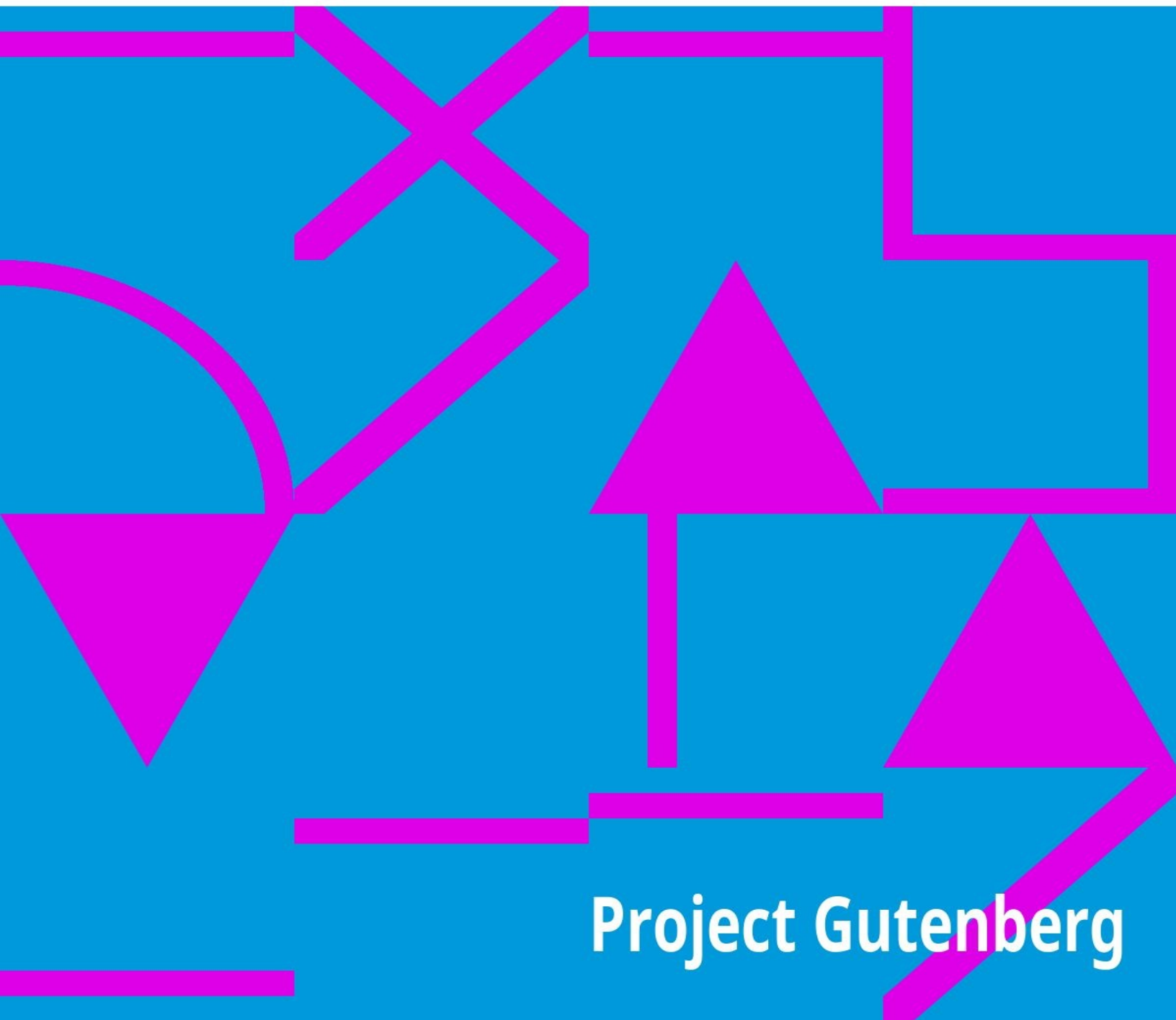


Evelina's Garden

Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman



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Evelina's Garden

By Mary E. Wilkins

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On the south a high arbor-vitæ hedge separated Evelina's garden from the road. The hedge was so high that when the school-children lagged by, and the secrets behind it fired them with more curiosity than those between their battered book covers, the tallest of them by stretching up on tiptoe could not peer over. And so they were driven to childish engineering feats, and would set to work and pick away sprigs of the arbor-vitæ with their little fingers, and make peep-holes—but small ones, that Evelina might not discern them. Then they would thrust their pink faces into the hedge, and the enduring fragrance of it would come to their nostrils like a gust of aromatic breath from the mouth of the northern woods, and peer into Evelina's garden as through the green tubes of vernal telescopes.

Then suddenly hollyhocks, blooming in rank and file, seemed to be marching upon them like platoons of soldiers, with detonations of color that dazzled their peeping eyes; and, indeed, the whole garden seemed charging with its mass of riotous bloom upon the hedge. They could scarcely take in details of marigold and phlox and pinks and London-pride and cock's-combs, and prince's-feather's waving overhead like standards.

Sometimes also there was the purple flutter of Evelina's gown; and Evelina's face, delicately faded, hung about with softly drooping gray curls, appeared

suddenly among the flowers, like another flower uncannily instinct with nervous melancholy.

Then the children would fall back from their peep-holes, and huddle off together with scared giggles. They were afraid of Evelina. There was a shade of mystery about her which stimulated their childish fancies when they heard her discussed by their elders. They might easily have conceived her to be some baleful fairy intrenched in her green stronghold, withheld from leaving it by the fear of some dire penalty for magical sins. Summer and winter, spring and fall, Evelina Adams never was seen outside her own domain of old mansion-house and garden, and she had not set her slim lady feet in the public highway for nearly forty years, if the stories were true.

