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***THE TIDES
OF BARNEGAT***

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The Tides of Barnegat

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CHAPTER I

THE DOCTOR'S GIG

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One lovely spring morning—and this story begins on a spring morning some fifty years or more ago—a joy of a morning that made one glad to be alive, when the radiant sunshine had turned the ribbon of a road that ran from Warehold village to Barnegat Light and the sea to satin, the wide marshes to velvet, and the belts of stunted pines to bands of purple—on this spring morning, then, Martha Sands, the Cobdens' nurse, was out with her dog Meg. She had taken the little beast to the inner beach for a bath—a custom of hers when the weather was fine and the water not too cold—and was returning to Warehold by way of the road, when, calling the dog to her side, she stopped to feast her eyes on the picture unrolled at her feet.

To the left of where she stood curved the coast, glistening like a scimitar, and the strip of yellow beach which divided the narrow bay from the open sea; to the right, thrust out into the sheen of silver, lay the spit of sand narrowing the inlet, its edges scalloped with lace foam, its extreme point dominated by the grim tower of Barnegat Light; aloft, high into the blue, soared the gulls, flashing like jewels as they lifted their breasts to the sun, while away and beyond the sails of the fishing-boats, gray or silver in their shifting tacks, crawled over the wrinkled sea.

The glory of the landscape fixed in her mind, Martha gathered her shawl about her shoulders, tightened the

strings of her white cap, smoothed out her apron, and with the remark to Meg that he'd "never see nothin' so beautiful nor so restful," resumed her walk.

They were inseparable, these two, and had been ever since the day she had picked him up outside the tavern, half starved and with a sore patch on his back where some kitchen-maid had scalded him. Somehow the poor outcast brought home to her a sad page in her own history, when she herself was homeless and miserable, and no hand was stretched out to her. So she had coddled and fondled him, gaining his confidence day by day and talking to him by the hour of whatever was uppermost in her mind.

Few friendships presented stronger contrasts: She stout and motherly-looking—too stout for any waistline—with kindly blue eyes, smooth gray hair—gray, not white—her round, rosy face, framed in a cotton cap, aglow with the freshness of the morning—a comforting, coddling-up kind of woman of fifty, with a low, crooning voice, gentle fingers, and soft, restful hollows about her shoulders and bosom for the heads of tired babies; Meg thin, rickety, and sneak-eyed, with a broken tail that hung at an angle, and but one ear (a black-and-tan had ruined the other)—a sandy-colored, rough-haired, good-for-nothing cur of multifarious lineage, who was either crouching at her feet or in full cry for some hole in a fence or rift in a wood-pile where he could flatten out and sulk in safety.

Martha continued her talk to Meg. While she had been studying the landscape he had taken the opportunity to wallow in whatever came first, and his wet hair was bristling with sand and matted with burrs.

"Come here, Meg—you measly rascal!" she cried, stamping her foot. "Come here, I tell ye!"

The dog crouched close to the ground, waited until Martha was near enough to lay her hand upon him, and then, with a backward spring, darted under a bush in full blossom.

"Look at ye now!" she shouted in a commanding tone. "'Tain't no use o' my washin' ye. Ye're full o' thistles and jest as dirty as when I throwed ye in the water. Come out o' that, I tell ye! Now, Meg, darlin'"—this came in a coaxing tone—"come out like a good dog—sure I'm not goin' in them brambles to hunt ye!"

A clatter of hoofs rang out on the morning air. A two-wheeled gig drawn by a well-groomed sorrel horse and followed by a brown-haired Irish setter was approaching. In it sat a man of thirty, dressed in a long, mouse-colored surtout with a wide cape falling to the shoulders. On his head was a soft gray hat and about his neck a white scarf showing above the lapels of his coat. He had thin, shapely legs, a flat waist, and square shoulders, above which rose a clean-shaven face of singular sweetness and refinement.

At the sound of the wheels the tattered cur poked his head from between the blossoms, twisted his one ear to catch the sound, and with a side-spring bounded up the road toward the setter.

"Well, I declare, if it ain't Dr. John Cavendish and Rex!" Martha exclaimed, raising both hands in welcome as the horse stopped beside her. "Good-mornin' to ye, Doctor John. I thought it was you, but the sun blinded me, and I couldn't see. And ye never saw a better nor a brighter mornin'.

