; a cracked laugh relieved her fright.

"Bless yo' soul, honey! How you skeered me! I 'clar' to gracious, I thought you was a ghos' or maybe the Old Boy hisself. I won' git over the turn you give me fur a week."

In proof of the shock to her nervous system, Mrs. Fogg dropped herself upon the stone from which she had dragged Flea, and began to suck in her breath loudly and irregularly as if the air were a thick fluid, fanning herself at the same time with her gingham apron.

"I was sitting here thinking, Mrs. Fogg—on my way from school," stammered the girl, really shaken by the adventure. "It's one of my favorite resting-places."

"I wouldn't come hyur much ef I was you, honey," sinking her voice and glancing over her shoulder at the closed door. "It's a norful place for snakes an' scarripens" (scorpions) "an' lizards. An' it's wuss fur ha'ants. I've been see Things here with my own two eyes o'nights, an' heered sech scritchin' an' bellerin' as mos' tarrified me to death. Stay 'way from

hyur, honey. You're too sweet an' pretty to be cyarried off by the Ole Satan."

Flea collected her bag, books, and slate from the ground and gave a hard, miserable laugh.

"Satan lives in a better house than this, Mrs. Fogg. He wears broadcloth every day and Sunday, too, and a fine gold watch and chain. I've seen him too often to be afraid of him."

The old woman pricked up her ears sharply; her bony hand reached up to clutch Flea's wrist.

"What you talkin' 'bout, honey-pie? Ole Nick couldn't w'ar a gold watch," cackling at her joke. "'Twould git melted."

"He lays it on the desk by him to see how long boys and girls can stand torment," rushed on the girl, recklessly. "He lives, most of the time, in the school-house. That's his workshop, where he ruins people's souls and tortures their bodies. Look here, Mrs. Fogg! I told you once that I'd ask Major Duncombe to let your grandchildren go to school. He's been away from home ever since, and I haven't had a chance to speak to him. I tell you now that I don't mean to ask him any such thing. They'd better grow up dunces, without knowing their *a, b, c's* than to go to school to that—that—*Evil!*"

It was the strongest word she could think of, and she flung it out in a passion of loathing.

The crone eyed her curiously, making odd noises in her throat, like a clucking hen.

"You don' say so! you don' say so, now! I suttinly is mighty sorry to hear it, my sweet young lady. I was jes' a-sayin' to my daughter, yis'tiddy, how I meant to stop you termorrer mornin' as you went by the gate, an' remin' you o' what you done promise' me. An' the chillen's fa'r crazy to go to school. Larnin' is a mighty fine thing for anybody. That's what I keep on a-tellin' on 'em. 'Larnin' is a good thing,' says I. In the fear o' the Lord, of course——"

"There's no fear of the Lord in that school!" interrupted Flea, bitterly. "I ought to know, if anybody does. Good-by, Mrs. Fogg."

She had dashed over the tumble-down fence and was flying across the field before the old woman could stop her, if, indeed, she wished to prolong the interview.

CHAPTER VII

MR. GRIGSBY ate his supper alone that night, having come home very late. The younger children were in bed, the three elder busy with their lessons, when he entered the Chamber. His wife hardly waited for him to be seated and to light his pipe before plunging into the story of the reports.

"Bea's is fustrate, if I do say it—'Lessons very good. Conduc' very good.' Dee's was—'Lessons indiff'runt. Conduc' good.' Flea—she says she lost hern on the way home. That's what makes me say what I do 'bout that child. A-traipsin' 'bout the country 't all hours, an' come to look for the repo't her pa's got to sign an' sen' back to the teacher ter-morrer, 'taint nowhar to be foun'."

Flea did not lift her head during the tirade. Her slate was propped in a slanting position by a book; her round comb had been pushed to the back of her head, and her shock of hair tumbled low upon her forehead. The terrible

test-sum already covered one side of the slate.

At her father's voice, the pencil stood still, although she did not look up.

"If she says she lost the paper, it is true. My lassie never tells a lie."

Flea dashed down the pencil and started up. Her eyes burned like live coals.

"Father trusts me! I knew he would. I'll tell you just what was in the old report. It said—'Lessons good—usually. Conduct—*room for improvement!*' There was a long, ugly dash after 'conduct.' Now you know all there is to tell."

"Well, I declare!" from Bea, and "did you ever?" from Mrs. Grigsby, were followed by Dee's drawling comment:

"It warn't fair, Pa. Mr. Tayloe hates her because she's smarter than him. She's the bes' girl in school."

Flea burst into tears, sobbing so hysterically that her father put his arm about her and led her from the room. In five minutes he was back, and glanced over the table.

"Where is your sister's slate, Bea?"

He took it from her hand, and stood for a moment, running his eyes down the calculation that resembled an irregular staircase, his rug-

ged face relaxing as he marked the erasures and smears, telling of a weary fight with the task. He was at the door when Bea's prim, pert tone arrested him.

"Mr. Tayloe will ask me to-morrow if anybody helped her, Pa."

"I never knew you to be backward in tale-telling," rejoined her father, and went on his way.

Flea was in the dining-room, already half-comforted. Her father had listened sympathizingly to the story of her hour's labor over the formidable sum, and encouraged her to persevere by predictions of her final success.

He now lighted another candle and established her comfortably on one side of the table.

"I will read my newspaper over here," he said, cheerily. "Nobody shall disturb you. I am sorry to tell you, lassie, that there are mistakes in the work on that slate. I cannot tell you what they are, but I advise you to wash the slate clean and try to forget how you did the sum before. 'Rub out and try again,' is one of the best rules in such cases."

He copied upon the margin of his newspaper the figures written by the teacher, before he gave back the slate, and when she

had washed it, set down the sum again for her.

"You make prettier figures than Mr. Tayloe does," said Flea, gratefully, laying her cheek against the brawny hand.

She fell to work with fresh zeal. Now and then her father stole a pitying glance at her intent face, but he did not interrupt her. At half-past ten, Mrs. Grigsby's disapproving visage appeared at the door. Her husband shook his head authoritatively; she shut her teeth down upon the exclamation that was between them, and vanished. At eleven o'clock the premises were still except for the occasional rustle of the newspaper and the continuous scratch of Flea's pencil. At half-past eleven she laid down the pencil and rubbed her cramped fingers.

"Father, would it be helping me if you were to look at it, and tell me if it is right, now?"

Both sides of the slate were covered with figures, so childish and unevenly rounded, that the father's heart ached at the sight. In reaching the bottom of the second side, he smiled and patted the head leaning against his shoulder.

"Well done, lassie! It was a tough fight,

but you've won it. I am proud of you, my little heroine!"

He not only kissed her "good-night" twice, but he went all the way up-stairs with her, lighted her bed-room candle, looked to the fastenings of the windows, and, Flea strongly suspected, was within an ace of offering to help her undress.

Poor Father! he had called her a heroine just because she had done a sum in long division!

The missing report did not come to light. The next morning being dry and sunny, the children went by the field-path to school, purposely to look about the door of the haunted house to see if Flea could have lost the paper there. There was no sign of it. In case she could not find it, she was to give the teacher a note of explanation written by her father. Mr. Tayloe had not arrived when she got to the school-house, and she laid the note upon the Bible that was on his desk, where he could not help seeing it.

He read it, drawing his brows together, but said nothing of the contents until the second class in arithmetic came up to recite.

"Felicia Grigsby!" was the first name called.

A subdued rustle ran through the school. By now, the children had learned to understand when there was war in the pale eyes.

Flea stepped forward and offered her slate. The pale eyes snapped.

"Whose figures are these?"

"The sum was so rubbed that my father wrote it down for me again," said Flea, modestly and simply.

"That's a likely story. We'll talk more of it presently."

He went over the sum to himself, making a sort of humming noise, without unclosing his lips. This "um-m-m-m!" was the only sound in the room. When he read the quotient, he snorted violently.

"Your father is a good hand at long division. You can tell him that I said so when you go home."

She met his eyes full. Slander of her father made her fearless.

"He did not help me to do that sum, Mr. Tayloe."

"Beatrice Grigsby! what have you to say of this matter?"

Bea stammered and blushed in giving the testimony upon which the inquisitor insisted. At last, he drew out the admission that her

father had sat with Flea in the dining-room all the evening and let nobody else come in.

There was no color in the face Flea turned upon her sister, but plenty of fight in flaming eyes and working lips.

"Bea Grigsby! you know that father *wouldn't* have helped me! He only told me once that the sum was not right."

"Silence!" thundered the teacher, bringing down the ruler upon the desk. "What more help did you want than that? David Grigsby! come here, sir!"

Dee stumped up the aisle, settling stolidly into his hips at each step.

"What story do you tell? Your sisters give one another the lie in fine style."

"Flea never told a lie in her life," asserted Dee, sturdily. "Pa said so, las' night."

"He has a better opinion of her than I have. How did he happen to say that?"

"'Cause Ma, she didn't b'lieve Flea los' her report."

"Your 'ma,'" mimicking the witness's drawl, "has more sense than your 'pa.' Did you see him help your truth-telling Flea with her sum?"

"No, sir."

"You wouldn't tell me if you had, would you?"

"No, sir."

By the time the dogged reply left his lips he reeled under a crack of the ruler upon his head. Flea cried out once and sharply, and hid her face with her hands.

Mr. Tayloe addressed the school:

"This girl has disobeyed me. She has tried to cheat me. She has lied outright. She also, as I believe, tore up her report to keep from showing it at home. She will stand for an hour on the dunce-stool, with the dunce-cap on her head. She will not leave the school-room at playtime. She will stay after school for an hour for three days and do, each day, a sum in long division as long as that her father did last night. The other girls to whom I gave the sum have had the honesty to confess that they could not do it. They will not be punished. They have neither cheated nor lied."

If the child had been as guilty as he said, the punishment would have been extreme. Some of the girls cried silently behind their books; the boys exchanged savage looks in the shelter of slates and atlases. Nobody was amused by the grotesque figure mounted upon a tall stool by Mr. Tayloe and facing the school, a conical paper cap upon her head. Something in the livid, set face that gazed over and beyond their

heads with vacant unseeing eyes, appalled the most thoughtless.

Bea shed becoming tears, and was pitied by all for her sister's misconduct. Dee got a terrible flogging for sulking and disrespect. When called up to recite, he stood with locked jaws and clenched fists, and would not answer a single question. Flea cast an agonized glance at the loyal little rebel as the blows fell thick and fast, and his jaws were not unlocked. He would die under the lash, she knew, sooner than cry out, now that his blood was up. She had the same in her veins, and she had not shed a tear.

It was a field-day, long to be remembered in the history of the Tayloe reign. More lessons were missed through stupidity or lack of study than upon any previous day. During Flea's hour upon the dunce-stool, Snail Snead and Tom Carter were thrashed, Emma Jones had a taste of the ruler upon her palm, and six girls were in tears from the sarcastic scoldings dealt out to them. There was no romping or jollity upon the playground when Mr. Tayloe went home for his luncheon, and little appetite for the snacks brought from home. One and all, the children had been forbidden to speak to Flea, left solitary on the front bench, but Dee

sat on the floor at her feet, his head against her knee, like an ailing, devoted puppy.

The hour rolled heavily by and the afternoon session began. I record it with pride in proof of the prime stuff of which she was made, that every lesson recited by Flea during that horrible session was without a flaw. It was not in child-flesh to feign cheerfulness, or to appear indifferent. She looked obstinate and sullen. She was *mad*, (in the Virginia sense of the word) through and through. Yet her brain did its work well. She had passed the red-hot stage of temper and was now at the white heat that often makes the mind abnormally clear.