People differed as to the reason why. Some said she had had an unfortunate love affair, that her heart had been broken, and she had taken upon herself a vow of seclusion from the world, but nobody could point to the unworthy lover who had done her this harm. When Evelina was a girl, not one of the young men of the village had dared address her. She had been set apart by birth and training, and also by a certain exclusiveness of manner, if not of nature. Her father, old Squire Adams, had been the one man of wealth and college learning in the village. He had owned the one fine old mansion-house, with its white front propped on great Corinthian pillars, overlooking the village like a broad brow of superiority.

He had owned the only coach and four. His wife during her short life had gone dressed in rich brocades and satins that rustled loud in the ears of the village women, and her nodding plumes had dazzled the eyes under their modest hoods. Hardly a woman in the village but could tell—for it had been handed down like a folk-lore song from mother to daughter—just what Squire Adams's wife wore when she walked out first as bride to meeting. She had been clad all in blue.

“Squire Adams's wife, when she walked out bride, she wore a blue satin brocade gown, all wrought with blue flowers of a darker blue, cut low neck and short sleeves. She wore long blue silk mitts wrought with blue, blue satin shoes, and blue silk clocked stockings. And she wore a blue crape mantle that was brought from over seas, and a blue velvet hat, with a long blue ostrich feather curled over it—it was so long it reached her shoulder, and waved when she walked; and she carried a little blue crape fan with ivory sticks.” So the women and girls told each other when the Squire's bride had been dead nearly seventy years.

The blue bride attire was said to be still in existence, packed away in a cedar chest, as the Squire had ordered after his wife's death. "He stood over the woman that took care of his wife whilst she packed the things away, and he never shed a tear, but she used to hear him a-goin' up to the north chamber nights, when he couldn't sleep, to look at 'em," the women told.

People had thought the Squire would marry again. They said Evelina, who was only four years old, needed a mother, and they selected one and another of the good village girls. But the Squire never married. He had a single woman, who dressed in black silk, and wore always a black wrought veil over the side of her bonnet, come to live with them, to take charge of Evelina. She was said to be a distant relative of the Squire's wife, and was much looked up to by the village people, although she never did more than interlace, as it were, the fringes of her garments with theirs. "She's stuck up," they said, and felt, curiously enough, a certain pride in the fact when they met her in the street and she ducked her long chin stiffly into the folds of her black shawl by way of salutation.

When Evelina was fifteen years old this single woman died, and the village women went to her funeral, and bent over her lying in a last helpless dignity in her coffin, and stared with awed freedom at her cold face. After that Evelina was sent away to school, and did not return, except for a yearly vacation, for six years to come. Then she returned, and settled down in her old home to live out her life, and end her days in a perfect semblance of peace, if it were not peace.

Evelina never had any young school friend to visit her; she had never, so far as any one knew, a friend of her own age. She lived alone with her father and three old servants. She went to meeting, and drove with the Squire in his chaise. The coach was never used after his wife's death, except to carry Evelina to and from school. She and the Squire also took long walks, but they never exchanged aught but the merest civilities of good-days and nods with the neighbors whom they met, unless indeed the Squire had some matter of business to discuss. Then Evelina stood aside and waited, her fair face drooping gravely aloof. She was very pretty, with a gentle high-bred prettiness that impressed the village folk, although they looked at it somewhat askance.

Evelina's figure was tall, and had a fine slenderness; her silken skirts hung straight from the narrow silk ribbon that girt her slim waist; there was a languidly graceful bend in her long white throat; her long delicate hands hung inertly at her sides among her skirt folds, and were never seen to clasp anything;

her softly clustering fair curls hung over her thin blooming cheeks, and her face could scarce be seen, unless, as she seldom did, she turned and looked full upon one. Then her dark blue eyes, with a little nervous frown between them, shone out radiantly; her thin lips showed a warm red, and her beauty startled one.

Everybody wondered why she did not have a lover, why some fine young man had not been smitten by her while she had been away at school. They did not know that the school had been situated in another little village, the counterpart of the one in which she had been born, wherein a fitting mate for a bird of her feather could hardly be found. The simple young men of the country-side were at once attracted and intimidated by her. They cast fond sly glances across the meeting-house at her lovely face, but they were confused before her when they jostled her in the doorway and the rose and lavender scent of her lady garments came in their faces. Not one of them dared accost her, much less march boldly upon the great Corinthian-pillared house, raise the brass knocker, and declare himself a suitor for the Squire's daughter.

One young man there was, indeed, who treasured in his heart an experience so subtle and so slight that he could scarcely believe in it himself. He never recounted it to mortal soul, but kept it as a secret sacred between himself and his own nature, but something to be scoffed at and set aside by others.

It had happened one Sabbath day in summer, when Evelina had not been many years home from school, as she sat in the meeting-house in her Sabbath array of rose-colored satin gown, and white bonnet trimmed with a long white feather and a little wreath of feathery green, that of a sudden she raised her head and turned her face, and her blue eyes met this young man's full upon hers, with all his heart in them, and it was for a second as if her own heart leaped to the surface, and he saw it, although afterwards he scarce believed it to be true.

Then a pallor crept over Evelina's delicately brilliant face. She turned it away, and her curls falling softly from under the green wreath on her bonnet brim hid it. The young man's cheeks were a hot red, and his heart beat loudly in his ears when he met her in the doorway after the sermon was done. His eager, timorous eyes sought her face, but she never looked his way. She laid her slim hand in its cream-colored silk mitt on the Squire's arm; her satin gown rustled softly as she passed before him, shrinking against the wall to give her room, and a faint fragrance which seemed like the very breath of the unknown delicacy and exclusiveness of life came to his bewildered senses.

Many a time he cast furtive glances across the meeting-house at Evelina, but she never looked his way again. If his timid boy-eyes could have seen her cheek behind its veil of curls, he might have discovered that the color came and went before his glances, although it was strange how she could have been conscious of them; but he never knew.

