



***DINAH MARIA
MULOCK CRAIK***

***MISTRESS
AND MAID***

Dinah Maria Mulock Craik

Mistress and Maid

A Household Story

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I.

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She was a rather tall, awkward, and strongly-built girl of about fifteen. This was the first impression the "maid" gave to her "mistresses," the Misses Leaf, when she entered their kitchen, accompanied by her mother, a widow and washer-woman, by name Mrs. Hand. I must confess, when they saw the damsel, the ladies felt a certain twinge of doubt as to whether they had not been rash in offering to take her; whether it would not have been wiser to have gone on in their old way—now, alas! grown into a very old way, so as almost to make them forget they had ever had any other—and done without a servant still.

Many consultations had the three sisters held before such a revolutionary extravagance was determined on. But Miss Leaf was beginning both to look and to feel "not so young as she had been;" Miss Selina ditto; though, being still under forty, she would not have acknowledged it for the world. And Miss Hilary young, bright, and active as she was, could by no possibility do every thing that was to be done in the little establishment: be, for instance, in three places at once—in the school-room, teaching little boys and girls, in the kitchen cooking dinner, and in the rooms up stairs busy at house-maid's work. Besides, much of her time was spent in waiting upon "poor Selina," who frequently was, or fancied her self, too ill to take any part in either the school or house duties.

Though, the thing being inevitable, she said little about it, Miss Leaf's heart was often sore to see Hilary's pretty hands smeared with blacking of grates, and roughened with scouring of floors. To herself this sort of thing had become natural—but Hilary!

All the time of Hilary's childhood, the youngest of the family had of course, been spared all house-work; and afterward her studies had left no time for it. For she was a clever girl, with a genuine love of knowledge Latin, Greek, and even the higher branches of arithmetic and mathematics, were not beyond her range; and this she found much more interesting than washing dishes or sweeping floors. True, she always did whatever domestic duty she was told to do; but her bent was not in the household line. She had only lately learned to "see dust," to make a pudding, to iron a shirt; and, moreover, to reflect, as she woke up to the knowledge of how these things should be done, and how necessary they were, what must have been her eldest sister's lot during all these twenty years! What pains, what weariness, what eternal toil must Johanna have silently endured in order to do all those things which till now had seemed to do themselves!

Therefore, after much cogitation as to the best and most prudent way to amend matters, and perceiving with her clear common sense that, willing as she might be to work in the kitchen, her own time would be much more valuably spent in teaching their growing school. It was Hilary who these Christmas holidays, first started the bold idea, "We must have a servant;" and therefore, it being necessary to begin with a very small servant on very low wages, (£3 per

annum was, I fear the maximum), did they take this Elizabeth Hand. So, hanging behind her parent, an anxious-eyed, and rather sad-voiced woman, did Elizabeth enter the kitchen of the Misses Leaf.

The ladies were all there. Johanna arranging the table for their early tea: Selina lying on the sofa trying to cut bread and butter: Hilary on her knees before the fire, making the bit of toast, her eldest sister's one luxury. This was the picture that her three mistresses presented to Elizabeth's eyes: which, though they seemed to notice nothing, must, in reality, have noticed every thing.

"I've brought my daughter, ma'am, as you sent word you'd take on trial," said Mrs. Hand, addressing herself to Selina, who, as the tallest, the best dressed, and the most imposing, was usually regarded by strangers as the head of the family.

"Oh. Joanna, my dear."

Miss Leaf came forward, rather uncertainly, for she was of a shy nature, and had been so long accustomed to do the servant's work of the household, that she felt quite awkward in the character of mistress. Instinctively she hid her poor hands, that would at once have betrayed her to the sharp eyes of the working-woman, and then, ashamed of her momentary false pride, laid them outside her apron and sat down.

"Will you take a chair, Mrs. Hand? My sister told you. I believe all our requirements We only want a good, intelligent girl. We are willing to teach her every thing."

"Thank you, kindly; and I be willing and glad for her to learn, ma'am," replied the mother, her sharp and rather free

tone subdued in spite of herself by the gentle voice of Miss Leaf. Of course, living in the same country town, she knew all about the three school-mistresses, and how till now they had kept no servant. "It's her first place, and her'll be awk'ard at first, most like. Hold up your head, Lizabeth."