Two other children had been condemned to stay in, but their lessons were despatched in ten minutes and Mr. Tayloe and Flea had the schoolhouse to themselves. His watch was laid, as usual, upon the desk, and he glanced at it frequently while writing his letter. Flea busied herself with the sum he had written out for her, the identical sum she had done last night, and therefore, easy work.

"Have you done it?" asked the teacher, as her pencil ceased its scratching.

"Yes, sir."

"Bring it here!" As he took it he said,

rudely, "Go to the spring and bring me a bucket of water."

No girl was ever ordered to fetch water for the use of the school or the master. It was the boys' business. Without a word Flea took the big tin bucket and dipper from the window-sill and started to the door.

"Be quick about it!" was called after her.

She sauntered down the hill, insolent, reckless, and dangerous. She had had "tiffs" and tempers often before, but they were passing flurries that left no trace upon character. What had been done to her since she passed this spring on her way to school, less than seven hours ago, could never be forgotten or forgiven. The tinkle of the water into the trough and the whispering among the grasses, as it stole away to lower ground, irritated, instead of soothing her. She kicked a stone into the ripples to change the sound, filled the dipper, drained it thirstily, and was about to brim it again, when Mrs. Fogg's wheedling whine made her look around. The old woman was watching her craftily.

"What you doin' totin' water, chile, like a nigger? Who sot you 'bout that sort o' work?"

"The Old Harry!" said Flea, deliberately.

Her eyes were black and deep; red fire burned behind and through them.

"I told you that he lived up there!" jerking her head backward in the direction of the school-house. "You'd better keep away if you don't want to be scorched."

The old woman's laugh was like the rattling of pebbles in a gourd.

"Lor' bless you, my sweet little lady! I ain't afeard o' the Old Harry in broad daylight. They tell me he *do* treat you mighty mean, and that's a fac'. I wonder yo' pa stands it. I s'pose he dar'sent cross the Major. The Major's mighty thick with the teacher. Ah, well! the pore was made to be trompled inter the mire o' the dus'. Thar's a Day a-comin' when they'll have to answer for the deeds done in their bodies."

For the first time Flea detected a false ring in the snuffling cant. She started up the bank, lugging the heavy bucket; the water, plashing and trickling over the sides, wet her feet and ankles and angered her still further. Mrs. Fogg overtook her and seized one side of the handle.

"Lemme tote it fur you, deary! 'Taint fitten work fur yo' pretty white han's. He mus'

be a nimp o' the Evil One, sure 'nough, to let you be a carrier o' water an' a drawer o' wood, this yere fashion."

She was not to be shaken off and they went together to the school-house door. There, Flea nodded her thanks, lugged the bucket with both hands to the head of the room and set it down upon a bench. She would not offer her tormentor what she had brought, as if she were his negro slave. In her absence her slate had been laid upon her seat. *Both sides were bare!* In fact, the teacher had found her work correct and chose this ungracious mode of dismissing her for the day. She instantly concluded that he meant for her to do the sum over from the beginning. The match had touched the powder-magazine of temper. Rising to her feet, she surveyed him with desperate eyes. He sat quite erect as he wrote, and worked his mouth oddly, compressing and loosening his lips, sometimes fast, sometimes slowly. Now he drew his eyebrows together, and then he would smile at what he was writing. He was comfortable and at peace with himself—this natty, prosperous and powerful little man, whom she knew to be the vilest of the vile. If she thought that the blow would kill him she would bring her big slate crashing down upon his skull. She

"THE OLD HARRY!" SAID FLEA, DELIBERATELY.

could not kill him, but she could injure and mortify him.

Quickly and easily she lifted the pail she had carried with difficulty just now. Wrath lent her strength. In a twinkling it was turned upside down upon the head of the unsuspecting writer; a torrent of ice-cold water deluged him, and as she let go the bucket, it clattered down upon his shoulders, covering his head like an enormous cap.

It was the deed of a second. In another second, Flea had cleared the school-house and was running for her life.

CHAPTER VIII

"RUNNING for her life" is not too strong an expression to describe the child's flight. She had had experience of the temper of the man she had injured to the extent of her ability. She believed that he would kill her in his fury if he overtook her. With the instinct of a hunted hare she made for the thickest part of the woods, tearing through matted jungles of cat-briers and saplings, redoubling her speed as she heard a shout behind her. She had run a mile when she stopped for breath. Her hat was gone, and the muslin spencer worn under a sleeveless jacket, because of the late warm weather, was torn into ribbons. Her arms and face were bleeding; her heart beat so loudly that she could hear nothing else distinctly, but she fancied, presently, that she distinguished from afar off the noise of somebody crashing through the undergrowth. She bethought herself instantly that her flight must have left a wide trail in the forest. Winged by terror, she

A TORRENT OF ICE-COLD WATER DELUGED HIM.

dashed on, but she no longer ran straight. With an undefined idea, gained from reading Cooper's novels, of losing a trail in the water, she directed her course toward the swamp lying on both sides of the creek near where it emptied into the river. She could wade for a mile there, if necessary. Once in the depths of the swamp, she could defy anybody to find her unless he had a blood-hound to guide him. She had read and heard of blood-hounds, but never seen one.

In her blind haste, she miscalculated distances and direction, becoming aware of the blunder as the woods grew lighter. Long, level lines of light from the early sunsetting hit her like arrows shot from behind the leafless trees. Where was she going? If she kept on, where would she come out?

A new sound smote her ears. It was not the shout of the pursuer or the bay of the hound which her imagination had conjured up. As it arose and wailed upon the still air, she fancied something familiar in it. Creeping cautiously nearer the road, which she espied through the brushwood, she saw, first, the white top of a covered "tumbler-cart" crossing a bridge laid over an arm of the creek; then, the long ears of a mule; lastly, her father's one

man-servant, Dick, walking alongside of the mule, his hand on the thill of the cart. As he walked, he uplifted voice and soul in sacred song:

> "An' mus' dis body die?
> Dis martial frame do-cay?
> An' mus' dese actyve lim's o' mine——"

("Min' yo' eye dar, you ole buzzard!" as the mule touched the driver's cowhide boots with his hoof——)

> "Lie mould'ing in de clay?"

The truth flashed upon Flea. Chaney's sister, who had belonged to a planter living ten miles farther down the river, had died a week ago, and word had been sent to Chaney that "a right smart chance o' clo'es an' blankets an' things" had been left to her by the deceased. Mrs. Grigsby had asked her husband that morning at breakfast if Dick could have a mule and a cart, and a day's holiday in order to fetch home his wife's legacy. The master had given his consent readily and Dick was now on his way home, bearing his goods with him. He was likewise charged with all the particulars of his sister-in-law's sickness and death, with which he had it in his mind to regale his

faithful Chaney. Behind him were the fertile low-grounds; before him the road stretched straight into the heart of swamp and forest.

"I'm goin' home!"

wailed the chorus,

"I'm goin' home! I'm goin' h-o-me!
I'm goin' ho-o-o-ome, to die no mo'!"

Crouching low, and treading as lightly as a panther, Flea quitted the bushes, stole up behind the cart as Dick threw up his head to open his mouth back to the ears in the final howl of "ho-o-o-ome," and crept in over the back-board, unseen and unsuspected by the musician.

A feather-bed filled the body of the cart, and into this the fugitive sank, pulling the "things" over her. How soft and how safe it felt! and how tired! tired! *tired!* she was, now that she had stopped running and need not fear pursuit. She had eaten nothing since breakfast and was giddy and faint. She was very wet, too. In emptying the bucket upon her tormentor she had drenched herself to the skin.

Flea had not thought of going home when she ran out of the school-house. She would

have said that she dared not meet her father and mother after what she had done. Maddened by her wrongs, she was conscious of but two impulses—to revenge herself upon the guilty party, and then to get out of sight of everybody. The best thing that could happen to her, she told herself, would be to die in the woods of starvation and exposure, and to be found there by a search-party sent out by her parents. Everybody would cry over her lifeless remains, and the wicked cause of her death would be driven out of the county. Perhaps he might be hanged for her murder. He would certainly be the victim of remorse all the rest of his days.

These thoughts had shot into her mind in little bits at a time, while she pushed through the thickets. There had been no time for connected plans or expectations. But now, lying secure in her dark and downy nest, she concluded that, after all, home was the only refuge for her. Her shoulders and arms were naked; her skirts were wringing wet; her shoes heavy with swamp-mud; her legs were torn by briers and thorns, and her head began to feel queer. Her brain swam and swung, her skull seemed to be filled with boiling water which was trying to get out at her ears. They were deaf-

FLEA CREPT IN OVER THE BACK-BOARD.

ened by the sound of the boiling, and the steam pressed on the back of her eyes. Her mouth was so dry that the surface of her tongue "crazed," as crockery goes into tiny cracks when over-heated.

Yes! home was the place for her. She would meet with punishment there. In a strange, half-sleep she heard herself whispering—"*Not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that bonds and afflictions await me.*"

Rest and comfort could never be hers again. But home was better than the wide, wide, wicked world.

Awaking herself with an effort, she set in order what she should say when she got home. Her father would not believe that she had lied and cheated. But, what would he say to the revenge that began to taste less sweet than at first? He would have to pay for Mr. Tayloe's spoiled clothes. She might even have to go to court to answer for her misdeed. Her spirit leaped up again at the thought. She would tell her story boldly to judge and jury, and show what had been done by "the wretch who was a disgrace to his cloth."

That sounded fine—but did "cloth" always mean a broadcloth coat? She had a notion

that it was only "cloth" when black and on a clergyman's back. At any rate she would defy the little monster. The memory of his grinning face and insulting tone stirred up the mire and dirt anew.

The cart had no springs. It jolted and bumped over the rough road and rocked up and down, but she was used to the ways of the tumbler-cart and Dick's singing was making her drowsy again. She would put off thinking until she got rested. Perhaps by then her ears would roar less and her head stop aching.

Creak and rumble! See-saw! and fainter and farther away sounded Dick's monotonous wail:

"We'll pass over Jerdan!
How happy we shall be!
We'll pass over Jerdan
And shout de Jubilee."

Snail Snead was singing that tune yesterday to what the girls said were "wicked words." They got into Flea's head now and would not get out:

"We'll pass over Jerdan
An' drink sweeten' tea,
We'll pass over Jerdan
An' climb the 'simmon-tree."

She smiled foolishly in saying them over.

Cart and song had come to a halt. Flea put her eye to a crevice in the cover. It was Miss Em'ly on horseback, a mounted groom leading a third horse. Dick pulled off his whitey-brown wool hat, and scraped his foot.

"Howdy, Uncle Dick!" called the sweet, shrill voice. "Have you seen Mr. Tayloe anywhere?"

Dick tugged at his forelock and scraped his foot again.

"Naw, my Mistis, I ain' see him nowhar'. Is you los' him? I moughty sorry."

His eyes twinkled and Miss Em'ly snapped her whip at him, blushing and laughing.

"Shut your mouth, Uncle Dick! He was to go riding with me, and he isn't at the schoolhouse. If you should see him, tell him I couldn't wait for him. Good-by!"

She gave her horse a smart cut and galloped down the road.

"He is looking for me all this time!" thought Flea, fearfully. Her teeth chattered and she pulled a blanket up over her.

Another adventure was in store for her at the next turn of the highway. Mr. Tayloe stepped out of the edge of the woods and hailed Dick. Flea could have thought his eye met hers as she peeped through the hole in the

cover. He stood within six feet of the cart. His hat was the only dry thing he had on. His blue coat, buff waistcoat, and gray trousers were discolored and streaked with wet. "Beggars' ticks" and "Spanish needles," sticking to his clothes, told of a tramp through marsh and field. He looked cross and ugly and fierce.

"Aren't you Grigsby's man?" he asked, harshly.

Dick touched his hat, but did not take it off.