And he also never knew how, when he walked past the Squire's house of a Sunday evening, dressed in his best, with his shoulders thrust consciously back, and the windows in the westering sun looked full of blank gold to his furtive eyes, Evelina was always peeping at him from behind a shutter, and he never dared go in. His intuitions were not like hers, and so nothing happened that might have, and he never fairly knew what he knew. But that he never told, even to his wife when he married; for his hot young blood grew weary and impatient with this vain courtship, and he turned to one of his villagemates, who met him fairly half way, and married her within a year.

On the Sunday when he and his bride first appeared in the meeting-house Evelina went up the aisle behind her father in an array of flowered brocade, stiff with threads of silver, so wonderful that people all turned their heads to stare at her. She wore also a new bonnet of rose-colored satin, and her curls were caught back a little, and her face showed as clear and beautiful as an angel's.

The young bridegroom glanced at her once across the meeting-house, then he looked at his bride in her gay wedding finery with a faithful look.

When Evelina met them in the doorway, after meeting was done, she bowed with a sweet cold grace to the bride, who courtesied blushing in return, with an awkward sweep of her foot in the bridal satin shoe. The bridegroom did not look at Evelina at all. He held his chin well down in his stock with solemn embarrassment, and passed out stiffly, his bride on his arm.

Evelina, shining in the sun like a silver lily, went up the street, her father stalking beside her with stately swings of his cane, and that was the last time she was ever seen at meeting. Nobody knew why.

When Evelina was a little over thirty her father died. There was not much active grief for him in the village; he had really figured therein more as a stately monument of his own grandeur than anything else. He had been a man of little force of character, and that little had seemed to degenerate since his wife died.

An inborn dignity of manner might have served to disguise his weakness with any others than these shrewd New-Englanders, but they read him rightly. “The Squire wa'n't ever one to set the river a-fire,” they said. Then, moreover, he left none of his property to the village to build a new meeting-house or a town-house. It all went to Evelina.

People expected that Evelina would surely show herself in her mourning at meeting the Sunday after the Squire died, but she did not. Moreover, it began to be gradually discovered that she never went out in the village street nor crossed the boundaries of her own domains after her father's death. She lived in the great house with her three servants—a man and his wife, and the woman who had been with her mother when she died. Then it was that Evelina's garden began. There had always been a garden at the back of the Squire's house, but not like this, and only a low fence had separated it from the road. Now one morning in the autumn the people saw Evelina's man-servant, John Darby, setting out the arbor-vitæ hedge, and in the spring after that there were ploughing and seed-sowing extending over a full half-acre, which later blossomed out in glory.

Before the hedge grew so high Evelina could be seen at work in her garden. She was often stooping over the flower-beds in the early morning when the village was first astir, and she moved among them with her watering-pot in the twilight—a shadowy figure that might, from her grace and her constancy to the flowers, have been Flora herself.

As the years went on, the arbor-vitæ hedge got each season a new growth and waxed taller, until Evelina could no longer be seen above it. That was an annoyance to people, because the quiet mystery of her life kept their curiosity alive, until it was in a constant struggle, as it were, with the green luxuriance of the hedge.

“John Darby had ought to trim that hedge,” they said. They accosted him in the street: “John, if ye don't cut that hedge down a little it'll all die out.” But he only made a surly grunting response, intelligible to himself alone, and passed on. He was an Englishman, and had lived in the Squire's family since he was a boy.

He had a nature capable of only one simple line of force, with no radiations or parallels, and that had early resolved itself into the service of the Squire and his house. After the Squire's death he married a woman who lived in the family. She was much older than himself, and had a high temper, but was a good servant, and

he married her to keep her to her allegiance to Evelina. Then he bent her, without her knowledge, to take his own attitude towards his mistress. No more could be gotten out of John Darby's wife than out of John Darby concerning the doings at the Squire's house. She met curiosity with a flash of hot temper, and he with surly taciturnity, and both intimidated.

The third of Evelina's servants was the woman who had nursed her mother, and she was naturally subdued and undemonstrative, and rendered still more so by a ceaseless monotony of life. She never went to meeting, and was seldom seen outside the house. A passing vision of a long white-capped face at a window was about all the neighbors ever saw of this woman.

So Evelina's gentle privacy was well guarded by her own household, as by a faithful system of domestic police. She grew old peacefully behind her green hedge, shielded effectually from all rough bristles of curiosity. Every new spring her own bloom showed paler beside the new bloom of her flowers, but people could not see it.

Some thirty years after the Squire's death the man John Darby died; his wife, a year later. That left Evelina alone with the old woman who had nursed her mother. She was very old, but not feeble, and quite able to perform the simple household tasks for herself and Evelina. An old man, who saved himself from the almshouse in such ways, came daily to do the rougher part of the garden-work in John Darby's stead. He was aged and decrepit; his muscles seemed able to perform their appointed tasks only through the accumulated inertia of a patiently toilsome life in the same tracks. Apparently they would have collapsed had he tried to force them to aught else than the holding of the ploughshare, the pulling of weeds, the digging around the roots of flowers, and the planting of seeds.

Every autumn he seemed about to totter to his fall among the fading flowers; every spring it was like Death himself urging on the resurrection; but he lived on year after year, and tended well Evelina's garden, and the gardens of other maiden-women and widows in the village. He was taciturn, grubbing among his green beds as silently as a worm, but now and then he warmed a little under a fire of questions concerning Evelina's garden. "Never see none sech flowers in nobody's garden in this town, not sence I knowed 'nough to tell a pink from a piny," he would mumble. His speech was thick; his words were all uncouthly slurred; the expression of his whole life had come more through his old knotted

hands of labor than through his tongue. But he would wipe his forehead with his shirt-sleeve and lean a second on his spade, and his face would change at the mention of the garden. Its wealth of bloom illumined his old mind, and the roses and honeysuckles and pinks seemed for a second to be reflected in his bleared old eyes.