"Is her name Elizabeth?"

"Far too long and too fine," observed Selina from the sofa. "Call her Betty."

"Any thing you please, Miss; but I call her Lizabeth. It wor my young missis' name in my first place, and I never had a second."

"We will call her Elizabeth," said Miss Leaf, with the gentle decision she could use on occasion.

There was a little more discussion between the mother and the future mistress as to holidays, Sundays, and so on, during which time the new servant stood silent and impassive in the door-way between the back kitchen and the kitchen, or, as it is called in those regions, the house-place.

As before said, Elizabeth was by no means, a personable girl, and her clothes did not set her off to advantage. Her cotton frock hung in straight lines down to her ankles, displaying her clumsily shod feet and woolen stockings; above it was a pinafore—a regular child's pinafore, of the cheap, strong, blue-speckled print which in those days was generally worn. A little shabby shawl, pinned at the throat, and pinned very carelessly and crookedly, with an old black bonnet, much too small for her large head and her quantities of ill kept hair, completed the costume. It did not

impress favorably a lady who, being, or rather having been very handsome herself, was as much alive to appearances as the second Miss Leaf.

She made several rather depreciatory observations, and insisted strongly that the new servant should only be taken "on trial," with no obligation to keep her a day longer than they wished. Her feeling on the matter communicated itself to Johanna, who closed the negotiation with Mrs. Hand, by saying.

"Well, let us hope your daughter will suit us. We will give her a fair chance at all events."

"Which is all I can ax for, Miss Leaf. Her bean't much to look at, but her's willin' sharp, and her's never told me a lie in her life. Courtesy to thy missis, and say thee'It do thy best, Lizabeth."

Pulled forward Elizabeth did courtesy, but she never offered to speak. And Miss Leaf, feeling that for all parties the interview had better be shortened, rose from her chair.

Mrs. Hand took the hint and departed, saying only, "Good-by, Lizabeth," with a nod, half-encouraging, half-admonitory, which Elizabeth silently returned. That was all the parting between mother and daughter; they neither kissed nor shook hands, which undemonstrative farewell somewhat surprised Hilary.

Now, Miss Hilary Leaf had all this while gone on toasting. Luckily for her bread the fire was low and black; meantime, from behind her long drooping curls (which Johanna would not let her "turn up," though she was twenty), she was making her observations on the new servant. It might be that, possessing more head than the one and more heart

than the other, Hilary was gifted with deeper perception of character than either of her sisters, but certainly her expression, as she watched Elizabeth, was rather amused and kindly that dissatisfied.

"Now, girl, take off your bonnet," said Selina, to whom Johanna had silently appealed in her perplexity as to the next proceeding with regard to the new member of the household.

Elizabeth obeyed, and then stood, irresolute, awkward, and wretched to the last degree, at the furthest end of the house-place.

"Shall I show you where to hang up your things?" said Hilary, speaking for the first time; and at the new voice, so quick, cheerful, and pleasant, Elizabeth visibly started.

Miss Hilary rose from her knees, crossed the kitchen, took from the girl's unresisting hands the old black bonnet and shawl, and hung them up carefully on a nail behind the great eight-day clock. It was a simple action, done quite without intention, and accepted without acknowledgment, except one quick glance of that keen, yet soft grey eye; but years and years after Elizabeth reminded Hilary of it.

And now Elizabeth stood forth in her own proper likeness, unconcealed by bonnet or shawl, or maternal protection. The pinafore scarcely covered her gaunt neck and long arms; that tremendous head of rough, dusky hair was evidently for the first time gathered into a comb. Thence elf locks escaped in all directions, and were forever being pushed behind her ears, or rubbed (not smoothed; there was nothing smooth about her) back from her forehead, which, Hilary noticed, was low, broad, and full. The rest of

her face, except the before-mentioned eyes was absolutely and undeniably plain. Her figure, so far as the pinafore exhibited it, was undeveloped and ungainly, the chest being contracted and the shoulders rounded, as if with carrying children or other weights while still a growing girl. In fact, nature and circumstances had apparently united in dealing unkindly with Elizabeth Hand.

Still here she was; and what was to be done with her?

Having sent her with the small burden, which was apparently all her luggage, to the little room—formerly a box-closet—where she was to sleep, the Misses Leaf—or as facetious neighbors called them, the Miss Leaves—took serious counsel together over their tea.