"Yas, suh. I has de honor fur to be Mister Grigsby's body-sarvant! At yo' sarvice, suh!"

The superior quality of his manners did not impress the white man. His tone was more offensive than before.

"You tell him he must come up to the house to-night. I want to see him on particular business. Do you hear?"

"Yas, suh!" Dick's roving gaze took in all the details of the forlorn figure, and he grew exasperatingly polite. "You been fall in de creek, ain' you, suh? Carn't I give you a lif' home, suh? You mought happen to meet somebody 'long de road. Miss Em'ly Duncombe, she done parss 'long hyur, jes' now, a lookin' fur you. It's more'n likely she'll tu'n back at de cross-road. Lordy! dar's a moughty big dus'

down yonder—" arching his hand over his eyes to make sure they did not deceive him. "Hit looks mightily like dat's her, now."

Flea had never heard the teacher swear until he flung a round and abusive oath at the negro, and plunged back into the woods. Sly Dick had been morally certain that the fine gentleman would never, in any circumstances, demean himself to become a passenger in a tumbler-cart. He had not risked dampening his Chaney's "things" by the invitation, or it would never have been given. Flea, half dead with dread lest it might be accepted, felt the blood rush wildly from her heart to her head in the relief of the escape, sank back upon the feather-bed and fainted away.

Dick plodded along the highway, too full of wicked glee to sing any more hymns. Twice he stopped in the middle of the road to laugh—a regular darky "Ki-*yi!*" enjoyed by every atom of his being. Mr. Tayloe was very unpopular with the Greenslope servants, and tales of his "high-handed, low-down ways" had been repeated throughout the colored community.

The full moon was high above the horizon when the tumbler-cart was driven up to the kitchen door.

Chaney bustled out with importance becoming an heiress in her own right, but with a decent show of indifference to her own interests where those of her employer's were concerned.

"Ain' no time fur to tech dem things now!" she declared. "Marster's sister done come from Philadelphy or Pennsylvany, or wharever 'tis. De big pot's got to be put in de little one, you better b'lieve. Did you git de baid?" (bed.)

"Yas, an' a pyar o' blankets, an' a counterpin, an' a shawl, an' two linsey-woolsey coats Dorkis never had on her back—an' I don' know what else beside. Dar's a chaney teapot an' sugar dish. Jes you take a peep in dar!" leading the way to the back of the cart. "Put yo' han' inter dat 'ar' baid. Dem's fedders as *is* fedders!"

"The chamber" of the Grigsby house was a-blaze with three candles and a great fire upon the hearth. To escape from the heat of this last the visitor, Mrs. McLaren, had drawn her chair to an open window. She was two years older than her brother and had worn black for ten years for her only child who had borne her name—Jean. Her husband, who had been an invalid for fifteen years, had died six months before this, her first visit to Virginia. Her brother, of whom she was very fond, had been

in Philadelphia for a few days every summer since her marriage. Against his wife's wish he had slipped "Jean" in after the high-sounding name bestowed by her upon their second child. Mrs. Grigsby considered her sister-in-law "down-right hard favored," and, indeed, her reddish hair, high cheek-bones, and prominent mouth robbed her of all claim to beauty. She had, however, a sensible, kindly face and looked and spoke like a refined lady. She had arrived from Norfolk at three o'clock that afternoon, and had seen all the children except her namesake.

"She had to stay for awhile after school to do a sum, poor thing!" Bea explained, with amiable unwillingness.

Mrs. Grigsby heaved her usual sigh over Flea's shortcomings. Good woman and good mother though she was, she would not have been sorry to see Bea in high favor with her rich aunt, even at the expense of her less attractive sister. Bea would do her mother's training credit anywhere. "Poor Flea," as her mother often lamented, was "nobody's pretty child, and too odd for anything."

"Is she often out as late as this?" asked Mrs. McLaren. "Is it quite safe for her to come home alone from school after sunset?"

Mrs. Grigsby repeated her sigh.

"Flea takes after her father in headiness," she remarked, in sickly jest.

Her husband paid no heed to the fling.

"If she is not in soon, I shall go to look after her," he said, peering through the window at the darkening landscape. "Mr. Tayloe is an excellent teacher, but, as you say, Jean, it is not right to keep a girl out after dark. She wasn't kept in over the sum she did last night, was she?" looking at Bea. "I know that was right."

Bea was discreet and mysterious.

"I didn't ask any questions, sir. I only heard Mr. Tayloe say she must stay in for an hour after school."

Mrs. McLaren glanced at Dee. He sat upon a cricket in a corner near her, apparently asleep, but at Bea's reply he unclosed his eyes in languid surprise upon his sister.

"The laddie knows something he could tell, if he would," said his aunt, laying her hand upon the bullet-head.

"'Twould be tellin' tales out o' school," muttered the boy, reddening bashfully. "If 'twouldn't, I could tell a heap o' things."

Mrs. McLaren's hand, passing gently over his hair, was checked by something she felt there.

"How came this big bump here?" she inquired. "Have you had a fall?"

"Naw'm."

"A fight, perhaps, then?"

"Naw'm."

She raised his chin to search his eyes.

"Would it be telling tales out of school to answer *that* question?"

Dee nodded, got redder and more bashful.

"Ef you had a' tole me I'd 'a' rubbed it with operdildoc," observed the mother. "Boys that won't steddy, mus' look for hard knocks."

"Doesn't Felicia study?" pursued the visitor.

"I can't exac'ly say she don't steddy," returned the mother. "But she is the greatest one fur gittin' inter scrapes——"

Her husband interrupted her again as if he had not heard what she said.

"Study! she's the best scholar of her age I, or you, or anybody else ever saw. She has more brains than all the rest of them put together. You'll be proud of your name-child, some of these days, Jean."

"How happens it, then, that she was kept in?" was the next and natural question. "Perhaps she is not industrious?"

"She works like a horse!" came from Dee, who had laid his head back against the wall and

turned white behind his freckles. The boy looked ill.

Mr. Grigsby was troubled.

"I have had thoughts," he said, more hesitatingly than he was accustomed to speak, "about Mr. Tayloe's management of that child. She's high-strung and sensitive, and so little like most girls of her age that an ordinary teacher would not know how to get on with her. But she learns so fast under him, and is so eager about her lessons that it doesn't seem wise for me——"

A piercing yell from without broke the sentence in the middle. Another and another, with never a breath between, drew the whole party to the back-door, from which direction the screams had come.

The moonlight showed the cart and mule at the door of the kitchen, which was built twenty yards or so from the house. The moon also showed Chaney jumping up and down like a crazy thing at the back of the cart and shrieking at the top of her lungs. Two children clutched her skirts and screeched in sympathy.

"What is to pay out there?" shouted the master, angrily. "Stop that noise!"

"Dar's somefin' 'live in dar, suh!" Dick called back in trembling accents.

Mr. Grigsby stepped back into the house for

a candle; his sister followed him with another. He pulled aside the cover of the cart. Mrs. McLaren held the light above his head and leaned forward with him to look in.

When Chaney had thought to thrust her hand into her feather-bed it had encountered Something that moved and moaned. That Something now sat upright and stretched out two naked arms, encrusted with dried blood. A voice nobody there would have known, cried out: "Father! father! don't let that man get me! He wants to *kill* me!"

Such was Mrs. McLaren's introduction to the namesake of whom she would, some day, be proud.

CHAPTER IX

A NOTE was brought to Mr. Grigsby at noon of the next day. It was from Major Duncombe:

"MY DEAR MR. GRIGSBY:

"As you did not come to my house last night, I take it for granted that your negro man did not deliver the message sent to you by Mr. Tayloe, who met him on the road yesterday evening. I write now to ask you to meet Mr. Tayloe and myself at half past three o'clock to-day at the school-house for the discussion of important and confidential business. As the days are short, may I suggest that you be punctual to the hour named?

"Yours truly,
"C. S. DUNCOMBE."

Mr. Grigsby had not seen the Major in his morning round of the plantation, never omitted except in very stormy weather. He had made it to-day with a clouded brow and heavy heart. Dick had affirmed, upon his knees, the tears bursting from his frightened eyes, that he had no idea how "Miss F'lishy" got into the cart, or when or where. He also declared that he

had not left the vehicle for a minute during the journey. Flea was raving in delirium. The doctor, summoned at midnight, said that she was on the verge of brain fever. Except for the scratches and the wetting she had, apparently, sustained no external injury. Dee was laid up with a violent sick headache. His mother was positive in the belief that both of the children had "ketched" some anonymous disease, somewhere and somehow.

"It didn't stand to reason" (her reason) "that the two on 'em would 'a' come down at oncet in exac'ly the same way unless 'twas somethin' ketchin'. Flea mus' 'a' been off her head when she run away into the woods and got into the cyart while Dick was a-noddin'. That nigger could sleep's well a-walkin' 'long as a-lyin' down."

When Mr. Grigsby arrived at the school-house Major Duncombe's buggy was already there, Nell, his blooded mare, standing patiently under an aspen-tree. Her master and Mr. Tayloe were in the house, the Major in his usual seat on the corner of the desk, the school-master tramping from side to side of the room. He stopped at the overseer's entrance and eyed him frowningly, without speaking. Major Duncombe said, "Good-day," civilly, but gravely.

Something unpleasant was in the air, and Mr. Grigsby was certain it had to do with him before the Major opened the conversation:

"We asked you to meet us here, Mr. Grigsby, because, as I wrote to you, the matter we have in hand is confidential. I must request that, whatever may be the outcome of our talk, the facts of this interview shall remain confidential between us three."

"Your wishes shall be obeyed to the letter, Major Duncombe."

The employer was formal; the hireling was stiff. His conscience was void of offence, and he would not behave like a man on trial.

"To begin with what you are already aware of—" continued the Major, "we have been annoyed of late by the discovery that a regular system of thieving is going on upon this plantation. You know, too, how unsuccessful have been our efforts to track the thieves. I told you, yesterday, that besides the depredations in the poultry-yard and the loss of an occasional sheep or pig from the fields, one of the smoke-houses was entered Thursday night and four or five hams stolen. Night before last, the laundress carelessly left out in the garden a quantity of valuable lace and handkerchiefs, which had been laid on the grass to bleach in the sun.

In the morning all were gone, also several linen pillow-cases and towels from the line in the yard."

"I had not heard of this last robbery," said Mr. Grigsby, when the speaker paused, as for a reply.

The Major's gravity deepened. As he went on he avoided Mr. Grigsby's eye.

"The information was purposely held back for reasons that will appear presently. We agreed, you may recollect, that the guilty parties were most probably the Fogg family. Also, that they were aided and abetted by some of my negroes who have access to the keys and are familiar with the habits of the household. My fear now is that the Foggs have made use of other and more unlikely tools. To speak plainly, Mr. Grigsby, I am afraid that they have tampered with your second daughter, and that the freedom she has been allowed in the Greenslope house and grounds has been used by them for their vile purposes——"

"Major Duncombe!"

The overseer's lank form was drawn up to full height, his deep-set eyes were alight with angry amazement.

"You are surprised and displeased, Mr. Grigsby, and no wonder. This is a most un-

pleasant task to me. I like the child. She has the elements of a noble character in her. But I have positive proof of her intimacy with the Fogg tribe. She stops at the house on her way to school; she sits upon the porch and chats familiarly with them on summer afternoons. The elder Fogg woman boasts of her intimacy with your family. Yesterday, after school, Mr. Tayloe asked your daughter, who had been kept in for insubordination and impertinence, to bring him a drink of water from the spring. I met Mrs. Fogg going to the school-house as I was riding by at the same hour, but thought no more of the circumstance until Mr. Tayloe came home last night and told me a shocking story. He was sitting at his desk writing, his watch and chain laid upon his silk handkerchief on the desk beside him, when your daughter, coming up behind him, dashed pail, water and all, over him and ran away, as fast as she could go, to the woods. He gave chase, but could not overtake her. Returning to the school-house, he found that his watch and chain and his handkerchief were gone. There seems to be no doubt that your daughter snatched them when she blinded him for the instant with the water. Her confederate must have been waiting for her outside."