These spring days is all blossoms, and they ought to be. Where ye goin', anyway, that ye're in such a hurry? Ain't nobody sick up to Cap'n Holt's, be there?" she added, a shade of anxiety crossing her face.

"No, Martha; it's the dressmaker," answered the doctor, tightening the reins on the restless sorrel as he spoke. The voice was low and kindly and had a ring of sincerity through it.

"What dressmaker?"

"Why, Miss Gossaway!" His hand was extended now—that fine, delicately wrought, sympathetic hand that had soothed so many aching heads.

"You've said it," laughed Martha, leaning over the wheel so as to press his fingers in her warm palm. "There ain't no doubt 'bout that skinny fright being 'Miss,' and there ain't no doubt 'bout her stayin' so. Ann Gossaway she is, and Ann Gossaway she'll die. Is she took bad?" she continued, a merry, questioning look lighting up her kindly face, her lips pursed knowingly.

"No, only a sore throat" the doctor replied, loosening his coat.

"Throat!" she rejoined, with a wry look on her face. "Too bad 'twarn't her tongue. If ye could snip off a bit o' that some day it would help folks considerable 'round here."

The doctor laughed in answer, dropped the lines over the dashboard and leaned forward in his seat, the sun lighting up his clean-cut face. Busy as he was—and there were few busier men in town, as every hitching-post along the main street of Warehold village from Billy Tatham's, the driver of

the country stage, to Captain Holt's, could prove—he always had time for a word with the old nurse.

"And where have YOU been, Mistress Martha?" he asked, with a smile, dropping his whip into the socket, a sure sign that he had a few more minutes to give her.

"Oh, down to the beach to git some o' the dirt off Meg. Look at him—did ye ever see such a rapsallion! Every time I throw him in he's into the sand ag'in wallowin' before I kin git to him."

The doctor bent his head, and for an instant watched the two dogs: Meg circling about Rex, all four legs taut, his head jerking from side to side in his eagerness to be agreeable to his roadside acquaintance; the agate-eyed setter returning Meg's attentions with the stony gaze of a club swell ignoring a shabby relative. The doctor smiled thoughtfully. There was nothing he loved to study so much as dogs—they had a peculiar humor of their own, he often said, more enjoyable sometimes than that of men—then he turned to Martha again.

"And why are you away from home this morning of all others?" he asked. "I thought Miss Lucy was expected from school to-day?"

"And so she is, God bless her! And that's why I'm here. I was that restless I couldn't keep still, and so I says to Miss Jane, 'I'm goin' to the beach with Meg and watch the ships go by; that's the only thing that'll quiet my nerves. They're never in a hurry with everybody punchin' and haulin' them.' Not that there's anybody doin' that to me, 'cept like it is to-day when I'm waitin' for my blessed baby to come back to

me. Two years, doctor—two whole years since I had my arms round her. Wouldn't ye think I'd be nigh crazy?"

"She's too big for your arms now, Martha," laughed the doctor, gathering up his reins. "She's a woman—seventeen, isn't she?"

"Seventeen and three months, come the fourteenth of next July. But she's not a woman to me, and she never will be. She's my wee bairn that I took from her mother's dyin' arms and nursed at my own breast, and she'll be that wee bairn to me as long as I live. Ye'll be up to see her, won't ye, doctor?"

"Yes, to-night. How's Miss Jane?" As he made the inquiry his eyes kindled and a slight color suffused his cheeks.

"She'll be better for seein' ye," the nurse answered with a knowing look. Then in a louder and more positive tone, "Oh, ye needn't stare so with them big brown eyes o' yourn. Ye can't fool old Martha, none o' you young people kin. Ye think I go round with my eyelids sewed up. Miss Jane knows what she wants—she's proud, and so are you; I never knew a Cobden nor a Cavendish that warn't. I haven't a word to say—it'll be a good match when it comes off. Where's that Meg? Good-by, doctor. I won't keep ye a minute longer from MISS Gossaway. I'm sorry it ain't her tongue, but if it's only her throat she may get over it. Go 'long, Meg!"

Dr. Cavendish laughed one of his quiet laughs—a laugh that wrinkled the lines about his eyes, with only a low gurgle in his throat for accompaniment, picked up his whip, lifted his hat in mock courtesy to the old nurse, and calling to Rex, who, bored by Meg's attentions, had at last retreated under the gig, chirruped to his horse, and drove on.