Tea itself suggested the first difficulty. They were always in the habit of taking that meal, and indeed every other, in the kitchen. It saved time, trouble, and fire, besides leaving the parlor always tidy for callers, chiefly pupils' parents, and preventing these latter from discovering that the three orphan daughters of Henry Leaf, Esq., solicitor, and sisters of Henry Leaf, Junior, Esq., also solicitor, but whose sole mission in life seemed to have been to spend every thing, make every body miserably, marry, and die, that these three ladies did always wait upon themselves at meal-time, and did sometimes breakfast without butter, and dine without meat. Now this system would not do any longer.

"Besides, there is no need for it," said Hilary, cheerfully. "I am sure we can well afford both to keep and to feed a servant, and to have a fire in the parlor every day. Why not take our meals there, and sit there regularly of evenings?"

"We must," added Selina, decidedly. "For my part, I couldn't eat, or sew, or do any thing with that great hulking girl sitting starting opposite, or standing; for how could we ask her to sit with us? Already, what must she have thought of us—people who take tea in the kitchen?"

"I do not think that matters," said the eldest sister, gently, after a moment's silence. "Every body in the town knows who and what we are, or might, if they chose to inquire. We cannot conceal our poverty if we tried; and I don't think any body looks down upon us for it. Not even since we began to keep school, which you thought was such a terrible thing, Selina."

"And it was. I have never reconciled myself to teaching the baker's two boys and the grocer's little girl. You were wrong, Johanna, you ought to have drawn the line somewhere, and it ought to have excluded trades-people."

"Beggars can not be choosers," began Hilary.

"Beggars!" echoed Selina.

"No, my dear, we were never that," said Miss Leaf, interposing against one of the sudden storms that were often breaking out between these two. "You know well we have never begged or borrowed from any body, and hardly ever been indebted to any body, except for the extra lessons that Mr. Lyon would insist upon giving to Ascott at home."

Here Johanna suddenly stopped, and Hilary, with a slight color rising in her face, said—

"I think, sisters, we are forgetting that the staircase is quite open, and though I am sure she has an honest look

and not that of a listener, still Elizabeth might hear. Shall I call her down stairs, and tell her to light a fire in the parlor?"

While she is doing it, and in spite of Selina's forebodings to the contrary, the small maiden did it quickly and well, especially after a hint or two from Hilary—let me take the opportunity of making a little picture of this same Hilary.

Little it should be, for she was a decidedly little woman: small altogether, hands, feet, and figure being in satisfactory proportion. Her movements, like those of most little women, were light and quick rather than elegant; yet every thing she did was done with a neatness and delicacy which gave an involuntary sense of grace and harmony. She was, in brief, one of those people who are best described by the word "harmonious;" people who never set your teeth on edge, or rub you up the wrong way, as very excellent people occasionally do. Yet she was not over-meek or unpleasantly amiable; there was a liveliness and even briskness about her, as if the every day wine of her life had a spice of Champagniness, not frothiness but natural effervescence of spirit, meant to "cheer but not inebriate" a household.

And in her own household this gift was most displayed. No centre of a brilliant, admiring circle could be more charming, more witty, more irresistibly amusing than was Hilary sitting by the kitchen fire, with the cat on her knee, between her two sisters, and the school-boy Ascott Leaf, their nephew—which four individuals, the cat being not the least important of them, constituted the family.

In the family, Hilary shone supreme. All recognized her as the light of the house, and so she had been, ever since she was born, ever since her

"Dying mother mild,
Said, with accents undefiled,
'Child, be mother to this child.'"

It was said to Johanna Leaf—who was not Mrs. Leaf's own child. But the good step-mother, who had once taken the little motherless girl to her bosom, and never since made the slightest difference between her and her own children, knew well whom she was trusting.

From that solemn hour, in the middle of the night, when she lifted the hour-old baby out of its dead mother's bed into her own, it became Johanna's one object in life. Through a sickly infancy, for it was a child born amidst trouble, her sole hands washed, dressed, fed it; night and day it "lay in her bosom, and was unto her as a daughter."

She was then just thirty: not too old to look forward to woman's natural destiny, a husband and children of her own. But years slipped by, and she was Miss Leaf still. What matter! Hilary was her daughter.