The overseer's face was gray and rigid. He cleared his throat as he began to speak.

"I must have very strong evidence—direct evidence—of my child's guilt before I believe all this, sir."

Mr. Tayloe spoke for the first time. He addressed the Major, not the last speaker.

"What more does the man want than my word?"

The father wheeled sharply upon him:

"Did you *see* her throw the water upon you? Did you look to see whether or not the watch was upon your desk when you started to run after the child? Might not the woman whom Major Duncombe saw have entered the school-house while you were in the woods? Major Duncombe! my daughter came home last night raving with fever, scratched by briers and covered with swamp-mud. She has raved all day of the cruelty and injustice of her teacher. There's another side to the story, sir"—the hand that held his cowhide whip went up above his head and came down hard upon the desk—"and as sure as I am a live man, and there is justice on earth or in heaven, I mean to get at the bottom of this thing!"

He turned abruptly and stalked to the door. Warm moisture hung upon his sandy eyelashes

and made the lids smart. He could not have uttered another word to save his life or his child's reputation.

The Major looked perplexedly at his companion, who shrugged his shoulders and pursed up his mouth disdainfully.

"What else did you expect from him?" he asked, taking no pains to lower his voice.

Mr. Grigsby came back as abruptly as he had left. He had got himself in hand and spoke in his usual dry, somewhat harsh voice:

"Major Duncombe, I am at your service as soon as I have your commands. Do you advise a search of the Fogg premises? As a magistrate you can make out a warrant and qualify me to serve it. The son from Norfolk is at his mother's just now. It might be well to make the search before he gets away. As to my daughter—if there is any doubt as to her ability to appear as an accomplice, you can satisfy yourself on that head by a visit to my house. Perhaps a search of my premises might be expedient."

"By no means! It is not to be thought of!" cried the Major, impulsively. "I hope you understand, Grigsby, how plaguedly disagreeable this whole proceeding is to me—to us. I am so sick of it that I would not go a step far-

ther were I the only party that has been robbed. As to having the poor little girl up, it is all nonsense. I pledge myself for that."

"Even should her guilt be proved?" Mr. Tayloe jerked in the question, his horseshoe smile sinking the roots of his nose into his face. "Would there be law or equity in such a course?"

"Pooh! pooh!" retorted the Major, impatiently. "We don't put the law upon babies in this part of the world. Mr. Grigsby, if you will ride along with us as far as my office, we will make out the necessary papers, and also send for a couple of constables. Dan Fogg is an ugly customer to handle."

The river-fogs were unfolding over the landscape as a cool evening crept stealthily upon the heels of a warm day. They lay low upon the meadows and sagged over the banks of the sunken road beyond the school-house. The three men had gained higher ground, where the carriage road was level with the surrounding country, when the eye of the horseman who rode behind the gig was attracted by a gleam of light twinkling across a wide field. It was like the glimmer of a firefly, but his quick wits told him it had no right to be there. He watched it keenly while it flashed and van-

ished, always at the same height from the ground. Riding on a stone's throw farther, he caught sight of it again. It was stationary, and he had fixed the location in his mind. He rode up to the side of the gig.

"Major Duncombe! it is well at this time not to overlook anything suspicious. And a light in that old cabin over yonder is suspicious. If you please, I will alight when we get nearer, and go on foot across the fields to see what it means."

"Better pull down a panel of fence and let us drive into the field," suggested the Major. "I'll go with you, leaving the horses with Mr. Tayloe."

About a hundred yards from the haunted house they alighted, and approached it cautiously from the back. The light twinkled at intervals through a crevice at the side of the chimney. Guiding their course by it, the men trod lightly upon the withered herbage until they stood at the front and only door. Here all was dark, but by laying their ears against the door they could detect muffled movements within as of some one walking about and dragging something on the floor.

The Major knocked loudly with his loaded whip. All was instantly still.

"Who is there?" he called. "Open the door! I am Major Duncombe."

No answer.

"Do you hear me?" he said again. "Open the door, or we will break it down."

After another long minute, he whispered in Mr. Grigsby's ear:

"Put your shoulder against it, and when I say, 'Now!' drive it in. Are you ready? '*Now!*'"

Under the force of their united strength and weight, the crazy door went down as if made of pasteboard, and with such surprising suddenness that both men fell in with it on the floor. A man leaped over them, as they lay there, and rushed off into the darkness. Mr. Grigsby was the first to find his feet. He struck a match and held it high to look around the room.

"There's nobody here!" he said. "That fellow was holding the door and let it go purposely to throw us when we threw our weight against it. Ha! here's his lantern."

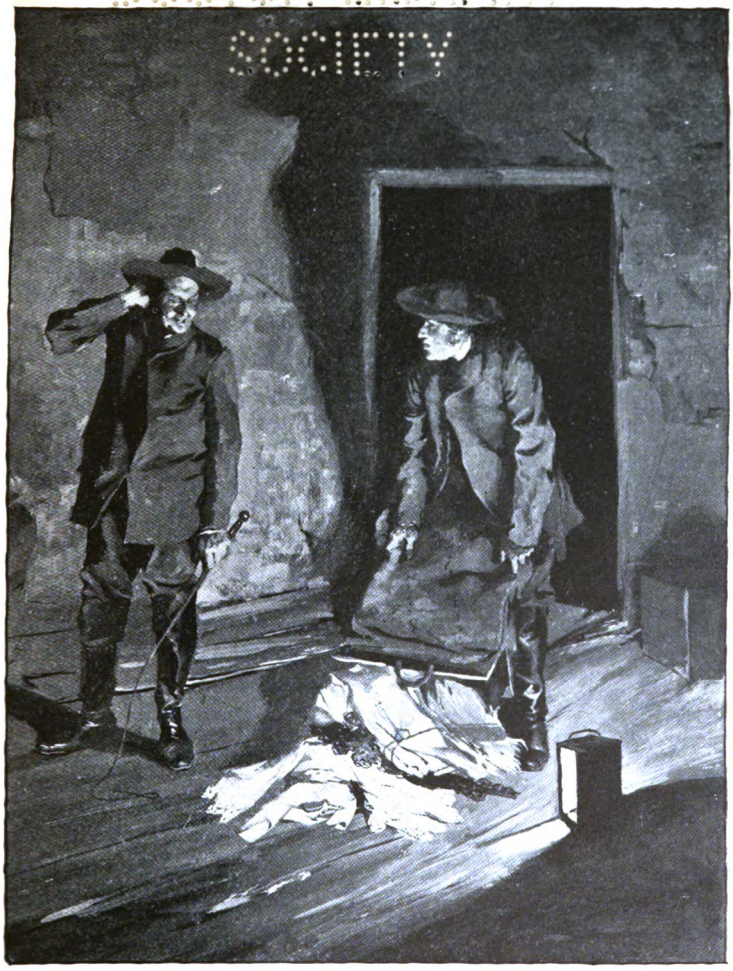
It was on the floor, and when lighted, revealed a disorderly heap of stuff collected about a big carpet bag, open and partly packed. Without further ado, Mr. Grigsby picked it up by the corners and emptied it upon the

floor. At the very bottom were the missing lace and handkerchiefs, and, rolled up carefully in a white silk handkerchief, Mr. Tayloe's watch and chain. A roll of pillow-cases and towels was near by. Beyond was a stout sack of oznaburg, containing four hams. A roll of homespun flannel; a box half full of candles; a bag of corn, and one of oats, with articles of lesser value, were piled in the corners of the cabin. The haunted house was the cleverly chosen hiding-place of the booty collected during several weeks, perhaps for months.

"I wonder how long this has been going on?" said the Major, giving a long whistle, as he stared about him. "No need of a search-warrant now for the Fogg house. They were too smart to store their plunder there. They are a sharp set! Not a negro would come within gun-shot of this place after sunset. Did you get a glimpse of the rascal who played us such a shabby trick?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Grigsby was busy with the lantern that, just at that moment, went out, leaving them in total darkness but for the dying daylight that found entrance through the open door. When the candle in the lantern was rekindled, the blaze made the overseer's face look ghastly,



MR. GRIGSBY EMPTIED THE BAG UPON THE FLOOR.

and his high cheek-bones threw his eyes into shadows. They seemed to have sunken farther back into his head. When he spoke, his voice was husky, as if the yellow fog without had settled there.

"If you will take charge of the watch, I'll ram the laces and linen into the bag and carry it to the gig," stooping to gather them while he talked. "Then I'll prop up the door for to-night. The rest of the things can be sent for to-morrow."

After the place was closed he strode on ahead of the Major, and tucked the carpet-bag under the seat of the gig, making no reply to Mr. Tayloe's impatient queries.

"Have you any other orders for me to-night, Major?" he asked, looming up tall and dark in the twilight when his employer was in his seat.

"Nothing more, thank you, Grigsby!" said the Major's lively, hearty voice. His good humor was thoroughly restored by the excitement of the adventure. "We may well be satisfied with our evening's work. And, I say, Grigsby! if there's anything any of us can do for the little girl, you know how gladly we would do it. Emily will be down in the morning to see her."

"Thank you, sir."

The reply came back as he was moving toward his horse, and was hardly audible.

"An uncivil cur!" commented Mr. Tayloe. "I wonder that you keep him."

"I might go farther and fare a million times worse. It's natural he should be sore and surly just now. If any man had said one-tenth of one of my girls that I said of that bright little daughter of his, I'd be as savage as a bear."

"I submit that there is some difference between your daughters and his," observed Mr. Tayloe, dryly. "But what have you found?"

"For one thing, your watch and chain."

The school-master heard the story to the end without interrupting the narrator. Then he sneered openly.

"I'll wager my head against a turnip that that impudent vixen put the watch there herself. I'm not sure that she isn't responsible for the laces and handkerchiefs, too. Doesn't it strike you as rather odd that her father should ferret out the stolen goods on this particular evening?"

"Oh, come now, Tayloe, that is carrying your detective genius too far! Grigsby is an honest man if ever there was one. It is more odd that this nest of thieves was not unearthed be-

fore. Grigsby only needed to be put upon the scent. A canny Scot has a nose like a pointer dog's if once you wake him up."

The canny Scot was wide awake at this present moment. Pulling his horse up in a part of the road where the banks shut him away from possible observation, he struck a match and examined more closely a piece of paper he had picked up, unnoticed by the Major, in the hut. It had lain open, the written side up, in the middle of the floor. At the first glance he had read nothing but his daughter's name, yet had recognized instantly the lost report, and instinctively secreted it. The match burned long enough for him to verify his first impression.

October 31, 184–.

Felicia Jean Grigsby,
Lessons, usually fair.
Conduct——room for improvement.

James Tayloe.

The date was the day before yesterday, when her mother had scolded the girl for loitering on her way home. He recalled the haste and heat with which Flea had answered, while confessing that she had lost the report—she could not say where.

How came she to be inside of that locked

door? He had vowed to get at the bottom of this matter. Was he there now?

Flea was worse when her father got home. Her cheeks were purple and glazed with fever, her eyes wild and sightless. Her head rolled restlessly on the pillow; her fingers picked tufts of wool from the blanket while she crooned over and over what her mother described as "outlandish stuff." Her aunt, who had established herself as head nurse, had learned the lines by heart already:

> "It stands beside the weedy way;
> Shingles are mossy, walls are gray;
> Gnarled apple-branches shade the door,
> Wild vines have bound it o'er and o'er;
> The sumac whispers with its tongues of flame—
> 'Here once was done a deed without a name.'"