Martha watched the doctor and Rex until they were out of sight, walked on to the top of the low hill, and finding a seat by the roadside—her breath came short these warm spring days—sat down to rest, the dog stretched out in her lap. The little outcast had come to her the day Lucy left Warehold for school, and the old nurse had always regarded him with a certain superstitious feeling, persuading herself that nothing would happen to her bairn as long as this miserable dog was well cared for.

"Ye heard what Doctor John said about her bein' a woman, Meg?" she crooned, when she had caught her breath. "And she with her petticoats up to her knees! That's all he knows about her. Ye'd know better than that, Meg, wouldn't ye—if ye'd seen her grow up like he's done? But grown up or not, Meg"—here she lifted the dog's nose to get a clearer view of his sleepy eyes—"she's my blessed baby and she's comin' home this very day, Meg, darlin'; d'ye hear that, ye little ruffian? And she's not goin' away ag'in, never, never. There'll be nobody drivin' round in a gig lookin' after her—nor nobody else as long as I kin help it. Now git up and come along; I'm that restless I can't sit still," and sliding the dog from her lap, she again resumed her walk toward Warehold.

Soon the village loomed in sight, and later on the open gateway of "Yardley," the old Cobden Manor, with its two high brick posts topped with white balls and shaded by two tall hemlocks, through which could be seen a level path leading to an old colonial house with portico, white pillars supporting a balcony, and a sloping roof with huge chimneys and dormer windows.

Martha quickened her steps, and halting at the gateposts, paused for a moment with her eyes up the road. It was yet an hour of the time of her bairn's arrival by the country stage, but her impatience was such that she could not enter the path without this backward glance. Meg, who had followed behind his mistress at a snail's pace, also came to a halt and, as was his custom, picked out a soft spot in the road and sat down on his haunches.

Suddenly the dog sprang up with a quick yelp and darted inside the gate. The next instant a young girl in white, with a wide hat shading her joyous face, jumped from behind one of the big hemlocks and with a cry pinioned Martha's arms to her side.

"Oh, you dear old thing, you! where have you been? Didn't you know I was coming by the early stage?" she exclaimed in a half-querulous tone.

The old nurse disengaged one of her arms from the tight clasp of the girl, reached up her hand until she found the soft cheek, patted it gently for an instant as a blind person might have done, and then reassured, hid her face on Lucy's shoulder and burst into tears. The joy of the surprise had almost stopped her breath.

"No, baby, no," she murmured. "No, darlin', I didn't. I was on the beach with Meg. No, no—Oh, let me cry, darlin'. To think I've got you at last. I wouldn't have gone away, darlin', but they told me you wouldn't be here till dinner-time. Oh, darlin', is it you? And it's all true, isn't it? and ye've come back to me for good? Hug me close. Oh, my baby bairn, my little one! Oh, you precious!" and she nestled the girl's head

on her bosom, smoothing her cheek as she crooned on, the tears running down her cheeks.

Before the girl could reply there came a voice calling from the house: "Isn't she fine, Martha?" A woman above the middle height, young and of slender figure, dressed in a simple gray gown and without her hat, was stepping from the front porch to meet them.

"Too fine, Miss Jane, for her old Martha," the nurse called back. "I've got to love her all over again. Oh, but I'm that happy I could burst meself with joy! Give me hold of your hand, darlin'—I'm afraid I'll lose ye ag'in if ye get out of reach of me."

The two strolled slowly up the path to meet Jane, Martha patting the girl's arm and laying her cheek against it as she walked. Meg had ceased barking and was now sniffing at Lucy's skirts, his bent tail wagging slowly, his sneaky eyes looking up into Lucy's face.

"Will he bite, Martha?" she asked, shrinking to one side. She had an aversion to anything physically imperfect, no matter how lovable it might be to others. This tattered example struck her as particularly objectionable.

"No, darlin'—nothin' 'cept his food," and Martha laughed.

"What a horrid little beast!" Lucy said half aloud to herself, clinging all the closer to the nurse. "This isn't the dog sister Jane wrote me about, is it? She said you loved him dearly—you don't, do you?"

"Yes, that's the same dog. You don't like him, do you, darlin'?"

"No, I think he's awful," retorted Lucy in a positive tone.

"It's all I had to pet since you went away," Martha answered apologetically.