Johanna's pride in her knew no bounds. Not that she showed it much; indeed she deemed it a sacred duty not to show it; but to make believe her "child" was just like other children. But she was not. Nobody ever thought she was—even in externals.—Fate gave her all those gifts which are sometimes sent to make up for the lack of worldly prosperity. Her brown eyes were as soft as doves' eyes, yet could dance with fun and mischief if they chose; her hair, brown also, with a dark-red shade in it, crisped itself in two wavy lines over her forehead, and then turned down in two glorious masses, which Johanna, ignorant, alas! of art, called very "untidy," and labored in vain to quell under

combs, or to arrange in proper, regular curls Her features—well, they too, were good; better than those unartistic people had any idea of—better even than Selina's, who in her youth had been the belle of the town. But whether artistically correct or not, Johanna, though she would on no account have acknowledged it, believed solemnly that there was not such a face in the whole world as little Hillary's.

Possibly a similar idea dawned upon the apparently dull mind of Elizabeth Hand, for she watched her youngest mistress intently, from kitchen to parlor, and from parlor back to kitchen; and once when Miss Hilary stood giving information as to the proper abode of broom, bellows, etc., the little maid gazed at her with such admiring observation that the scuttle she carried was tumbled, and the coals were strewn all over the kitchen floor. At which catastrophe Miss Leaf looked miserable. Miss Selina spoke crossly, and Ascott, who just then came in to his tea, late as usual, burst into a shout of laughter.

It was as much as Hilary could do to help laughing herself, she being too near her nephew's own age always to maintain a dignified aunt-like attitude, but nevertheless, when, having disposed of her sisters in the parlor, she coaxed Ascott into the school-room, and insisted upon his Latin being done—she helping him, Aunt Hilary scolded him well, and bound him over to keep the peace toward the new servant.

"But she is such a queer one. Exactly like a South Sea Islander. When she stood with her grim, stolid countenance, contemplating the coals oh, Aunt Hilary, how killing she was!"

And the regular, rollicking, irresistible boy-laugh broke out again.

"She will be great fun. Is she really to stay?"

"I hope so," said Hilary, trying to be grave. "I hope never again to see Aunt Johanna cleaning the stairs, and getting up to light the kitchen fire of winter mornings, as she will do if we have not a servant to do it for her. Don't you see, Ascott?"

"Oh, I see," answered the boy, carelessly, "But don't bother me, please. Domestic affairs are for women, not men."

Ascott was eighteen, and just about to pass out of his caterpillar state as a doctor's apprentice-lad into the chrysalis condition of a medical student in London. "But," with sudden reflection, "I hope she won't be in my way. Don't let her meddle with any of my books and things."

"No; you need not be afraid. I have put them all into your room. I myself cleared your rubbish out of the box closet."

"The box-closet! Now, really, I can't stand—"

"She is to sleep in the box-closet; where else could she sleep?" said Hilary, resolutely, though inly quaking a little; for somehow, the merry, handsome, rather exacting lad had acquired considerable influence in this household of women. "You must put up with the loss of your 'den.' Ascott; it would be a great shame if you did not, for the sake of Aunt Johanna and the rest of us."

"Um!" grumbled the boy, who, though he was not a bad fellow at heart, had a boy's dislike to "putting up" with the slightest inconvenience.

"Well, it won't last long. I shall be off shortly. What a jolly life

I'll have in London, Aunt Hilary! I'll see Mr. Lyon there too."

"Yes," said Aunt Hilary, briefly, returning to Dido and Cneus; humble and easy Latinity for a student of eighteen; but Ascott was not a brilliant boy, and, being apprenticed early, his education had been much neglected, till Mr. Lyon came as usher to the Stowbury grammar-school, and happening to meet and take an interest in him, taught him and his Aunt Hilary Latin, Greek, and mathematics together, of evenings.

I shall make no mysteries here. Human nature is human nature all the world over. A tale without love in it would be unnatural, unreal—in fact, a simple lie; for there are no histories and no lives without love in them: if there could be, Heaven pity and pardon them, for they would be mere abortions of humanity.