At the fourth repetition in her father's hearing, the girl laughed aloud, the hollow, mirthless peal of madness.

"I made that poem! It's all about the haunted house, you know. Mrs. Fogg says nobody but just we two dares to go there. She says the devil has been seen there. *I* say he lives in the school-house. Eighteen hundred and forty-four into three thousand six hundred and eighty-eight. Why, Father, that's just

twice and none over. Now, I've got to climb to the top of the haunted house on a ladder made of noughts, noughts, noughts!"

Her rambling subsided into whispers. She fell to tracing figures and drawing lines upon the counterpane, her brows knotted, her lips moving fast.

"That is worse than the singing!" said Mrs. McLaren aside to her brother. "She will work at that sum for an hour at a time. It is wearing her out. Heaven forgive that teacher!"

The father did not say, "Amen!"

CHAPTER X

On the afternoon of December 24th, Felicia Grigsby sat alone by the fire in her room. A book was open upon her lap, but she was not reading. Her hands were thin and white, her gray eyes were unnaturally large and dark in a face that had wasted until it looked like an elf's. She had lain in bed for six weeks and was still so weak that her father carried her up and down stairs to her meals.

He had been very kind to her throughout her illness, but never tender, and he was always grave, nowadays. Flea was thinking of these and other puzzling things this afternoon. While she thought, two tears arose and enlarged in her eyes until their weight carried them over the lower lids, and they plashed down upon the book. The first snow-storm of the season was driving at a sharp slant past the windows; the wind cried in the chimney in a low-spirited, feeble-minded kind of way; the fire kept up heart and spat snappishly as stray hail-stones and

snow-flakes flew down the throat of the chimney. Mrs. Grigsby was frying doughnuts in the dining-room. She always fried doughnuts with her own hands on Christmas Eve, a half bushel of them, the children looking on in expectant ecstasy.

Flea kicked one foot out of the blanket shawl laid over her lap, and moaned fretfully:

"I don't care for anything or anybody, and nobody cares whether I live or die!"

The door opened and her father came in. He looked unusually grave, even for him. Flea wondered if he were going to lecture her. He laid more logs on the andirons, and stirred the coals below the blazing fore-stick.

"Is it too hot for you?" he asked, as the fire leaped up with a greedy roar.

"A little," Flea answered, shielding her eyes with her hand. The tears had made them tender.

Her father took hold of her rocking-chair with one hand, the cricket on which her feet rested with the other, and lifted her away from the flaring flames. Then, he arranged the covering over her knees and feet. It was a checked blanket-shawl, red and green, that belonged to Mrs. Grigsby. It was always brought out when an invalid was able to sit up, or not quite

ill enough to be put to bed. In Flea's mind it was joined with the remembered taste of jalap, Epsom salts, castor-oil and tansy-tea. The checks were just two inches square. She had measured them a hundred times. Her mother used to give her medicine; her father read aloud to her when she had the measles, and chills-and-fever after the measles.

She got hold of his hand and laid her face against it with a sob that seemed to bring her heart up with it.

"Father! you haven't called me 'lassie' all the time I've been sick. Don't you love me any more?"

He let her keep his hand, but he did not press hers. He stood bolt upright, his eyes upon the driving snow; his tone was constrained.

"A father never stops loving his children, my daughter, let them do what they may."

Flea twisted herself in her chair to get a good view of his face.

"Have I done anything to displease you, Father? Maybe 'twas some silly thing I said when I was out of my head. Mother says I talked dreadfully sometimes. You know I didn't mean it. Won't you forgive it, and let me be your own lassie again?"

She was crying fast, clinging to his hand and

covering it with kisses. He drew it away gently and put his thumb and finger into the pocket of his waistcoat, bringing out with them a paper, creased and worn by much handling.

"Look at that!" he said, in a tone that arrested her tears.

Flea unfolded it and gave a cry of surprise.

"My report! Where did it come from?"

"You ought to know."

"But I don't! We looked for it all the way to school that last day. I thought likely that I had dropped it on the step of the old cabin—the haunted house, you know. I sat down there, the day before, to look at the report, and stayed there ever so long. When I saw what was in it, I just *hated* to bring it home. I didn't think how late it was until Mrs. Fogg—the old Mrs. Fogg — came 'round the corner of the house and scared me. I scared her, too" — laughing nervously at the recollection — "and although I was sure that I had put the paper back into my Geography, it wasn't there when I got home. We hunted all about the door-step — Dee and I — next morning, but couldn't find it. We supposed the wind must have blown it away — if I dropped it there."

Her father drew up a chair and sat down beside her, a little back of her, so she could

not study his face. He tried to speak carelessly:

"What was Mrs. Fogg doing there at that time of day?"

"I don't know, I am sure. She is a funny old woman—always turning up just where you wouldn't expect to see her."

"Did she go into the house?"

"Why, no, sir. It's nailed up, I think—windows and doors, too. She said that she mistook me for a ghost—'ha'ant,' she called it.—Father!"

She had his hand again, and again raised it to her cheek. Her voice was tremulous.

"Well!" watching her out of the corners of his eyes.

"I did something wrong and foolish that day. I had told her once that I'd ask Major Duncombe to let her grandchildren go to school. I was sorry for the little fellows. I told her that day that she'd better send them to the Old Harry than to Mr. Tayloe. You see I was as mad as fire about my report."

"And then?"

"I ran home and left her there, sitting on the step."

"Did you ever see her again?"

She hesitated visibly; the color came and

FLEA UNFOLDED IT AND GAVE A CRY OF SURPRISE.

went in the thin, sensitive face. She dropped her voice.

"She came to the spring next day. Mr. Tayloe sent me for a bucket of water. After school, you know. He said you *did* help me with that awful sum and made me stay in and do it all over again. I never felt so angry before. I wished that I could kill him. And Mrs. Fogg began palavering and I tried to get away from her. She *would* help me up the hill with the bucket, and I wasn't decently polite to her. When I got into the school-house there was my slate on the bench, where Mr. Tayloe had put it while I was gone, and he had rubbed out the sum I had done. Then—I think it was like being possessed of a devil, for my head went 'round and 'round and I got hot all over. For there he sat, with that horrid smile on his face, as if he were making fun of me when I had done my very best and been disgraced for nothing at all. I jumped up and threw the bucket on him and ran away as fast as I could. That's all. O Father! please don't let us talk any more about that horrible day!"

Her voice arose into a piteous cry.

"No, lassie, never again!"

He gathered her into his arms and held her there as he had in that wonderful ride through

the woods the night he found her asleep in the school-house. She sobbed herself calm upon the heart where there was always love for his children, and where she knew, at last, the warmest place was for her.

When he appeared below stairs he found his sister in the chamber alone, but for the sleeping baby whom she had offered to look after while the other children, in a gale of spirits, superintended and hindered the frying of the doughnuts.

"Does that amuse you, David?" asked Mrs. McLaren, smiling at the pains he took to tear a scrap of white paper into bits, all exactly the same size, and to throw them, one by one, into the fire.

Each was seized by the hot draught and whirled up the chimney.

"It pleases me—mightily!" he rejoined, his face as sunny as hers. "I am disposing of the last objection I had to putting my bit lassie into your hands. I can trust her the world over, now."

He sat down by his sister, stretching his long legs in front of him and locking his hands at the back of his head, with the air of one who has shaken off a burden.

"I've had a long talk with the bairnie, Jean.

I'm willing to trust her away from me. You'll do better for her than I can."

. . . . . .

"It will be a trial to your mother and myself to let you go," he said to Flea on Christmas-day, in telling her of Aunt Jean's wish to take her and Dee home with her. "We will bear it for the sake of the good you'll get."

What the trial was to himself nobody comprehended. All through the quiet winter that shut down upon the river lands early in January, the most momentous events to the father's heart were the weekly arrivals of the letters from his daughter. They were long, and, to him, wonderful. He was kept in touch with her home-life, her school, her reading, her sight-seeing, her growth in knowledge and her burning thirst for more knowledge. She sent him books now and then; his sister provided him with two weekly papers and a monthly magazine, but the short days and long evenings wore away tediously.

The months seemed like as many years in looking back upon them on a certain June morning when he and Flea set out for a ride on horseback. She had been at home but eighteen hours, and he had still to persuade himself from time to time that he was not dreaming.

He looked her over pridefully as they rode off from the house.

"You are more like yourself this morning, lassie. Last night you were paler and quieter than seemed just natural. I suppose you were tired after the journey."

Flea blushed and averted her face.

"I feel beautifully rested out to-day," she said. Honest as ever, she could not say more without revealing what would have pained his loyal heart.

I have made no secret of her faults, and I do not excuse what her father was never allowed to guess.

Her home-coming had been a dismay as well as a disappointment to her. Nothing had come to pass as she had expected and planned, except the look on her father's face when he had espied her on the deck of the boat, waving her hand to him on the wharf, and the long, silent hug she received as she sprang into his arms. She had never heard the word "disillusion," or she would have known better what the next few hours meant. Mr. Grigsby had come to the landing in a blue-bodied "carryall." A plank laid across the front served him for a seat. Two splint-bottomed chairs were set for the children, leaving room behind them for their

trunks. It was not heroinic, but it was natural that, seeing her late fellow-passengers eying the equipage from the boat, Flea grew hot with embarrassment and wished that her father had thought of borrowing a better-looking vehicle from Greenslope.

The road over which they jolted was rutty and straggling, the fences ungainly. Nothing was trimmed and well-kept to eyes used, for five months, to spick-and-span Philadelphia. Her own home was sadly unlike her recollection of it. It had been newly whitewashed in honor of her coming, but she had forgotten that there never were shutters at the windows. They stared at her like eyes without lids and lashes. The calico half-curtains were "poor-white-folksy," the furniture was scanty and common. Her mother wore a slate-colored calico. She was "partial to slate-colored calico." It kept its color, did not show dirt and looked so clean, when it *was* clean. She did not bethink herself, or she had never known, that slate is of all colors most trying to women of no particular complexion. Her hair was pulled back tightly from her temples and done at the back of her head in a knot that would not come undone of itself in a week. On her head was a cap of rusty, black cotton lace. Bea had

bedecked her fair self in a light blue lawn, short-sleeved and low upon the shoulders. A double string of wax beads was about her neck and a single string upon each wrist. Her yellow hair was braided and tucked up. Bea was fifteen and quite the young lady now. About her head was a narrow band of black velvet, fastened above her forehead with a breastpin containing a green glass stone. Bea thought it was an emerald. Flea knew that it was not, yet felt horribly ashamed that she could notice all these things, and that they dampened her spirits.

They had a "big supper," to which Dee's boyish appetite did abundant justice. Flea berated and despised herself for seeing that the coffee-pot was tin and was the boiler in which the coffee had been made, and that the handles of the two-tined forks were of bone; that her mother poured her coffee into her saucer to cool before drinking it, and that everything—fried chicken, ham, fish, preserves, cake, pudding, pie, frozen custard and waffles—was put on the table at once.

It was unkind, ungrateful, undaughterly, and every other "un" she could think of to let such trifles destroy the comfort of the first evening at home.

Her pillow was moistened with remorseful tears, and the more she hated herself for such meanness, fickleness, and ingratitude, the more plentiful was the flow of briny drops.

Things were more tolerable in the morning. With the elasticity of youth she adjusted ideas and feelings to suit her circumstances, or, as she put it to herself, she "came to her senses." She donned the neat habit her Aunt Jean had ordered for her and tripped down-stairs when the horses were ready, radiant with pleasurable anticipation. The habit found little favor in the sight of her mother and sister. They called the gray linen, braided with black, "Quaker-ish." To her father's eyes she looked the little lady from crown to toe.