"Well, now I'm home, give him away, please. Go away, you dreadful dog!" she cried, stamping her foot as Meg, now reassured, tried to jump upon her.

The dog fell back, and crouching close to Martha's side raised his eyes appealingly, his ear and tail dragging.

Jane now joined them. She had stopped to pick some blossoms for the house.

"Why, Lucy, what's poor Meg done?" she asked, as she stooped over and stroked the crestfallen beast's head. "Poor old doggie—we all love you, don't we?"

"Well, just please love him all to yourselves, then," retorted Lucy with a toss of her head. "I wouldn't touch him with a pair of tongs. I never saw anything so ugly. Get away, you little brute!"

"Oh, Lucy, dear, don't talk so," replied the older sister in a pitying tone. "He was half starved when Martha found him and brought him home—and look at his poor back—"

"No, thank you; I don't want to look at his poor back, nor his poor tail, nor anything else poor about him. And you will send him away, won't you, like a dear good old Martha?" she added, patting Martha's shoulder in a coaxing way. Then encircling Jane's waist with her arm, the two sisters sauntered slowly back to the house.

Martha followed behind with Meg.

Somehow, and for the first time where Lucy was concerned, she felt a tightening of her heart-strings, all the more painful because it had followed so closely upon the joy of their meeting. What had come over her bairn, she said to

herself with a sigh, that she should talk so to Meg—to anything that her old nurse loved, for that matter? Jane interrupted her reveries.

"Did you give Meg a bath, Martha?" she asked over her shoulder. She had seen the look of disappointment in the old nurse's face and, knowing the cause, tried to lighten the effect.

"Yes—half water and half sand. Doctor John came along with Rex shinin' like a new muff, and I was ashamed to let him see Meg. He's comin' up to see you to-night, Lucy, darlin'," and she bent forward and tapped the girl's shoulder to accentuate the importance of the information.

Lucy cut her eye in a roguish way and twisted her pretty head around until she could look into Jane's eyes.

"Who do you think he's coming to see, sister?"

"Why, you, you little goose. They're all coming—Uncle Ephraim has sent over every day to find out when you would be home, and Bart Holt was here early this morning, and will be back to-night."

"What does Bart Holt look like?"—she had stopped in her walk to pluck a spray of lilac blossoms. "I haven't seen him for years; I hear he's another one of your beaux," she added, tucking the flowers into Jane's belt. "There, sister, that's just your color; that's what that gray dress needs. Tell me, what's Bart like?"

"A little like Captain Nat, his father," answered Jane, ignoring Lucy's last inference, "not so stout and—"

"What's he doing?"

"Nothin', darlin', that's any good," broke in Martha from behind the two. "He's sailin' a boat when he ain't playin'

cards or scarin' everybody down to the beach with his gun, or shyin' things at Meg."

"Don't you mind anything Martha says, Lucy," interrupted Jane in a defensive tone. "He's got a great many very good qualities; he has no mother and the captain has never looked after him. It's a great wonder that he is not worse than he is."

She knew Martha had spoken the truth, but she still hoped that her influence might help him, and then again, she never liked to hear even her acquaintances criticised.

"Playing cards! That all?" exclaimed Lucy, arching her eyebrows; her sister's excuses for the delinquent evidently made no impression on her. "I don't think playing cards is very bad; and I don't blame him for throwing anything he could lay his hands on at this little wretch of Martha's. We all played cards up in our rooms at school. Miss Sarah never knew anything about it—she thought we were in bed, and it was just lovely to fool her. And what does the immaculate Dr. John Cavendish look like? Has he changed any?" she added with a laugh.

"No," answered Jane simply.

"Does he come often?" She had turned her head now and was looking from under her lids at Martha. "Just as he used to and sit around, or has he—" Here she lifted her eyebrows in inquiry, and a laugh bubbled out from between her lips.

"Yes, that's just what he does do," cried Martha in a triumphant tone; "every minute he kin git. And he can't come too often to suit me. I jest love him, and I'm not the only one, neither, darlin'," she added with a nod of her head toward Jane.

"And Barton Holt as well?" persisted Lucy. "Why, sister, I didn't suppose there would be a man for me to look at when I came home, and you've got two already! Which one are you going to take?" Here her rosy face was drawn into solemn lines.

Jane colored. "You've got to be a great tease, Lucy," she answered as she leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. "I'm not in the back of the doctor's head, nor he in mine—he's too busy nursing the sick—and Bart's a boy!"