Thank Heaven, we, most of us, do not philosophize: we only live. We like one another, we hardly know why; we love one another, we still less know why. If on the day she first saw—in church it was—Mr. Lyon's grave, heavy-browed, somewhat severe face—for he was a Scotsman, and his sharp, strong Scotch features did look "hard" beside the soft, rosy, well conditioned youth of Stowbury—if on that Sunday any one had told Hilary Leaf that the face of this stranger was to be the one face of her life, stamped upon brain and heart, and soul with a vividness that no other impressions were strong enough to efface, and retained there with a tenacity that no vicissitudes of time, or place, or fortunes had power to alter, Hilary would—yes, I think she

would—have quietly kept looking on. She would have accepted her lot, such as it was, with its shine and shade, its joy and its anguish; it came to her without her seeking, as most of the solemn things in life do; and whatever it brought with it, it could have come from no other source than that from which all high, and holy, and pure loves ever must come—the will and permission of GOD.

Mr. Lyon himself requires no long description. In his first visit he had told Miss Leaf all about himself that there was to be known; that he was, as they were, a poor teacher, who had altogether "made himself," as so many Scotch students do. His father, whom he scarcely remembered, had been a small Ayrshire farmer; his mother was dead, and he had never had either brother or sister.

Seeing how clever Miss Hilary was, and how much as a schoolmistress she would need all the education she could get, he had offered to teach her along with her nephew; and she and Johanna were only too thankful for the advantage. But during the teaching he had also taught her another thing, which neither had contemplated at the time—to respect him with her whole soul, and to love him with her whole heart.

Over this simple fact let no more be now said. Hilary said nothing. She recognized it herself as soon as he was gone; a plain, sad, solemn truth, which there was no deceiving herself did not exist, even had she wished its non-existence. Perhaps Johanna also found it out, in her darling's extreme paleness and unusual quietness for a while; but she too said nothing. Mr. Lyon wrote regularly to Ascott, and once or twice to her, Miss Leaf; but though every one knew that

Hilary was his particular friend in the whole family, he did not write to Hilary. He had departed rather suddenly, on account of some plan which he said, affected his future very considerably; but which, though he was in the habit of telling them his affairs, he did not further explain. Still Johanna knew he was a good man, and though no man could be quite good enough for her darling, she liked him, she trusted him.

What Hilary felt none knew. But she was very girlish in some things; and her life was all before her, full of infinite hope. By-and-by her color returned, and her merry voice and laugh were heard about the house just as usual.

This being the position of affairs, it was not surprising that after Ascott's last speech Hilary's mind wandered from Dido and Cneus to vague listening, as the lad began talking of his grand future—the future of a medical student, all expenses being paid by his godfather, Mr. Ascott, the merchant, of Russell Square, once a shop boy of Stowbury.

Nor was it unnatural that all Ascott's anticipations of London resolved themselves, in his aunt's eyes, into the one fact that he would "see Mr. Lyon."

But in telling thus much about her mistresses, I have for the time being lost sight of Elizabeth Hand.

Left to herself, the girl stood for a minute or two looking around her in a confused manner, then, rousing her faculties, began mechanically to obey the order with which her mistress had quitted the kitchen, and to wash up the tea-things. She did it in a fashion that, if seen, would have made Miss Leaf thankful that the ware was only the common set, and not the cherished china belonging to

former days: still she did it, noisily it is true, but actively, as if her heart were in her work. Then she took a candle and peered about her new domains.

These were small enough; at least they would have seemed so to other eyes than Elizabeth's; for, until the school-room and box-closet above had been kindly added by the landlord, who would have done any thing to show his respect for the Misses Leaf, it had been merely a six-roomed cottage—parlor kitchen, back kitchen, and three upper chambers. It was a very cozy house notwithstanding, and it seemed to Elizabeth's eyes a perfect palace.

For several minutes more she stood and contemplated her kitchen, with the fire shining on the round oaken stand in the centre, and the large wooden-bottomed chairs, and the loud-ticking clock, with its tall case, the inside of which, with its pendulum and weights, had been a perpetual mystery and delight, first to Hilary's and then to Ascott's childhood. Then there was the sofa, large and ugly, but, oh! so comfortable, with its faded, flowered chintz, washed and worn for certainly twenty years. And, overall, Elizabeth's keen observation was attracted by a queer machine apparently made of thin rope and bits of wood, which hung up to the hooks on the ceiling—an old-fashioned baby's swing. Finally, her eye dwelt with content on the blue and red diamond tiled floor, so easily swept and mopped, and (only Elizabeth did not think of that, for her hard childhood had been all work and no play) so beautiful to whip tops upon! Hilary and Ascott, condoling together over the new servant, congratulated themselves that their delight in this occupation had somewhat failed, though it was really not so

many years ago since one of the former's pupils, coming suddenly out of the school-room, had caught her in the act of whipping a meditative top round this same kitchen floor.