The clover fields were aflush with bobbing blooms, and a thousand bees were swinging and humming above these; the hay was ripe for cutting; the cornfields shook glossy lances in the face of the sun; in the woods mocking-birds, cat-birds, and orioles were swelling throats and hearts with music; hares scampered fearlessly in the open road under the horses' feet, and striped ground-squirrels raced on the top rails of the fences for a mile at a time, just ahead of the riders.

"I must have been tired last night," repeated

Flea, filling her lungs with the scented air. "I didn't feel a bit like myself. I am all right again. How dear and beautiful everything is to-day. There's nothing like the country, after all. Especially the country in Old Virginia."

With that her tongue was loosened, and she opened to her indulgent confidant her hopes, aspirations, and plans. Aunt Jean was as gentle and tender as a mother to her; her teachers were wisdom and goodness personified; she had scores of nice friends; she was doing well in all her classes, and had taken two prizes on Examination Day, the first for Composition, the second for History.

"It's like a fairy-tale," she prattled on, happily. "When I was young and foolish I used to dream of such things as are coming to pass every day, and I take them as a matter of course until I stop to think how wonderful and nice it all is. I often call Aunt Jean 'my fairy godmother.'"

In return, her father talked of his hope of being his own master and a landholder by the time her school-days should be over, hopes he had shared with no one else, he said, not even her mother, who might be disappointed if they came to nothing.

"My canny little lassie can always be trusted," he said, fondly.

Happy, honored little Flea! Riding close beside him, his hand on the neck of her horse, her eyes, moist and beaming, upturned to his, she would not have exchanged places with a princess of the blood. The weakness and false pride of yesterday were recalled only to brighten, by contrast, the joys of to-day.

As the day neared noon the bird-music ceased and the stir of green leaves in the light wind did not rise above the thud of hoofs upon the dead leaves that had fallen and lain on the bridle-road for fifty winters. The crash of a falling tree, that might have been a mile away, boomed and echoed like the report of a cannon, and was a long time in dying upon the distant hills. From the virgin forest, where oaks and hickories locked arms above their heads, they emerged upon a swampy spot through which a fire had swept in April, leaving a deserted track behind it. Ferns and wild flowers were springing up, as though eager to hide the blackened ruins.

"The Major is having this swamp cleared," remarked Mr. Grigsby. "The men are about other work to-day, but they have been cutting in here all the week."

Rounding an evergreen thicket, they saw a horse harnessed to a low gig, which the riders recognized at once. The carriage was empty and the gray mare was tethered to the stump of a sapling. She neighed long and wistfully at sight of Mr. Grigsby. He patted her in passing.

"The Major cannot be far off," he said. "He is looking to see what we have been doing, I suppose. I am glad to see him show interest in plantation work once more. He never opens his lips to me on the subject, of course, but there is something heavy on his mind. The gossips say that he is bitterly opposed to Miss Emily's marrying Mr. Tayloe."

CHAPTER XI

FLEA'S horse threw up his head with a snort and wheeled partly around at the jerk upon the bridle; his rider flushed crimson, then grew white.

"Father!" she gasped. "What did you say? Miss Emily! *my* Miss Emily is going to marry that man!"

"So it is said, lassie. I'm afraid it is true. There has been talk of it all winter, but I don't think the Major had any idea of how things were going until lately. Early in May, Mr. Tayloe left Greenslope, and went to board at Mr. Thompson's. Of course, his moving from Greenslope, where he was so intimate, set tongues wagging, and then it came out that he and Miss Emily were engaged and that her father opposed the match. I have asked no questions, but I cannot help seeing that the Major is not himself, and how he is aging."

"*I* don't see how Miss Emily can disobey such a good father," said Flea, indignantly. "His little finger-nail is worth more than forty

thousand James Tayloes. If she knows how her father feels she will surely give up all notion of that little — *monster!*"

Her father looked amused.

"He isn't a monster, but a well-born, well-educated gentleman; not bad-looking and with a voice like a church organ. Your mother says he sang his way into Miss Emily's heart. I wonder the Major didn't suspect what might come of all their music and horseback rides and walks together, but he is so open-hearted and above-board himself that he probably set it down to young folks' natural enjoyment in each other's society. It hurts me to see him take it so hard. Miss Emily will be of age in a few months, and she can then marry anybody she chooses. Except that he has a hasty temper and an ugly way of showing it, I don't know that there is anything against him. She will have money enough for both. Her grandmother left her a nice little fortune besides what the Major can give her."

"Nothing against him!" burst forth Flea, passionately. "He is the wickedest man ever created. Mean, spiteful, deceitful, and cruel as a tiger. He looks like a tiger when his eyebrows draw together and his mouth draws up and the roots of his nose draw in. To think of

his daring to lift his eyes to my sweet, pretty, darling Miss Emily! If I were her brother, I'd shoot him sooner than he should have her."

"Lassie! lassie! that is strong language."

"Not half as strong as he deserves, father. You don't guess what a creature he is. Aunt Jean never wrote to you about it, for she did not want to distress you, but poor Dee couldn't go to school for a month after he went to Philadelphia. He had terrible pains in his head and was sick at the stomach all the time, and she had him examined by a great doctor there, who said he had been seriously injured by so much beating on the head. That a little more of it would have made him an idiot. That monster of cruelty used to whack the poor boy every day with his heavy ruler, because he was slow at his lessons. Dee cannot study long, now, without having a sick headache. He can never be a learned scholar. And I did *so* hope he would be a distinguished man! Instead of getting married, Mr. Tayloe ought to be put into the penitentiary. He deserves hanging—and worse."

The rush of hot words choked her.

Her father patted her shoulder, soothingly.

"Don't take it so to heart, dear child. It isn't like you to fly into such a passion."

"I never knew that I had a bad temper until he brought it out."

Flea could not be quieted. "He would have made me as wicked as himself if I hadn't fallen sick from his treatment of me, and then gone home with Aunt Jean. He will break Miss Emily's heart. He enjoys torturing helpless things as a cat likes to torture a mouse. Where is he now, that the school is closed for vacation?"

"I think he has gone home. I have not seen or heard of him for a week and more."

"I hope he will never come back. I hope he will die while he is away!" uttered Flea, savagely.

"Fie! fie on you!" said her father, trying to look stern. "You'll make me afraid of you if you get so blood-thirsty. Never meddle with people's love affairs, chick. It's worse than putting your fingers 'twixt bark and tree. Miss Emily knows her own business and has a fine high spirit of her own."

They were at the outer gate of the avenue leading to Greenslope, and he drew rein.

"Would you mind riding with me as far as the stables? I won't keep you long. Or, perhaps you will go up to the house and see the ladies? They always ask kindly after you."

Mrs. Duncombe was not at home, said a small darky who was pretending to sweep one corner of the piazza. "Miss 'Liza and Miss Em'ly is out-o'-doors, somewhar'," he added, staring at her until the round black eyes almost slipped out of the lids.

"Don't you know me, Peter?" asked Flea, kindly.

"Yaas'm. But you done got mighty pretty sence you been away."

Flea's head was higher, her heart and step lighter with natural pleasure in the honest praise, as she ran down the steps to look for the young ladies. She had determined to reason with Miss Emily, and could go about it in better style as the well-dressed niece of her Philadelphia aunt, than the shabby child of the overseer would have presumed to do. She was glad she had grown prettier. She wanted to look like a lady.

In crossing the lawn she saw, midway in the broad avenue cutting the grounds in two, what brought her courage down on the run and her hopes with it. She turned aside hastily into an arbor thickly draped with vines to take counsel with herself as to her next movement. Miss Emily, dressed in white, a garden hat set jauntily above her curls, sat upon a settee by Mr.

Tayloe. Across the avenue Miss Eliza occupied another settee and seemed absorbed in a book. Miss Emily was holding a handkerchief to her eyes, while Mr. Tayloe talked earnestly to her. Groups of children were playing on the other side of the lawn. Mr. Tayloe must be pretty confident of his ground to show himself in the sight of so many people.

After five minutes of embarrassed waiting, Flea was on the point of going back to her horse unobserved when Mr. Tayloe got up, stepped across the avenue and shook hands in brotherly fashion with Miss Eliza, then, Miss Emily at his side, strolled down the walk in the direction of Flea's hiding-place. They passed so near to it that she could have knocked his hat off with her riding-whip. He was serious, but as bland as the plait between his eyebrows would allow him to look. He was talking low and impressively.

"All you have to do is to be resolute," was all Flea could hear.

"That is more easily said than done," Miss Emily began. The rest was lost to the eavesdropper.

Her blood was at the boiling-point by the time the young lady returned alone. A smile hovered about her red lips, although her eyes

were still wet. Flea stepped out of the arbor.

"Miss Emily!"

"Mercy on us!" in a faint scream. "Why, it is Flea Grigsby, as sure as I'm alive! Did you drop from the clouds? How you have grown and how *nice* you look! Ain't you going to kiss me, child?"

The caress was almost wasted upon the excited girl.

"Miss Emily!" driving straight at the point. "I have something particular to say to you. Won't you come in here?"

Miss Emily followed her into the summer-house, dropped upon a seat and drew her dress aside to make room for her guest.

Flea spoke fast and hurriedly, but her voice did not shake. She was too much wrought up to be diffident.

"Miss Emily! they tell me you are going to marry Mr. Tayloe. You don't know how I love you. I can't remember the time when I didn't love and almost worship you. You've always been so kind and sweet that I couldn't have helped loving you, even if you hadn't been so beautiful."

Miss Emily leaned back on the bench, well-pleased and smiling.

"Oh, *come* now, you've learned how to flatter in Philadelphia," she simpered, hitting Flea with the handkerchief that had wiped the tears from the blue eyes a little while ago. "And *who*, I should like to know, has been fibbing to you about my getting married?"

Flea seized upon both the pretty hands, her face one flash of ecstasy.

"I might have known it couldn't be true. Oh-h-h!" heaving a long, quivering sigh of relief. "If you only knew what I suffered when I heard you were to marry him! I couldn't bear the thought."

"You jealous little puss!"

Flea had sunk to her knees upon the gravelly floor of the arbor, and was gazing worshipfully into her idol's face. It was like the coming true of another fairy-dream when the dainty white hands were laid, one on each side of her flushed cheeks, and Miss Emily kissed her between the eyes.

"You unreasonable little *monkey!* Do you want me to die an old *maid?* I declare" — inspecting the braided front of the habit-waist — "you look *real* fashionable. And you used to be *such* a tom-boy that your poor mother threatened to make oznaburg frocks for you. But go on. Then you won't let me marry anybody?"

"I don't mean that," Flea protested. "But I heard that you were engaged to Mr. Tayloe, and it made me perfectly miserable, and I felt that if I could talk to you for five minutes you would change your mind. I'm so happy that it is nothing but a gossip's story."

"What have you against poor Mr. Tayloe, besides his admiration for a foolish little nobody like me?"

Flea raised herself on her knees to bring her eyes on a level with her companion's. Her young face darkened.

"You are not foolish or a nobody. You would be foolish if you were to marry that meanest, cruelest, hardest-hearted of all men. And you would be a nobody — worse than a nobody — when once he had you in his power. Your brothers can tell you how he used to whip the boys and ferule the girls' hands until they were blistered — and he grinning all the time. He tortures people for the love of torturing. He is a bully, and a coward, and a demon——"

"Are you calling Mr. Tayloe all these names?" interposed the listener, tartly.

"Yes, Miss Em——"

Before she could utter another syllable, her idol drew away to get a better reach and slapped her with all her might, first upon one

cheek, then upon the other, until her astonished ears rang like an alarm-bell, then pushed her off so violently that she fell backward to the ground. Springing up, wild with the shock and horror of it all, she faced a red-haired fury, with glaring eyes and distorted features.