"Why, he's twenty-five years old, isn't he?" exclaimed Lucy in some surprise.

"Twenty-five years young, dearie—there's a difference, you know. That's why I do what I can to help him. If he'd had the right influences in his life and could be thrown a little more with nice women it would help make him a better man. Be very good to him, please, even if you do find him a little rough."

They had mounted the steps of the porch and were now entering the wide colonial hall—a bare white hall, with a staircase protected by spindling mahogany banisters and a handrail. Jane passed into the library and seated herself at her desk. Lucy ran on upstairs, followed by Martha to help unpack her boxes and trunks.

When they reached the room in which Martha had nursed her for so many years—the little crib still occupied one corner—the old woman took the wide hat from the girl's head and looked long and searchingly into her eyes.

"Let me look at ye, my baby," she said, as she pushed Lucy's hair back from her forehead; "same blue eyes, darlin', same pretty mouth I kissed so often, same little dimples ye

had when ye lay in my arms, but ye've changed—how I can't tell. Somehow, the face is different."

Her hands now swept over the full rounded shoulders and plump arms of the beautiful girl, and over the full hips.

"The doctor's right, child," she said with a sigh, stepping back a pace and looking her over critically; "my baby's gone—you've filled out to be a woman."

CHAPTER II

SPRING BLOSSOMS

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For days the neighbors in and about the village of Warehold had been looking forward to Lucy's home-coming as one of the important epochs in the history of the Manor House, quite as they would have done had Lucy been a boy and the expected function one given in honor of the youthful heir's majority. Most of them had known the father and mother of these girls, and all of them loved Jane, the gentle mistress of the home—a type of woman eminently qualified to maintain its prestige.

It had been a great house in its day. Built in early Revolutionary times by Archibald Cobden, who had thrown up his office under the Crown and openly espoused the cause of the colonists, it had often been the scene of many of the festivities and social events following the conclusion of peace and for many years thereafter: the rooms were still pointed out in which Washington and Lafayette had slept, as well as the small alcove where the dashing Bart de Klyn passed the night whenever he drove over in his coach with outriders from Bow Hill to Barnegat and the sea.

With the death of Colonel Creighton Cobden, who held a commission in the War of 1812, all this magnificence of living had changed, and when Morton Cobden, the father of Jane and Lucy, inherited the estate, but little was left except the Manor House, greatly out of repair, and some invested property which brought in but a modest income. On his

death-bed Morton Cobden's last words were a prayer to Jane, then eighteen, that she would watch over and protect her younger sister, a fair-haired child of eight, taking his own and her dead mother's place, a trust which had so dominated Jane's life that it had become the greater part of her religion.

Since then she had been the one strong hand in the home, looking after its affairs, managing their income, and watching over every step of her sister's girlhood and womanhood. Two years before she had placed Lucy in one of the fashionable boarding-schools of Philadelphia, there to study "music and French," and to perfect herself in that "grace of manner and charm of conversation," which the two maiden ladies who presided over its fortunes claimed in their modest advertisements they were so competent to teach. Part of the curriculum was an enforced absence from home of two years, during which time none of her own people were to visit her except in case of emergency.

To-night, the once famous house shone with something of its old-time color. The candles were lighted in the big bronze candelabra—the ones which came from Paris; the best glass and china and all the old plate were brought out and placed on the sideboard and serving-tables; a wood fire was started (the nights were yet cold), its cheery blaze lighting up the brass fender and andirons before which many of Colonel Cobden's cronies had toasted their shins as they sipped their toddies in the old days; easy-chairs and hair-cloth sofas were drawn from the walls; the big lamps lighted, and many minor details perfected for the comfort of the expected guests.

Jane entered the drawing-room in advance of Lucy and was busying herself putting the final touches to the apartment,—arranging the sprays of blossoms over the clock and under the portrait of Morton Cobden, which looked calmly down on the room from its place on the walls, when the door opened softly and Martha—the old nurse had for years been treated as a member of the family—stepped in, bowing and curtsying as would an old woman in a play, the skirt of her new black silk gown that Ann Gossaway had made for her held out between her plump fingers, her mob-cap with its long lace strings bobbing with every gesture. With her rosy cheeks, silver-rimmed spectacles, self-satisfied smile, and big puffy sleeves, she looked as if she might have stepped out of one of the old frames lining the walls.