There had never been in the village such a garden as this of Evelina Adams's. All the old blooms which had come over the seas with the early colonists, and started as it were their own colony of flora in the new country, flourished there. The naturalized pinks and phlox and hollyhocks and the rest, changed a little in color and fragrance by the conditions of a new climate and soil, were all in Evelina's garden, and no one dreamed what they meant to Evelina; and she did not dream herself, for her heart was always veiled to her own eyes, like the face of a nun. The roses and pinks, the poppies and heart's-ease, were to this maiden-woman, who had innocently and helplessly outgrown her maiden heart, in the place of all the loves of life which she had missed. Her affections had forced an outlet in roses; they exhaled sweetness in pinks, and twined and clung in honeysuckle-vines. The daffodils, when they came up in the spring, comforted her like the smiles of children; when she saw the first rose, her heart leaped as at the face of a lover.

She had lost the one way of human affection, but her feet had found a little single side-track of love, which gave her still a zest in the journey of life. Even in the winter Evelina had her flowers, for she kept those that would bear transplanting in pots, and all the sunny windows in her house were gay with them. She would also not let a rose leaf fall and waste in the garden soil, or a sprig of lavender or thyme. She gathered them all, and stored them away in chests and drawers and old china bowls—the whole house seemed laid away in rose leaves and lavender. Evelina's clothes gave out at every motion that fragrance of dead flowers which is like the fragrance of the past, and has a sweetness like that of sweet memories. Even the cedar chest where Evelina's mother's blue bridal array was stored had its till heaped with rose leaves and lavender.

When Evelina was nearly seventy years old the old nurse who had lived with her her whole life died. People wondered then what she would do. "She can't live all alone in that great house," they said. But she did live there alone six months, until spring, and people used to watch her evening lamp when it was put out, and the morning smoke from her kitchen chimney. "It ain't safe for her to be there

alone in that great house," they said.

But early in April a young girl appeared one Sunday in the old Squire's pew. Nobody had seen her come to town, and nobody knew who she was or where she came from, but the old people said she looked just as Evelina Adams used to when she was young, and she must be some relation. The old man who had used to look across the meeting-house at Evelina, over forty years ago, looked across now at this young girl, and gave a great start, and his face paled under his gray beard stubble. His old wife gave an anxious, wondering glance at him, and crammed a peppermint into his hand. "Anything the matter, father?" she whispered; but he only gave his head a half-surly shake, and then fastened his eyes straight ahead upon the pulpit. He had reason to that day, for his only son, Thomas, was going to preach his first sermon therein as a candidate. His wife ascribed his nervousness to that. She put a peppermint in her own mouth and sucked it comfortably. "That's all 't is," she thought to herself. "Father always was easy worked up," and she looked proudly up at her son sitting on the hair-cloth sofa in the pulpit, leaning his handsome young head on his hand, as he had seen old divines do. She never dreamed that her old husband sitting beside her was possessed of an inner life so strange to her that she would not have known him had she met him in the spirit. And, indeed, it had been so always, and she had never dreamed of it. Although he had been faithful to his wife, the image of Evelina Adams in her youth, and that one love-look which she had given him, had never left his soul, but had given it a guise and complexion of which his nearest and dearest knew nothing.

It was strange, but now, as he looked up at his own son as he arose in the pulpit, he could seem to see a look of that fair young Evelina, who had never had a son to inherit her beauty. He had certainly a delicate brilliancy of complexion, which he could have gotten directly from neither father nor mother; and whence came that little nervous frown between his dark blue eyes? His mother had blue eyes, but not like his; they flashed over the great pulpit Bible with a sweet fire that matched the memory in his father's heart.

But the old man put the fancy away from him in a minute; it was one which his stern common-sense always overcame. It was impossible that Thomas Merriam should resemble Evelina Adams; indeed, people always called him the very image of his father.

The father tried to fix his mind upon his son's sermon, but presently he glanced

involuntarily across the meeting-house at the young girl, and again his heart leaped and his face paled; but he turned his eyes gravely back to the pulpit, and his wife did not notice. Now and then she thrust a sharp elbow in his side to call his attention to a grand point in their son's discourse. The odor of peppermint was strong in his nostrils, but through it all he seemed to perceive the rose and lavender scent of Evelina Adams's youthful garments. Whether it was with him simply the memory of an odor, which affected him like the odor itself, or not, those in the vicinity of the Squire's pew were plainly aware of it. The gown which the strange young girl wore was, as many an old woman discovered to her neighbor with loud whispers, one of Evelina's, which had been laid away in a sweet-smelling chest since her old girlhood. It had been somewhat altered to suit the fashion of a later day, but the eyes which had fastened keenly upon it when Evelina first wore it up the meeting-house aisle could not mistake it. "It's Evelina Adams's lavender satin made over," one whispered, with a sharp hiss of breath, in the other's ear.

The lavender satin, deepening into purple in the folds, swept in a rich circle over the knees of the young girl in the Squire's pew. She folded her little hands, which were encased in Evelina's cream-colored silk mitts, over it, and looked up at the young minister, and listened to his sermon with a grave and innocent dignity, as Evelina had done before her. Perhaps the resemblance between this young girl and the young girl of the past was more one of mien than aught else, although the type of face was the same. This girl had the same fine sharpness of feature and delicately bright color, and she also wore her hair in curls, although they were tied back from her face with a black velvet ribbon, and did not veil it when she drooped her head, as Evelina's used to do.

The people divided their attention between her and the new minister. Their curiosity goaded them in equal measure with their spiritual zeal. "I can't wait to find out who that girl is," one woman whispered to another.