"You impudent, low-lived minx!" said tones as vulgar as those of a scolding negress. "You ought to be tied up and whipped until you take back every word you have said. Who are *you* that you come here to insult a gentleman in a lady's hearing? This comes of my taking notice of a low-down overseer's daughter, who is meaner than the dirt under my feet! Begone! and if you ever show your face here again, I'll set the dogs on you!"

Flea did not quite know where she was or what she was doing until she found herself in the saddle, gathering up the reins, and telling the negro who had brought the horse up to the inner gate for her to "tell Mr. Grigsby he would find her waiting for him under the big oak-tree on the road."

She managed to get the words out without breaking down, and galloped along the avenue as if the dogs were already on her heels.

Her father rejoined her in less than half an

hour. She sat motionless upon the horse under the tree. The reins lay upon the docile animal's neck and he was grazing in quiet satisfaction, unnoticed by his mistress. Mr. Grigsby must have remarked her white face and swollen eyes had he been less engrossed in his own thoughts.

"Ready, lassie?" was all he said, and "Yes, father," was her only reply.

They jogged, side by side, for a mile before either spoke again. The bitterest cup Experience had ever held to poor Flea's lips was pressed to them now, and the draught was the very wine of astonishment to her soul. Five months with Aunt Jean and in a Philadelphia school had not cured her of ambitious dreams. Miss Em'ly had still stood with her as the loveliest, daintiest, and gentlest of women. She had described her to her schoolmates as her "patron saint" and her "guardian angel." She had not doubted what would be the outcome of the plain talk she had sought with her angel. Miss Emily would be shocked at first, perhaps incredulous, but in the end she would fall weeping upon her neck and sob in her ear, "My benefactress! from what an abyss of misery you have saved me!"

Her dream had crashed into dust and ashes

about her head. Something was gone forever out of her past, present, and future. There was no Miss Em'ly in all time for her, and, worst of all, there never had been. The shrill coarseness of the angry woman's speech, her inflamed face and threatening eyes, haunted Flea like a night-mare.

Her father aroused himself at length.

"I am a dull companion for you, lassie," he said, threading her horse's mane with his fingers. "But something has gone wrong—'agley,' as we Scotchmen say—at Greenslope, that's set me to thinking about other wrong-doings that took place months ago. The dairy was robbed last night of a matter of fifty pounds of butter. The dogs made no noise, so the thieves were not strangers. The Major and Mr. Robert Duncombe searched the plantation this morning and found nothing. The thieves, most likely, had a boat on the shore and made off with the butter up to Richmond. You noticed, didn't you? as we rode by to-day that the haunted house had been pulled down?"

"No, sir," answered Flea, in a dull tone. She had not seemed to listen until he asked the question.

"You used to sing a song about it when you

had the fever," resumed the father, in a would-be sprightly manner. "It began

'It stands beside the weedy way,—'

and was really tolerable poetry, as far as it went. It was queer it should run in your head then, when the Major and I had just found that the cabin was used as a hiding-place for stolen goods. It was a sort of robber's cave, and we suspected the Fogg family to be the robbers. Mr. Tayloe's watch and chain, that he had lost the day before in the school-house, were there, in a bag packed to be carried off. You recollect that Mrs. Fogg was at the school-house that day?"

Flea gave no sign of interest or surprise. She only said, in sullen bitterness, "I am sorry he ever found it."

"My child!"

"I am, father! I suppose I am wicked for feeling it, but I wish him all the harm in the world. The Foggs may be thieves and liars and a hundred other dreadful things. The worst of them is a saint compared with him."

"We will let that pass. I promised once never to speak of that day again. I beg your pardon, my dear," said the father, gravely. There was no use in arguing against the girl's prejudice, in

which, to tell the truth, he was beginning to share. "I was about to say that some strong measures must be taken to find out if the Foggs are really the ringleaders of this gang, with the negroes to help them, or if this wretched family do all the stealing themselves. They have been tolerably quiet since the cabin was cleared out and pulled down, but this dairy business looks as if they were beginning business again. If we meet the Major on the road I will speak to him about it. I wish now I had looked him up in the swamp when we saw Nell and the gig."

They relapsed into silence. The country was stilling into the hush of a summer noon. But for the indescribable consciousness of the growth of green and flowering things that fills June days and nights—something which is not motion and surely is not rest, and is, most of all, like the full, slow contented breathing of the world on which we live and that lives with us—everything except themselves and their horses seemed to be asleep as they passed into the grass-grown swamp-road.

"The day is getting hot," observed Mr. Grigsby, presently. "If the breeze should die away entirely we may expect a thunderstorm this afternoon."

At that instant the neigh of a horse, clear and prolonged, pierced the noon-tide; another moment brought them again in sight of the low-hung gig and mare they had seen in the same spot an hour-and-a-half ago. Nell had not stirred from her tracks except to paw up the earth about her front right foot in anxiety or impatience. She looked around and neighed piteously.

"Nell is getting hungry—poor thing!" said the overseer, stopping to pat her glossy neck. "The flies are troubling her, too. That is the worst of a blooded horse. The skin is as thin as a baby's. So, old lady!" as she threw her head down and up, and again whinnied. He went on, brushing off the flies from her head and sides while he talked. "These swamp-flies bite sharply. Any other horse would try to get away. She is the best broken beast in the State. If a cannon were fired off at her ear she would jump, but she'd never run. The Major broke her himself. It's odd where he is all this time."

A vague uneasiness took hold of him. He looked about him anxiously.

A large spruce-tree lay within ten feet of the gig. The branchy top had bent saplings and bushes down in its fall; the ground for many

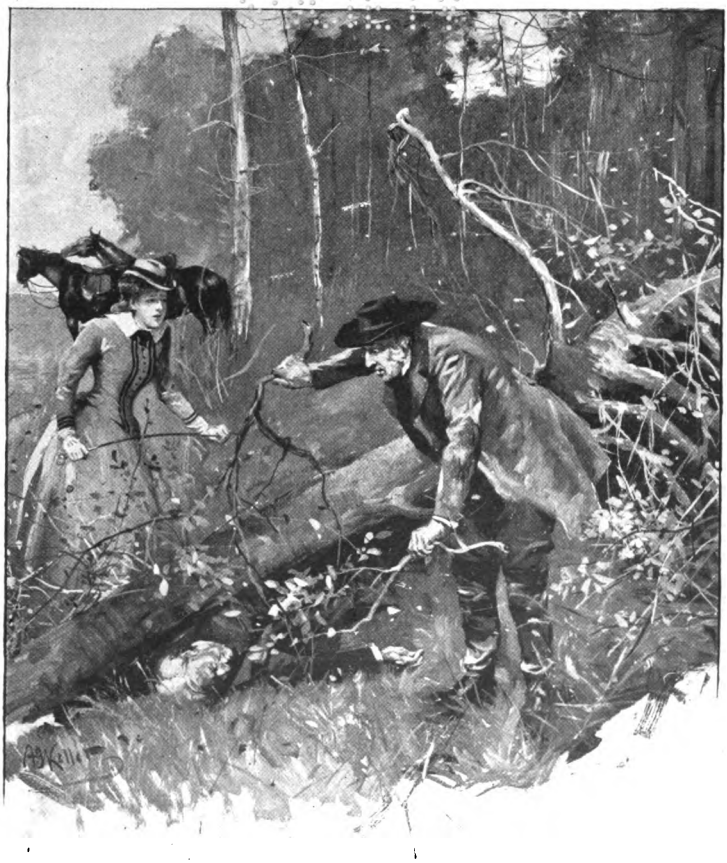
yards around was strewed with leaves and twigs. Flea glanced idly at the lower end of the trunk. She did not wish to meet Major Duncombe with the memory of the encounter with his daughter fresh in her mind. Still, if her father meant to wait for him, she had no choice. She could never tell how she chanced to notice that the trunk was hollow, and had been partly cut through by the axe. Beyond the cut the wood and bark were splintered roughly.

"Do you suppose Nell could have been here when that tree fell?" she said. "Could that have been what we heard as we came through the woods this morning? O Father!"

He looked in the direction of her pointing finger, threw himself from his saddle, and hurried into the swamp.

A man's hat, lying just beyond the branches of the fallen tree, had attracted Flea's eye. When she had slipped from her horse and followed her father into the thicket, he was tearing away the boughs in frantic haste from Major Duncombe's face. The upper part of the prostrate trunk lay right across his chest.

It must have killed him instantly.



HE WAS TEARING AWAY THE BOUGHS IN FRANTIC HASTE.

CHAPTER XII

Six years had passed since Major Duncombe's sudden death. He was the most popular man in the county and beloved by high and low, yet the gap made by his going was apparently filled.

Robert, the eldest son, inherited the homestead, and at his marriage, two years later, his mother went to live with her daughter Eliza, who had married a Richmond lawyer. By the terms of her father's will, Emily Duncombe received a valuable farm, embracing the house that had been built for the overseer.

Robert Duncombe would gladly have retained Mr. Grigsby in his employ, but the thrifty Scotchman had other views for himself. For years he had been putting aside money for the purchase of a home for his family, and a small plantation, a few miles back from the river, happened to be for sale about the time Major Duncombe died. Mrs. McLaren advanced a considerable sum to make up the nec-

essary amount for the purchase. At the date at which our story re-opens, the Grigsbys had lived for five years and a half in the comfortable brick house attached to the Oatley Farm. Perfect June days had come again. Bees were rifling the red clover-tops, and everything that could blossom had burst into bloom as the birds into song. The great fields of oats from which the place took its name ruffled before the breeze as green billows are rocked and crisped by sea-winds; the soft blue of the sky was unclouded, and heaven's own peace was upon the face of the earth.

Something—and much—of this was in Felicia Grigsby's mind as she rode dreamily through the familiar scenes the day after she had returned home "for good." That was the way her father put it, and she echoed it heartily. Not cheerily as yet. Aunt Jean had joined husband and child in the world that makes up for the losses and mistakes of this. Flea's new black dress told that the grief of parting with her best friend was still fresh in her heart. Mrs. McLaren's property was divided equally between her brother, her namesake niece, and her nephew David.

Nobody called him "Dee" now. The diminutive did not suit the stalwart youth of seven-

teen who rode beside his sister to-day, and did most of the talking for the first hour. He was tall for his years, and well knit together, with a frank face his sister thought handsome.

"You were disappointed that I didn't go to college," he was saying, "but I was cut out and made up for a farmer, and nothing else. The smell of a ploughed field is the sweetest perfume in the world to me. When I see my crops growing, I feel my soul growing with them. Where will you find anything in town equal to that, now?"

They were on the top of a hill overlooking the fertile river lands backed by a line of forest; the noble James, full to the brim after the May rains, glittered in the sun and made a golden rim for the picture.

"We have the 'sweet fields,' the 'living green' and the 'rolling flood' of the hymn," said Flea, softly. "Our Virginia is a bonnie state. I am thankful that it is 'my ain countree.' Why, there are the roof and chimneys of the old house! I did not know they could be seen from here. How strange it seems that we should be living anywhere else. How much stranger that Miss Emily should be living there!"

"The house is twice as big as it used to be,"

replied David. "That fellow made it his business, forthwith, to alter it as much as he could. You can't make him madder than by speaking of it as 'Grigsby's,' or, worse yet, the 'overseer's house.' It is 'Broadlawn' now, if you please, and the model place of the neighborhood. But the old name sticks to it, and all the closer because it frets him. I never speak to him. I cut him upon principle. I promised myself over six years ago to thrash him as soon as I got big enough, and I'm on the lookout for an excuse to do it."