"What do ye think of me, Miss Jane? I'm proud as a peacock—that I am!" she cried, twisting herself about. "Do ye know, I never thought that skinny dressmaker could do half as well. Is it long enough?" and she craned her head in the attempt to see the edge of the skirt.

"Fits you beautifully, Martha. You look fine," answered Jane in all sincerity, as she made a survey of the costume. "How does Lucy like it?"

"The darlin' don't like it at all; she says I look like a pall-bearer, and ye ought to hear her laughin' at the cap. Is there anything the matter with it? The pastor's wife's got one, anyhow, and she's a year younger'n me."

"Don't mind her, Martha—she laughs at everything; and how good it is to hear her! She never saw you look so well," replied Jane, as she moved a jar from a table and placed it

on the mantel to hold the blossoms she had picked in the garden. "What's she doing upstairs so long?"

"Prinkin'—and lookin' that beautiful ye wouldn't know her. But the width and the thickness of her"—here the wrinkled fingers measured the increase with a half circle in the air—"and the way she's plumped out—not in one place, but all over—well, I tell ye, ye'd be astonished! She knows it, too, bless her heart! I don't blame her. Let her git all the comfort she kin when she's young—that's the time for laughin'—the cryin' always comes later."

No part of Martha's rhapsody over Lucy described Jane. Not in her best moments could she have been called beautiful—not even to-night when Lucy's home-coming had given a glow to her cheeks and a lustre to her eyes that nothing else had done for months. Her slender figure, almost angular in its contour with its closely drawn lines about the hips and back; her spare throat and neck, straight arms, thin wrists and hands—transparent hands, though exquisitely wrought, as were those of all her race—all so expressive of high breeding and refinement, carried with them none of the illusions of beauty. The mould of the head, moreover, even when softened by her smooth chestnut hair, worn close to her ears and caught up in a coil behind, was too severe for accepted standards, while her features wonderfully sympathetic as they were, lacked the finer modeling demanded in perfect types of female loveliness, the eyebrows being almost straight, the cheeks sunken, with little shadows under the cheek-bones, and the lips narrow and often drawn.

And yet with all these discrepancies and, to some minds, blemishes there was a light in her deep gray eyes, a melody in her voice, a charm in her manner, a sureness of her being exactly the sort of woman one hoped she would be, a quick responsiveness to any confidence, all so captivating and so satisfying that 'those who knew her forgot her slight physical shortcomings and carried away only the remembrance of one so much out of the common and of so distinguished a personality that she became ever after the standard by which they judged all good women.

There were times, too—especially whenever Lucy entered the room or her name was mentioned—that there shone through Jane's eyes a certain instantaneous kindling of the spirit which would irradiate her whole being as a candle does a lantern—a light betokening not only uncontrollable tenderness but unspeakable pride, dimmed now and then when some word or act of her charge brought her face to face with the weight of the responsibility resting upon her—a responsibility far outweighing that which most mothers would have felt. This so dominated Jane's every motion that it often robbed her of the full enjoyment of the companionship of a sister so young and so beautiful.

If Jane, to quote Doctor John, looked like a lily swaying on a slender stem, Lucy, when she bounded into the room to-night, was a full-blown rose tossed by a summer breeze. She came in with throat and neck bare; a woman all curves and dimples, her skin as pink as a shell; plump as a baby, and as fair, and yet with the form of a wood-nymph; dressed in a clinging, soft gown, the sleeves caught up at the shoulders revealing her beautiful arms, a spray of blossoms on her

bosom, her blue eyes dancing with health, looking twenty rather than seventeen; glad of her freedom, glad of her home and Jane and Martha, and of the lights and blossoms and the glint on silver and glass, and of all that made life breathable and livable.

"Oh, but isn't it just too lovely to be at home!" she cried as she skipped about. "No lights out at nine, no prayers, no getting up at six o'clock and turning your mattress and washing in a sloppy little washroom. Oh, I'm so happy! I can't realize it's all true." As she spoke she raised herself on her toes so that she could see her face in the mirror over the mantel. "Why, do you know, sister," she rattled on, her eyes studying her own face, "that Miss Sarah used to make us learn a page of dictionary if we talked after the silence bell!"

"You must know the whole book by heart, then, dearie," replied Jane with a smile, as she bent over a table and pushed back some books to make room for a bowl of arbutus she held in her hand.