The girl herself had no thought of the commotion which she awakened. When the service was over, and she walked with a gentle maiden stateliness, which seemed a very copy of Evelina's own, out of the meeting-house, down the street to the Squire's house, and entered it, passing under the stately Corinthian pillars, with a last purple gleam of her satin skirts, she never dreamed of the eager attention that followed her.

It was several days before the village people discovered who she was. The

information had to be obtained, by a process like mental thumb-screwing, from the old man who tended Evelina's garden, but at last they knew. She was the daughter of a cousin of Evelina's on the father's side. Her name was Evelina Leonard; she had been named for her father's cousin. She had been finely brought up, and had attended a Boston school for young ladies. Her mother had been dead many years, and her father had died some two years ago, leaving her with only a very little money, which was now all gone, and Evelina Adams had invited her to live with her. Evelina Adams had herself told the old gardener, seeing his scant curiosity was somewhat awakened by the sight of the strange young lady in the garden, but he seemed to have almost forgotten it when the people questioned him.

“She'll leave her all her money, most likely,” they said, and they looked at this new Evelina in the old Evelina's perfumed gowns with awe.

However, in the space of a few months the opinion upon this matter was divided. Another cousin of Evelina Adams's came to town, and this time an own cousin—a widow in fine black bombazine, portly and florid, walking with a majestic swell, and, moreover, having with her two daughters, girls of her own type, not so far advanced. This woman hired one of the village cottages, and it was rumored that Evelina Adams paid the rent. Still, it was considered that she was not very intimate with these last relatives. The neighbors watched, and saw, many a time, Mrs. Martha Loomis and her girls try the doors of the Adams house, scudding around angrily from front to side and back, and knock and knock again, but with no admittance. “Evelina she won't let none of 'em in more 'n once a week,” the neighbors said. It was odd that, although they had deeply resented Evelina's seclusion on their own accounts, they were rather on her side in this matter, and felt a certain delight when they witnessed a crestfallen retreat of the widow and her daughters. “I don't s'pose she wants them Loomises marchin' in on her every minute,” they said.

The new Evelina was not seen much with the other cousins, and she made no acquaintances in the village. Whether she was to inherit all the Adams property or not, she seemed, at any rate, heiress to all the elder Evelina's habits of life. She worked with her in the garden, and wore her old girlish gowns, and kept almost as close at home as she. She often, however, walked abroad in the early dusk, stepping along in a grave and stately fashion, as the elder Evelina had used to do, holding her skirts away from the dewy roadside weeds, her face showing out in the twilight like a white flower, as if it had a pale light of its own.

Nobody spoke to her; people turned furtively after she had passed and stared after her, but they never spoke. This young Evelina did not seem to expect it. She passed along with the lids cast down over her blue eyes, and the rose and lavender scent of her garments came back in their faces.

But one night when she was walking slowly along, a full half-mile from home, she heard rapid footsteps behind, and the young minister, Thomas Merriam, came up beside her and spoke.

“Good-evening,” said he, and his voice was a little hoarse through nervousness.

Evelina started, and turned her fair face up towards his. “Good-evening,” she responded, and courtesied as she had been taught at school, and stood close to the wall, that he might pass; but Thomas Merriam paused also.

“I—” he began, but his voice broke. He cleared his throat angrily, and went on. “I have seen you in meeting,” he said, with a kind of defiance, more of himself than of her. After all, was he not the minister, and had he not the right to speak to everybody in the congregation? Why should he embarrass himself?

“Yes, sir,” replied Evelina. She stood drooping her head before him, and yet there was a certain delicate hauteur about her. Thomas was afraid to speak again. They both stood silent for a moment, and then Evelina stirred softly, as if to pass on, and Thomas spoke out bravely. “Is your cousin, Miss Adams, well?” said he.

“She is pretty well, I thank you, sir.”

“I've been wanting to—call,” he began; then he hesitated again. His handsome young face was blushing crimson.

Evelina's own color deepened. She turned her face away. “Cousin Evelina never sees callers,” she said, with grave courtesy; “perhaps you did not know. She has not for a great many years.”

“Yes, I did know it,” returned Thomas Merriam; “that's the reason I haven't called.”

“Cousin Evelina is not strong,” remarked the young girl, and there was a savor of apology in her tone.

“But—” stammered Thomas; then he stopped again. “May I—has she any objections to—anybody's coming to see you?”

Evelina started. “I am afraid Cousin Evelina would not approve,” she answered, primly. Then she looked up in his face, and a girlish piteousness came into her own. “I am very sorry,” she said, and there was a catch in her voice.

Thomas bent over her impetuously. All his ministerial state fell from him like an outer garment of the soul. He was young, and he had seen this girl Sunday after Sunday. He had written all his sermons with her image before his eyes, he had preached to her, and her only, and she had come between his heart and all the nations of the earth in his prayers. “Oh,” he stammered out, “I am afraid you can't be very happy living there the way you do. Tell me—”

Evelina turned her face away with sudden haughtiness. “My cousin Evelina is very kind to me, sir,” she said.

“But—you must be lonesome with nobody—of your own age—to speak to,” persisted Thomas, confusedly.

“I never cared much for youthful company. It is getting dark; I must be going,” said Evelina. “I wish you good-evening, sir.”

“Sha'n't I—walk home with you?” asked Thomas, falteringly.

“It isn't necessary, thank you, and I don't think Cousin Evelina would approve,” she replied, primly; and her light dress fluttered away into the dusk and out of sight like the pale wing of a moth.