"When the time comes, give him a lash or two in my name, there's a dear boy! All the same, he did us a good turn without meaning it. If he had been half decent with us we might have stayed in the old-field school for years. When it and the old-field schoolmaster are things of the past nobody will believe that such abuses existed in a Christian community. I am sorry for the Tayloe children."

"Red-heads, all three of them," said David. "With tempers to match, so I am told. You wouldn't know their mother. She has broken terribly."

"Who can wonder at it? I'd like to ride around that way, if you don't mind. By the school-house and the spring, and by what was

the Fogg place, and to see the short cut we used to take coming home from school. Heigho! how long ago it all seems."

She said "heigho!" again, and with a sadder intonation, in crossing the bridge from which she had been shot. No other picture of the past haunted her so persistently to-day as the vision of the "Miss Em'ly" of her childish adoration. They visited the empty school-house, disused for two years. The shingles were warping and loosening like neglected teeth; the door hung by one hinge; the steps were rotting into holes. Flea rode up close to the door and looked into the deserted room. Benches were gone and the teacher's desk and chair. She had seen Miss Emily there but once, yet she recalled more vividly than any other image that of the pretty girl in her blue riding-habit and cap, and how she had befriended the forlorn little victim of a tyrant's temper.

Since the incident of the arbor she had not spoken or thought of Miss Emily when she could help it. Memories such as those that visited her now took the sting out of what had happened there, and made her gentler in judgment. Far down in her heart the old-time tenderness awoke and stirred.

"You say she has changed very much?" she puzzled David by asking, as the horses turned in at a branch of the main road leading to the overseer's house.

David stared for a moment.

"Who is 'she?' Oh, you mean Mrs. Tayloe. More than anybody can believe without seeing her. Maybe we *will* see her as we go by."

"I hope not," said Flea, nervously. "I'd rather recollect her as she was at her best."

Nevertheless, she brought the horse down to a slow walk in passing the gate; her eyes lingered wistfully upon house and grounds. The dwelling had been raised to three stories; it was painted white and had green blinds; a porch, covered with vines, ran across the front and two sides. The turf of the yard was like green velvet, and three little negroes, two girls and a boy, dressed as for company, were picking up leaves and twigs about the front steps.

"Look at that, will you?" exclaimed David. "He is training them to be house servants. They are scrubbed within an inch of their lives, and packed into their best clothes every morning, and put through a sort of drill out there. They mustn't speak, unless when spoken to, while they are there, and if they overlook

a single straw, or get their clothes dirty, they are whipped. Will you look at the poor little rascals, now?"

The pickaninnies, the oldest of whom could not have been ten, drew up in a row, holding each other's hands, and as the riders were opposite to them, dropped a comical little courtesy all at once. They were as solemn as owls, and there was a mournful air about the whole performance that kept the young Grigsbys from laughing.

"I feel more like crying," Flea declared, when they were out of hearing. "It is worse than dancing dogs and trained canaries. I sha'n't get their patient eyes and their every-day Sunday clothes out of my head for a week."

David's reply was checked by the patter of feet behind them. The boy they had seen was tearing up the road at the top of his speed.

"Please, ma'am! please, suh!" he panted. "Mistes say you mus' please come back an' see her. She say to tell you Marster done gone to de Cotehouse for all day, an' she can' let you go by 'thout seein' her, 'pon no 'count."

Flea and David exchanged glances and turned their horses about. Mrs. Tayloe was leaning over the gate, waiting for them. David had said truly that they would never have

known her. The auburn hair was faded to the color of a half-burned brick, and the gloss was gone; the blue eyes were sunken, yet seemed larger than of old in the thin face and gave her the look of a hunted thing — a look that went to Flea's heart. She sprang from her horse into arms held eagerly out to receive her.

"Miss Emily! dear Miss Emily!" The words were choked by a gush of feeling which she tried to cover up with a laugh. "Mrs. Tayloe, I mean!"

"Don't call me that, child. I wish I could be a girl again — like you!" holding her at arm's length and gazing admiringly at the graceful figure and glowing face. "I saw you go by from the window, but I wouldn't have known you if your brother hadn't been with you. You've just *got* to stay to dinner. There's nobody here to-day to be afraid of. When the cat 's away the mice will play."

She talked fast in a high, unnatural key. Voice and laugh had few familiar tones to the listeners. Flea hastened to say that their mother expected them home to dinner, and that their sister would come down the river early in the afternoon.

"She married a Richmond man, didn't she?" ran on the hostess. "*Such* a pretty girl as she

was! Cecily! go tell your daddy to fix a nice snack on a waiter and bring it out here for this lady and gentleman, you hear? and to be *mighty* quick about it. Sit down, both of you. It's a heap pleasanter here than in the house. Mr. Tayloe can't *bear* to eat out of doors, or I'd *always* have breakfast and supper on the porch. It's one of his hundreds of notions, and I *daren't* have so much as a biscuit eaten out here when he is at home. He was cut out for an old maid and a fussy one at that. The very baby is afraid to cry where he can hear her. What a goose your pretty sister was to get married."

"She doesn't think so," smiled Flea.

"Wait awhile, and you'll see. That is if she tells the truth. Most women don't. I've got to the point where I don't *care*. How good-looking you are, Flea! Not exactly pretty, but stylish, and that's better. Beauty doesn't count for *anything* after a woman is married."

David had not sat down, and looked so uncomfortable while his hostess talked that his sister came to his help.

"You'd like to look at the garden and stable, I know, David. We will excuse you, but don't be gone long. I can stay but half an hour or so."

"I'll send for you when the snack comes," cried Mrs. Tayloe after him, as he went down the steps—and to Flea—"Now, we can have a comfortable, confidential chat."

David had said she had "broken." Flea thought that "frayed" would be the better word. The high, gay spirits had fled with youth and beauty. Her temper was quick; her husband's was violent. Their quarrels were the talk of the neighborhood, and a rumor was gaining ground that the wife was partially insane.

Grown-up Flea had never breathed to a living soul one word of what had happened in the summer-house six years ago. She was as loyal to those she loved as when the child had refused to tell how she got the scratch on her cheek. When flushed by heat or exercise, a thin white scar, hardly wider than a hair, still showed the line the shot had taken. It was distinct now, and Mrs. Tayloe stroked it with a finger which was no longer plump and soft.

"I declare you'll carry that scar to your *grave!* What a *game* little thing you were! And how *shamefully* I treated you the last time I saw you! I was just *crazy* over that man — the biggest fool that ever lived. I've paid for it since! O, I've *paid* for it!"

A scarlet spot flashed out upon each cheek; her voice arose until it cracked.

"If I had *only* listened to you that day, I would have been a happier and a better woman. Poor, dear papa said I was bewitched, and I *really* think I was. Mr. Tayloe has quarrelled with my brothers, and not *one* of them ever comes near me. Robert told me once to provoke the man to strike me, and *then* my brothers would make the law step in. But there are the children, you see. I *can't* disgrace them!"

"Dear Miss Emily," pleaded Flea, her eyes full of tears. "Don't talk of these things. You are not well, and thinking of old times excites you. Where are the children? I want to see them. They must be a great comfort to you."

Mrs. Tayloe shivered at intervals, hysterically. She caught her breath at every other word.

"Comfort! They are a part of my *torment*. He will manage them to suit himself. Do you know that he whipped my little Lizzie when she was only a *month* old, for crying with the colic? She was the oldest, you know, and her father said he couldn't begin discipline *too* early. He whipped her with a willow switch. My

mother told him he was a *brute*, and he turned her out of the house. The house my father gave me!

"Set that down on the table here, Hampton, and you, Ned, run and tell Mr. David Grigsby that the snack is ready."

"He never eats between meals," said Flea, taking the chair Mrs. Tayloe pushed up to the table—"and I ought not, but I am so hungry and everything looks so tempting that I cannot refuse."

It was a lavish luncheon and Mrs. Tayloe took a childish delight in pressing her delicacies upon the visitor.

"Hampton!" she said, after awhile, with a touch of her girlish vivacity—"go get a bottle of that shrub your master makes such a *fuss* over. I *must* have Miss Grigsby taste it. Here is the cupboard key."

When it was brought she went on with the same feverish gayety:

"He made it himself four years ago, and he gets stingier and stingier with it every year. It really is *mighty* good, 'though I wouldn't tell him so to save his life. He'd *kill* me if he knew I'd touched it."

"Don't have it opened, please!" begged Flea, checking the hand that held out the corkscrew

to the butler. "I really would rather not drink it. I don't care for liquor of any kind."

Mrs. Tayloe shook her hand off with a shriek of laughter.

"I believe you are *afraid* of him to this day. Hampton won't tell on us. It isn't the *first* secret he and I have kept from our lord and master. Open it!" to the grinning man. "Now, fill two glasses—one for Miss Grigsby and one for me. Take yours, Flea! I'll give you a toast. *Single* blessedness forever, and confusion to all husbands!"

Her elbow was grasped from behind as she lifted the glass above her head. Flea had set hers down, untasted, having seen who was coming up through the hall from the back-door. At the same moment David Grigsby hurried around the corner of the house. He had had a glimpse of Mr. Tayloe as he rode into the stable-yard by way of a plantation road, and hoped to reach the porch in season to get his sister away without encountering him.

The youth stopped short, confounded by what he saw. The wife tried to rise from the table, but was held down in her chair by the hand pressed upon her shoulder. The other hand did not relax the clutch upon her elbow. The sleeve of her summer dress had fallen back

when she raised the glass above her head, and David saw the flesh whiten under the cruel fingers. Flea gathered up the skirt of her habit and retreated to the steps, pausing there, as if reluctant to leave her friend in the power of the angry man. His face literally blackened; his eyes were livid; the sneer that drew the corners of his mouth upward lifted the lips from strong, sharp teeth, like a hound's.

"So ho!" he hissed between them. "This is what goes on while I am away."

He got no further. David and Flea never agreed in their accounts of what happened next. The brother thought that the wife's struggle was to free herself from the savage grip upon her elbow. Flea saw the look of hate and fear with which the frantic woman dashed glass and liquor into her husband's face. He did not move so much as to wipe the red streams from his eyes. He spoke slowly and in deadly calm:

"You have been taking a lesson from your distinguished visitor, have you?" glancing with his evil smile at the horror-stricken girl. "Let her take one in return from this!"

Shifting his right hand from her elbow to the wrist, with the left he bent her hand backward until the spectators heard the wrist break.

It was done so quickly that David's bound up the steps was simultaneous with the scream with which Mrs. Tayloe fell fainting into Flea's arms. In a flash the young farmer dragged the master of the house by the collar down the steps, thence along the gravel walk to the road. A blind instinct of what was conventional in such cases warned him not to beat a man upon his own premises. Once upon the highway, David stayed hand and whip no longer. Holding the elder and smaller man down upon the ground, he then and there paid off old and new scores. His whip was new and tough, the arm that wielded it was lusty. Every lash cut through the light cloth of coat and vest, and slashed the shirt into ribbons down to the skin.

. . . . . .

Felicia Grigsby was a married woman with a David and a Jean of her own when she told me the story of her Old-Field School-Days. Even then she could not describe without deep emotion the scene I have just sketched.

"No," she said, in answer to my exclamation of indignant horror, "his wife did not leave him, even after that. The act of infamous cruelty seemed to subdue her utterly. I never saw

her again. I dared not visit her, and she never went beyond her yard-gate, even to church. It was said she had fallen into a gentle melancholy. I am thankful, for her sake, that it was gentle. Her children loved her dearly. I hope they brought some balm to the wounded spirit.

"The youngest was ten years old when his mother died. The week after her burial her husband sold the plantation, through a real estate agent, to my brother David. A month later he left the county and State and removed to Louisiana. I hear that he has grown rich there on a sugar plantation. He says that the climate of Virginia did not agree with him. That was lucky for him—and for Virginia!"

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