Meantime Elizabeth penetrated farther, investigating the back kitchen, with its various conveniences; especially the pantry, every shelf of which was so neatly arranged and beautifully clean. Apparently this neatness impressed the girl with a sense of novelty and curiosity; and though she could hardly be said to meditate—her mind was not sufficiently awakened for that—still, as she stood at the kitchen fire, a slight thoughtfulness deepened the expression of her face, and made it less dull and heavy than it had at first appeared.

"I wonder which on 'em does it all. They must work pretty hard, I reckon; and two o' them's such little uns."

She stood a while longer; for sitting down appeared to be to Elizabeth as new a proceeding as thinking; then she went up stairs, still literally obeying orders, to shut windows and pull down blinds at nightfall. The bedrooms were small, and insufficiently, nay, shabbily furnished; but the floors were spotless—ah! poor Johanna!—and the sheets, though patched and darned to the last extremity, were white and whole. Nothing was dirty, nothing untidy. There was no attempt at picturesque poverty—for whatever novelists may say, poverty can not be picturesque; but all things were decent and in order. The house, poor as it was, gave the impression of belonging to "real ladies;" ladies who thought no manner of work beneath them, and who, whatever they had to do, took the pains to do it as well as possible.

Mrs. Hand's roughly-brought-up daughter had never been in such a house before, and her examination of every new corner of it seemed quite a revelation. Her own little sleeping nook was fully as tidy and comfortable as the rest, which fact was not lost upon Elizabeth. That bright look of mingled softness and intelligence—the only thing which beautified her rugged face—came into the girl's eyes as she "turned down" the truckle-bed, and felt the warm blankets and sheets, new and rather coarse, but neatly sewed.

"Her's made 'em hersel', I reckon. La!" Which of her mistresses the "her" referred to remained unspecified; but Elizabeth, spurred to action by some new idea, went briskly back into the bedrooms, and looked about to see if there was any thing she could find to do. At last, with a sudden inspiration, she peered into a wash-stand, and found there an empty ewer. Taking it in one hand and the candle in the other, she ran down stairs.

Fatal activity! Hilary's pet cat, startled from sleep on the kitchen hearth, at the same instant ran wildly up stairs; there was a start—a stumble—and then down came the candle, the ewer, Elizabeth, and all.

It was an awful crash. It brought every member of the family to see what was the matter.

"What has the girl broken?" cried Selina.

"Where has she hurt herself?" anxiously added Johanna.

Hilary said nothing, but ran for a light, and then picked up first the servant, then the candle, and then the fragments of crockery.

"Why, it's my ewer, my favorite ewer, and it's all smashed to bits, and I never can match it again. You

careless, clumsy, good-for-nothing creature!"

"Please, Selma," whispered her eldest sister.

"Very well, Johanna. You are the mistress, I suppose; why don't you speak to your servant?"

Miss Leaf, in an humbled, alarmed way, first satisfied herself that no bodily injury had been sustained by Elizabeth, and then asked her how this disaster had happened? For a serious disaster she felt it was. Not only was the present loss annoying, but a servant with a talent for crockery breaking would be a far too expensive luxury for them to think of retaining. And she had been listening in the solitude of the parlor to a long lecture from her always dissatisfied younger sister, on the great doubts Selina had about Elizabeth's "suiting."

"Come, now," seeing the girl hesitated, "tell me the plain truth. How was it?"

"It was the cat," sobbed Elizabeth.

"What a barefaced falsehood." exclaimed Selina. "You wicked girl, how could it possibly be the cat? Do you know that you are telling a lie, and that lies are hateful, and that all liars go to—"

"Nonsense, hush!" interrupted Hilary, rather sharply; for Selina's "tongue," the terror of her childhood, now merely annoyed her. Selina's temper was a long understood household fact—they did not much mind it, knowing that her bark was worse than her bite—but it was provoking that she should exhibit herself so soon before the new servant.