Poor Thomas Merriam walked on with his head in a turmoil. His heart beat loud in his ears. “I've made her mad with me,” he said to himself, using the old rustic school-boy vernacular, from which he did not always depart in his thoughts, although his ministerial dignity guarded his conversations. Thomas Merriam came of a simple homely stock, whose speech came from the emotions of the heart, all unregulated by the usages of the schools. He was the first for generations who had aspired to college learning and a profession, and had trained his tongue by the models of the educated and polite. He could not help, at times, the relapse of his thoughts, and their speaking to himself in the dialect of his family and his ancestors. “She's 'way above me, and I ought to ha' known it,” he further said, with the meekness of an humble but fiercely independent race,

which is meek to itself alone. He would have maintained his equality with his last breath to an opponent; in his heart of hearts he felt himself below the scion of the one old gentle family of his native village.

This young Evelina, by the fine dignity which had been born with her and not acquired by precept and example, by the sweetly formal diction which seemed her native tongue, had filled him with awe. Now, when he thought she was angered with him, he felt beneath her lady feet, his nostrils choked with a spiritual dust of humiliation.

He went forward blindly. The dusk had deepened; from either side of the road, from the mysterious gloom of the bushes, came the twangs of the katydids, like some coarse rustic quarrellers, each striving for the last word in a dispute not even dignified by excess of passion.

Suddenly somebody jostled him to his own side of the path. “That you, Thomas? Where you been?” said a voice in his ear.

“That you, father? Down to the post-office.”

“Who was that you was talkin' with back there?”

“Miss Evelina Leonard.”

“That girl that's stayin' there—to the old Squire's?”

“Yes.” The son tried to move on, but his father stood before him dumbly for a minute. “I must be going, father. I've got to work on my sermon,” Thomas said, impatiently.

“Wait a minute,” said his father. “I've got something to say to ye, Thomas, an' this is as good a time to say it as any. There ain't anybody 'round. I don't know as ye'll thank me for it—but mother said the other day that she thought you'd kind of an idea—she said you asked her if she thought it would be anything out of the way for you to go up to the Squire's to make a call. Mother she thinks you can step in anywheres, but I don't know. I know your book-learnin' and your bein' a minister has set you up a good deal higher than your mother and me and any of our folks, and I feel as if you were good enough for anybody, as far as that goes; but that ain't all. Some folks have different startin'-points in this world, and they see things different; and when they do, it ain't much use tryin' to make them walk

alongside and see things alike. Their eyes have got different cants, and they ain't able to help it. Now this girl she's related to the old Squire, and she's been brought up different, and she started ahead, even if her father did lose all his property. She 'ain't never eat in the kitchen, nor been scart to set down in the parlor, and satin and velvet, and silver spoons, and cream-pots 'ain't never looked anything out of the common to her, and they always will to you. No matter how many such things you may live to have, they'll always get a little the better of ye. She'll be 'way above 'em; and you won't, no matter how hard you try. Some ideas can't never mix; and when ideas can't mix, folks can't."

"I never said they could," returned Thomas, shortly. "I can't stop to talk any longer, father. I must go home."

"No, you wait a minute, Thomas. I'm goin' to say out what I started to, and then I sha'n't ever bring it up again. What I was comin' at was this: I wanted to warn ye a little. You mustn't set too much store by little things that you think mean consider'ble when they don't. Looks don't count for much, and I want you to remember it, and not be upset by 'em."

Thomas gave a great start and colored high. "I'd like to know what you mean, father," he cried, sharply.

"Nothin'. I don't mean nothin', only I'm older'n you, and it's come in my way to know some things, and it's fittin' you should profit by it. A young woman's looks at you don't count for much. I don't s'pose she knows why she gives 'em herself half the time; they ain't like us. It's best you should make up your mind to it; if you don't, you may find it out by the hardest. That's all. I ain't never goin' to bring this up again."

"I'd like to know what you mean, father." Thomas's voice shook with embarrassment and anger.

"I ain't goin' to say anything more about it," replied the old man. "Mary Ann Pease and Arabella Mann are both in the settin'-room with your mother. I thought I'd tell ye, in case ye didn't want to see 'em, and wanted to go to work on your sermon."

Thomas made an impatient ejaculation as he strode off. When he reached the large white house where he lived he skirted it carefully. The chirping treble of girlish voices came from the open sitting-room window, and he caught a glimpse

of a smooth brown head and a high shell comb in front of the candle-light. The young minister tiptoed in the back door and across the kitchen to the back stairs. The sitting-room door was open, and the candle-light streamed out, and the treble voices rose high. Thomas, advancing through the dusky kitchen with cautious steps, encountered suddenly a chair in the dark corner by the stairs, and just saved himself from falling. There was a startled outcry from the sitting-room, and his mother came running into the kitchen with a candle.

“Who is it?” she demanded, valiantly. Then she started and gasped as her son confronted her. He shook a furious warning fist at the sitting-room door and his mother, and edged towards the stairs. She followed him close. “Hadn't you better jest step in a minute?” she whispered. “Them girls have been here an hour, and I know they're waitin' to see you.” Thomas shook his head fiercely, and swung himself around the corner into the dark crook of the back stairs. His mother thrust the candle into his hand. “Take this, or you'll break your neck on them stairs,” she whispered.

Thomas, stealing up the stairs like a cat, heard one of the girls call to his mother —“Is it robbers, Mis' Merriam? Want us to come an' help tackle 'em?”—and he fairly shuddered; for Evelina's gentle-lady speech was still in his ears, and this rude girlish call seemed to jar upon his sensibilities.

“The idea of any girl screeching out like that,” he muttered. And if he had carried speech as far as his thought, he would have added, “when Evelina is a girl!”

He was so angry that he did not laugh when he heard his mother answer back, in those conclusive tones of hers that were wont to silence all argument: “It ain't anything. Don't be scared. I'm coming right back.” Mrs. Merriam scorned subterfuges. She took always a silent stand in a difficulty, and let people infer what they would. When Mary Ann Pease inquired if it was the cat that had made the noise, she asked if her mother had finished her blue and white counterpane.