"Ah, but she didn't catch us very often. We used to stuff up the cracks in the doors so she couldn't hear us talk and smother our heads in the pillows. Jonesy, the English teacher, was the worst." She was still looking in the glass, her fingers busy with the spray of blossoms on her bosom. "She always wore felt slippers and crept around like a cat. She'd tell on anybody. We had a play one night in my room after lights were out, and Maria Collins was Claude Melnotte and I was Pauline. Maria had a mustache blackened on her lips with a piece of burnt cork and I was all fixed up in a dressing-gown and sash. We never heard Jonesy till she put

her hand on the knob; then we blew out the candle and popped into bed. She smelled the candle-wick and leaned over and kissed Maria good-night, and the black all came off on her lips, and next day we got three pages apiece—the mean old thing! How do I look, Martha? Is my hair all right?" Here she turned her head for the old woman's inspection.

"Beautiful, darlin'. There won't one o' them know ye; they'll think ye're a real livin' princess stepped out of a picture-book." Martha had not taken her eyes from Lucy since she entered the room.

"See my little beau-catchers," she laughed, twisting her head so that Martha could see the tiny Spanish curls she had flattened against her temples. "They are for Bart Holt, and I'm going to cut sister out. Do you think he'll remember me?" she prattled on, arching her neck.

"It won't make any difference if he don't," Martha retorted in a positive tone. "But Cap'n Nat will, and so will the doctor and Uncle Ephraim and—who's that comin' this early?" and the old nurse paused and listened to a heavy step on the porch. "It must be the cap'n himself; there ain't nobody but him's got a tread like that; ye'd think he was trampin' the deck o' one of his ships."

The door of the drawing-room opened and a bluff, hearty, round-faced man of fifty, his iron-gray hair standing straight up on his head like a shoe-brush, dressed in a short pea-jacket surmounted by a low sailor collar and loose necktie, stepped cheerily into the room.

"Ah, Miss Jane!" Somehow all the neighbors, even the most intimate, remembered to prefix "Miss" when speaking to Jane. "So you've got this fly-away back again? Where are

ye? By jingo! let me look at you. Why! why! why! Did you ever! What have you been doing to yourself, lassie, that you should shed your shell like a bug and come out with wings like a butterfly? Why you're the prettiest thing I've seen since I got home from my last voyage."

He had Lucy by both bands now, and was turning her about as if she had been one of Ann Gossaway's models.

"Have I changed, Captain Holt?"

"No—not a mite. You've got a new suit of flesh and blood on your bones, that's all. And it's the best in the locker. Well! Well! WELL!" He was still twisting her around. "She does ye proud, Martha," he called to the old nurse, who was just leaving the room to take charge of the pantry, now that the guests had begun to arrive. "And so ye're home for good and all, lassie?"

"Yes—isn't it lovely?"

"Lovely? That's no name for it. You'll be settin' the young fellers crazy 'bout here before they're a week older. Here come two of 'em now."

Lucy turned her head quickly, just as the doctor and Barton Holt reached the door of the drawing-room. The elder of the two, Doctor John, greeted Jane as if she had been a duchess, bowing low as he approached her, his eyes drinking in her every movement; then, after a few words, remembering the occasion as being one in honor of Lucy, he walked slowly toward the young girl.

"Why, Lucy, it's so delightful to get you back!" he cried, shaking her hand warmly. "And you are looking so well. Poor Martha has been on pins and needles waiting for you. I told her just how it would be—that she'd lose her little girl—and

she has," and he glanced at her admiringly. "What did she say when she saw you?"

"Oh, the silly old thing began to cry, just as they all do. Have you seen her dog?"

The answer jarred on the doctor, although he excused her in his heart on the ground of her youth and her desire to appear at ease in talking to him.

"Do you mean Meg?" he asked, scanning her face the closer.

"I don't know what she calls him—but he's the ugliest little beast I ever saw."

"Yes—but so amusing. I never get tired of watching him. What is left of him is the funniest thing alive. He's better than he looks, though. He and Rex have great times together."

"I wish you would take him, then. I told Martha this morning that he mustn't poke his nose into my room, and he won't. He's a perfect fright."

"But the dear old woman loves him," he protested with a tender tone in his voice, his eyes fixed on Lucy.