The latter first looked up at the lady with simple surprise; then, as in spite of the other two, Miss Selina worked herself up into a downright passion, and unlimited abuse fell upon

the victim's devoted head, Elizabeth's manner changed. After one dogged repetition of, "It was the cat!" not another word could be got out of her. She stood, her eyes fixed on the kitchen floor, her brows knitted, and her under lip pushed out—the very picture of sullenness. Young as she was, Elizabeth evidently had, like her unfortunate mistress, "a temper of her own"—a spiritual deformity that some people are born with, as others with hare-lip or club-foot; only, unlike these, it may be conquered, though the battle is long and sore, sometimes ending only with life.

It had plainly never commenced with poor Elizabeth Hand. Her appearance, as she stood under the flood of sharp words poured out upon her, was absolutely repulsive. Even Miss Hilary turned away, and began to think it would have been easier to teach all day and do house work half the night, than have the infliction of a servant—to say nothing of the disgrace of seeing Selina's "peculiarities" so exposed before a stranger.

She knew of old that to stop the torrent was impracticable. The only chance was to let Selina expend her wrath and retire, and then to take some quiet opportunity of explaining to Elizabeth that sharp language was only "her way," and must be put up with. Humiliating as this was, and fatal to domestic authority that the first thing to be taught a new servant was to "put up" with one of her mistresses, still there was no alternative.—Hilary had already foreboded and made up her mind to such a possibility, but she had hoped it would not occur the very first evening.

It did, however, and its climax was worse even than she anticipated. Whether, irritated by the intense sullenness of

the girl. Selina's temper was worse than usual, or whether, as is always the case with people like her, something else had vexed her, and she vented it upon the first cause of annoyance that occurred, certain it is that her tongue went on unchecked till it failed from sheer exhaustion. And then, as she flung herself on the sofa—oh, sad mischance!—she caught sight of her nephew standing at the school-room door, grinning with intense delight, and making faces at her behind her back.

It was too much. The poor lady had no more words left to scold with; but she rushed up to Ascott, and big lad as he was, she soundly boxed his ears.

On this terrible climax let the curtain fall.

CHAPTER II.

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Common as were the small fends between Ascott and his Aunt Selina, they seldom reached such a catastrophe as that described in my last chapter. Hilary had to fly to the rescue, and literally drag the furious lad back into the school-room; while Johanna, pale and trembling, persuaded Selina to quit the field and go and lie down. This was not difficult; for the instant she saw what she had done, how she had disgraced herself and insulted her nephew. Selina felt sorry. Her passion ended in a gush of "nervous" tears under the influence of which she was led up stairs and put to bed, almost like a child—the usual termination of these pitiful outbreaks.

For the time nobody thought of Elizabeth. The hapless cause of all stood "spectatress of the fray" beside her kitchen fire. What she thought history saith not. Whether in her own rough home she was used to see brothers and sisters quarrelling, and mothers boxing their childrens' ears, can not be known; whether she was or was not surprised to see the same proceedings among ladies and gentlemen, she never betrayed, but certain it is that the little servant became uncommonly serious; yes, serious rather than sulky, for her "black" looks vanished gradually, as soon as Miss Selina left the kitchen.

On the reappearance of Miss Hilary it had quite gone. But Hilary took no notice of her; she was in search of Johanna,

who, shaking and cold with agitation, came slowly down stairs.

"Is she gone to bed?"

"Yes, my dear. It was the best thing for her; she is not at all well to-day."

Hilary's lip curled a little, but she replied not a word. She had not the patience with Selina that Johanna had. She drew her elder sister into the little parlor, placed her in the arm-chair, shut the door, came and sat beside her, and took her hand. Johanna pressed it, shed a quiet tear or two, and wiped them away. Then the two sisters remained silent, with hearts sad and sore.

Every family has its skeleton in the house: this was theirs. Whether they acknowledged it or not, they knew quite well that every discomfort they had, every slight jar which disturbed the current of household peace, somehow or other originated with "poor Selina." They often called her "poor" with a sort of pity—not unneeded. Heaven knows! for if the unhappy are to be pitied, ten times more so are those who make others miserable.