The two girls waited a half-hour longer, then they went home. “What do you s'pose made that noise out in the kitchen?” asked Arabella Mann of Mary Ann Pease, the minute they were out-of-doors.

“I don't know,” replied Mary Ann Pease. She was a broad-backed young girl, and looked like a matron as she hurried along in the dusk.

“Well, I know what I think it was,” said Arabella Mann, moving ahead with sharp jerks of her little dark body.

“What?”

“It was him.”

“You don't mean—”

“I think it was Thomas Merriam, and he was tryin' to get up the back stairs unbeknownst to anybody, and he run into something.”

“What for?”

“Because he didn't want to see *us*.”

“Now, Arabella Mann, I don't believe it! He's always real pleasant to me.”

“Well, I do believe it, and I guess he'll know it when I set foot in that house again. I guess he'll find out I didn't go there to see him! He needn't feel so fine, if he is the minister; his folks ain't any better than mine, an' we've got 'nough sight handsomer furniture in our parlor.”

“Did you see how the tallow had all run down over the candles?”

“Yes, I did. She gave that candle she carried out in the kitchen to him, too. Mother says she wasn't never any kind of a housekeeper.”

“Hush! Arabella: here he is coming now.”

But it was not Thomas; it was his father, advancing through the evening with his son's gait and carriage. When the two girls discovered that, one tittered out quite audibly, and they scuttled past. They were not rivals; they simply walked faithfully side by side in pursuit of the young minister, giving him as it were an impartial choice. There were even no heart-burnings between them; one always confided in the other when she supposed herself to have found some slight favor in Thomas's sight; and, indeed, the young minister could scarcely bow to one upon the street unless she flew to the other with the news.

Thomas Merriam himself was aware of all this devotion on the part of the young

women of his flock, and it filled him with a sort of angry shame. He could not have told why, but he despised himself for being the object of their attention more than he despised them. His heart sank at the idea of Evelina's discovering it. What would she think of him if she knew all those young women haunted his house and lagged after meeting on the chance of getting a word from him? Suppose she should see their eyes upon his face in meeting time, and decipher their half-unconscious boldness, as he had done against his will. Once Evelina had looked at him, even as the older Evelina had looked at his father, and all other looks of maidens seemed to him like profanations of that, even although he doubted afterwards that he had rightly interpreted it. Full it had seemed to him of that tender maiden surprise and wonder, of that love that knows not itself, and sees its own splendor for the first time in another's face, and flees at the sight. It had happened once when he was coming down the aisle after the sermon and Evelina had met him at the door of her pew. But she had turned her head quickly, and her soft curls flowed over her red cheek, and he doubted ever after if he had read the look aright. When he had gotten the courage to speak to her, and she had met him with the gentle coldness which she had learned of her lady aunt and her teacher in Boston, his doubt was strong upon him. The next Sunday he looked not her way at all. He even tried faithfully from day to day to drive her image from his mind with prayer and religious thoughts, but in spite of himself he would lapse into dreams about her, as if borne by a current of nature too strong to be resisted. And sometimes, upon being awakened from them, as he sat over his sermon with the ink drying on his quill, by the sudden outburst of treble voices in his mother's sitting-room below, the fancy would seize him that possibly these other young damsels took fond liberties with him in their dreams, as he with Evelina, and he resented it with a fierce maidenliness of spirit, although he was a man. The thought that possibly they, over their spinning or their quilting, had in their hearts the image of himself with fond words upon his lips and fond looks in his eyes, filled him with shame and rage, although he took the same liberty with the delicately haughty maiden Evelina.

But Thomas Merriam was not given to undue appreciation of his own fascination, as was proved by his ready discouragement in the case of Evelina. He had the knowledge of his conquests forced upon his understanding until he could no longer evade it. Every day were offerings laid upon his shrine, of pound-cakes and flaky pies, and loaves of white bread, and cups of jelly, whereby the culinary skill of his devotees might be proved. Silken purses and beautiful socks knitted with fancy stitches, and holy book-marks for his Bible, and even a wonderful bedquilt, and a fine linen shirt with hem-stitched bands,

poured in upon him. He burned with angry blushes when his mother, smiling meaningly, passed them over to him. "Put them away, mother; I don't want them," he would growl out, in a distress that was half comic and half pathetic. He would never taste of the tempting viands which were brought to him. "How you act, Thomas!" his mother would say. She was secretly elated by these feminine libations upon the altar of her son. They did not grate upon her sensibilities, which were not delicate. She even tried to assist two or three of the young women in their designs; she would often praise them and their handiwork to her son—and in this she was aided by an old woman aunt of hers who lived with the family. "Nancy Winslow is as handsome a girl as ever I set eyes on, an' I never see any nicer sewin'," Mrs. Merriam said, after the advent of the linen shirt, and she held it up to the light admiringly. "Jest look at that hem-stitchin'!" she said.

"I guess whoever made that shirt calkilated 't would do for a weddin' one," said old Aunt Betty Green, and Thomas made an exclamation and went out of the room, tingling all over with shame and disgust.

"Thomas don't act nateral," said the old woman, glancing after him through her iron-bound spectacles.

"I dun'no' what's got into him," returned his mother.

"Mebbe they foller him up a leetle too close," said Aunt Betty. "I dun'no' as I should have ventured on a shirt when I was a gal. I made a satin vest once for Joshua, but that don't seem quite as p'inted as a shirt. It didn't scare Joshua, nohow. He asked me to have him the next week."

"Well, I dun'no'," said Mrs. Merriam again. "I kind of wish Thomas would settle on somebody, for I'm pestered most to death with 'em, an' I feel as if 't was kind of mean takin' all these things into the house."

"They've 'bout kept ye in sweet cake, 'ain't they, lately?"