He had looked into the faces of too many young girls in his professional career not to know something of what lay at the bottom of their natures. What he saw now came as a distinct surprise.

"I don't care if she does," she retorted; "no, I don't," and she knit her brow and shook her pretty head as she laughed.

While they stood talking Bart Holt, who had lingered at the threshold, his eyes searching for the fair arrival, was advancing toward the centre of the room. Suddenly he stood

still, his gaze fixed on the vision of the girl in the clinging dress, with the blossoms resting on her breast. The curve of her back, the round of the hip; the way her moulded shoulders rose above the lace of her bodice; the bare, full arms tapering to the wrists;—the color, the movement, the grace of it all had taken away his breath. With only a side nod of recognition toward Jane, he walked straight to Lucy and with an "Excuse me," elbowed the doctor out of the way in his eagerness to reach the girl's side. The doctor smiled at the young man's impetuosity, bent his head to Lucy, and turned to where Jane was standing awaiting the arrival of her other guests.

The young man extended his hand. "I'm Bart Holt," he exclaimed; "you haven't forgotten me, Miss Lucy, have you? We used to play together. Mighty glad to see you—been expecting you for a week."

Lucy colored slightly and arched her head in a coquettish way. His frankness pleased her; so did the look of unfeigned admiration in his eyes.

"Why, of course I haven't forgotten you, Mr. Holt. It was so nice of you to come," and she gave him the tips of her fingers—her own eyes meanwhile, in one comprehensive glance, taking in his round head with its closely cropped curls, searching brown eyes, wavering mouth, broad shoulders, and shapely body, down to his small, well-turned feet. The young fellow lacked the polish and well-bred grace of the doctor, just as he lacked his well-cut clothes and distinguished manners, but there was a sort of easy effrontery and familiar air about him that some of his women admirers encouraged and others shrank from.

Strange to say, this had appealed to Lucy before he had spoken a word.

"And you've come home for good now, haven't you?" His eyes were still drinking in the beauty of the girl, his mind neither on his questions nor her answers.

"Yes, forever and ever," she replied, with a laugh that showed her white teeth.

"Did you like it at school?" It was her lips now that held his attention and the little curves under her dimpled chin. He thought he had never seen so pretty a mouth and chin.

"Not always; but we used to have lots of fun," answered the girl, studying him in return—the way his cravat was tied and the part of his hair. She thought he had well-shaped ears and that his nose and eyebrows looked like a picture she had in her room upstairs.

"Come and tell me about it. Let's sit down here," he continued as he drew her to a sofa and stood waiting until she took her seat.

"Well, I will for a moment, until they begin to come in," she answered, her face all smiles. She liked the way he behaved towards her—not asking her permission, but taking the responsibility and by his manner compelling a sort of obedience. "But I can't stay," she added. "Sister won't like it if I'm not with her to shake hands with everybody."

"Oh, she won't mind me; I'm a great friend of Miss Jane's. Please go on; what kind of fun did you have? I like to hear about girls' scrapes. We had plenty of them at college, but I couldn't tell you half of them." He had settled himself beside her now, his appropriating eyes still taking in her beauty.

"Oh, all kinds," she replied as she bent her head and glanced at the blossoms on her breast to be assured of their protective covering.

"But I shouldn't think you could have much fun with the teachers watching you every minute," said Bart, moving nearer to her and turning his body so he could look squarely into her eyes.

"Yes, but they didn't find out half that was going on." Then she added coyly, "I don't know whether you can keep a secret—do you tell everything you hear?"

"Never tell anything."

"How do I know?"

"I'll swear it." In proof he held up one hand and closed both eyes in mock reverence as if he were taking an oath. He was getting more interested now in her talk; up to this time her beauty had dazzled him. "Never! So help me—" he mumbled impressively.

"Well, one day we were walking out to the park—Now you're sure you won't tell sister, she's so easily shocked?" The tone was the same, but the inflection was shaded to closer intimacy.

Again Bart cast up his eyes.

"And all the girls were in a string with Miss Griggs, the Latin teacher, in front, and we all went in a cake shop and got a big piece of gingerbread apiece. We were all eating away hard as we could when we saw Miss Sarah coming. Every girl let her cake go, and when Miss Sarah got to us the whole ten pieces were scattered along the sidewalk."

Bart looked disappointed over the mild character of the scrape. From what he had seen of her he had supposed her