This was Selina's case, and had been all her life. And, sometimes, she herself knew it. Sometimes, after an especially bad outbreak, her compunction and remorse would be almost as terrible as her passion; forcing her sisters to make every excuse for her; she "did not mean it," it was only "ill health," or "nerves," or her "unfortunate way of taking things."

But they knew in their hearts that not all their poverty and the toils it entailed, not all the hardships and humiliation of their changed estate, were half so bitter to

bear as this something—no moral crime, and yet in its results as fatal as crime—which they called Selina's "way."

Ascott was the only one who did not attempt to mince matters. When a little boy he had openly declared he hated Aunt Salina; when he grew up he as openly defied her, and it was a most difficult matter to keep even decent peace between them. Hilary's wrath had never gone further than wishing Selina was married, that appearing the easiest way of getting rid of her. Latterly she had ceased this earnest aspiration; it might be, because, learning to think more seriously of marriage, she felt that a woman who is no blessing in her own household, is never likely much to bless a husband's; and that, looking still farther forward, it was, on the whole, a mercy of Providence, which made Selina not the mother of children.

Yet her not marrying had been somewhat a surprise; for she had been attractive in her day, handsome and agreeable in society. But perhaps, for all that, the sharp eye of the opposite sex had discovered the cloven foot; since, though she had received various promising attentions, poor Selina had never had an offer. Nor, fortunately, had she ever been known to care for any body; she was one of those women who would have married as a matter of course, but who never would have been guilty of the weakness of falling in love. There seemed small probability of shipping her off, to carry into a new household the restlessness, the fretfulness, the captious fault-finding with others, the readiness to take offence at what was done and said to herself, which made poor Selina Leaf the unacknowledged grief and torment of her own.

Her two sisters sat silent. What was the use of talking? It would be only going ever and over again the old thing; trying to ease and shift a little the long familiar burden which they knew must be borne. Nearly every household has, near or remote, some such burden, which Heaven only can lift off or help to bear. And sometimes, looking round the world outside, these two congratulated themselves, in a half sort of way, that theirs was as light as it was; that Selina was after all, a well-meaning well-principled woman, and, in spite of her little tempers, really fond of her family, as she truly was, at least as fond as a nature which has its centre in self can manage to be.

Only when Hilary looked, as to-night, into her eldest sister's pale face, where year by year the lines were deepening, and saw how every agitation such as the present shook her more and more—she who ought to have a quiet life and a cheerful home, after so many hard years—then Hilary, fierce in the resistance of her youth, felt as if what she could have borne for herself she could not bear for Johanna, and at the moment, sympathized with Ascott in actually "hating" Aunt Selina.

"Where is that boy? He ought to be spoken to," Johanna said, at length, rising wearily.

"I have spoken to him; I gave him a good scolding. He is sorry, and promises never to be so rude again."

"Oh no; not till the next time," replied Miss Leaf. hopelessly. "But Hilary." with a sudden consternation, "what are we to do about Elizabeth?"

The younger sister had thought of that. She had turned over in her mind all the pros and cons, the inevitable "worries" that would result from the presence of an additional member of the family, especially one from whom the family skeleton could not be hid, to whom it was already only too fatally revealed.

But Hilary was a clear headed girl, and she had the rare faculty of seeing things as they really were, undistorted by her own likings or dislikings—in fact, without reference to herself at all. She perceived plainly that Johanna ought not to do the housework, that Selina would not, and that she could not: ergo, they must keep a servant. Better, perhaps, a small servant, over whom they could have the same influence as over a child, than one older and more independent, who would irritate her mistresses at home, and chatter of them abroad. Besides, they had promised Mrs. Hand to give her daughter a fair trial. For a month, then, Elizabeth was bound to stay; afterward, time would show. It was best not to meet troubles half way.

This explained, in Hilary's cheerful voice, seemed greatly to reassure and comfort her sister.

"Yes, love, you are right; she must remain her month out, unless she does something very wrong. Do you think that really was a lie she told?"

"About the cat? I don't quite know what to think. Let us call her, and put the question once more. Do you put it, Johanna. I don't think she could look at you and tell you a story."

Other people, at sight of that sweet, grave face, its bloom faded, and hairs silvered long before their time, yet