"Yes; but I don't feel as if it was jest right for us to eat it up, when 't was brought for Thomas. But he won't touch it. I can't see as he has the least idee of any one of them. I don't believe Thomas has ever seen anybody he wanted for a wife."

"Well, he's got the pick of 'em, a-settin' their caps right in his face," said Aunt Betty.

Neither of them dreamed how the young man, sleeping and eating and living under the same roof, beloved of them since he entered the world, holding himself coldly aloof from this crowd of half-innocently, half-boldly ardent young women, had set up for himself his own divinity of love, before whom he consumed himself in vain worship. His father suspected, and that was all, and he never mentioned the matter again to his son.

After Thomas had spoken to Evelina the weeks went on, and they never exchanged another word, and their eyes never met. But they dwelt constantly within each other's thoughts, and were ever present to each other's spiritual vision. Always as the young minister bent over his sermon-paper, laboriously tracing out with sputtering quill his application of the articles of the orthodox faith, Evelina's blue eyes seemed to look out at him between the stern doctrines like the eyes of an angel. And he could not turn the pages of the Holy Writ unless he found some passage therein which to his mind treated directly of her, setting forth her graces like a prophecy. "The fairest among women," read Thomas Merriam, and nodded his head, while his heart leaped with the satisfied delight of all its fancies, at the image of his love's fair and gentle face. "Her price is far above rubies," read Thomas Merriam, and he nodded his head again, and saw Evelina shining as with gold and pearls, more precious than all the jewels of the earth. In spite of all his efforts, when Thomas Merriam studied the Scriptures in those days he was more nearly touched by those old human hearts which throbbed down to his through the ages, welding the memories of their old loves to his living one until they seemed to prove its eternity, than by the Messianic prophecies. Often he spent hours upon his knees, but arose with Evelina's face before his very soul in spite of all.

And as for Evelina, she tended the flowers in the elder Evelina's garden with her poor cousin, whose own love-dreams had been illustrated as it were by the pinks and lilies blooming around them when they had all gone out of her heart, and Thomas Merriam's half-bold, half-imploring eyes looked up at her out of every flower and stung her heart like bees. Poor young Evelina feared much lest she had offended Thomas, and yet her own maiden decorum had been offended by him, and she had offended it herself, and she was faint with shame and distress when she thought of it. How had she been so bold and shameless as to give him that look at the meeting-house? and how had he been so cruel as to accost her afterwards? She told herself she had done right for the maintenance of her own maiden dignity, and yet she feared lest she had angered him and hurt him. "Suppose he had been fretted by her coolness?" she thought, and then a great

wave of tender pity went over her heart, and she would almost have spoken to him of her own accord. But then she would reflect how he continued to write such beautiful sermons, and prove so clearly and logically the tenets of the faith; and how could he do that with a mind in distress? Scarcely could she herself tend the flower-beds as she should, nor set her embroidery stitches finely and evenly, she was so ill at ease. It must be that Thomas had not given the matter an hour's worry, since he continued to do his work so faithfully and well. And then her own heart would be sorer than ever with the belief that his was happy and at rest, although she would chide herself for it.

And yet this young Evelina was a philosopher and an analyst of human nature in a small way, and she got some slight comfort out of a shrewd suspicion that the heart of a man might love and suffer on a somewhat different principle from the heart of a woman. "It may be," thought Evelina, sitting idle over her embroidery with far-away blue eyes, "that a man's heart can always turn a while from love to other things as weighty and serious, although he be just as fond, while a woman's heart is always fixed one way by loving, and cannot be turned unless it breaks. And it may be wise," thought young Evelina, "else how could the state be maintained and governed, battles for independence be fought, and even souls be saved, and the gospel carried to the heathen, if men could not turn from the concerns of their own hearts more easily than women? Women should be patient," thought Evelina, "and consider that if they suffer 't is due to the lot which a wise Providence has given them." And yet tears welled up in her earnest blue eyes and fell over her fair cheeks and wet the embroidery—when the elder Evelina was not looking, as she seldom was. The elder Evelina was kind to her young cousin, but there were days when she seemed to dwell alone in her own thoughts, apart from the whole world, and she seldom spoke either to Evelina or her old servant-man.

Young Evelina, trying to atone for her former indiscretion and establish herself again on her height of maiden reserve in Thomas Merriam's eyes, sat resolutely in the meeting-house of a Sabbath day, with her eyes cast down, and after service she glided swiftly down the aisle and was out of the door before the young minister could much more than descend the pulpit stairs, unless he ran an indecorous race.

And young Evelina never at twilight strolled up the road in the direction of Thomas Merriam's home, where she might quite reasonably hope to meet him, since he was wont to go to the store when the evening stage-coach came in with

the mail from Boston.

Instead she paced the garden paths, or, when there was not too heavy a dew, rambled across the fields; and there was also a lane where she loved to walk. Whether or not Thomas Merriam suspected this, or had ever seen, as he passed the mouth of the lane, the flutter of maidenly draperies in the distance, it so happened that one evening he also went a-walking there, and met Evelina. He had entered the lane from the highway, and she from the fields at the head. So he saw her first afar off, and could not tell fairly whether her light muslin skirt might not be only a white-flowering bush. For, since his outlook upon life had been so full of Evelina, he had found that often the most common and familiar things would wear for a second a look of her to startle him. And many a time his heart had leaped at the sight of a white bush ahead stirring softly in the evening wind, and he had thought it might be she. Now he said to himself impatiently that this was only another fancy; but soon he saw that it was indeed Evelina, in a light muslin gown, with a little lace kerchief on her head. His handsome young face was white; his lips twitched nervously; but he reached out and pulled a spray of white flowers from a bush, and swung it airily to hide his agitation as he advanced.

As for Evelina, when she first espied Thomas she started and half turned, as if to go back; then she held up her white-kerchiefed head with gentle pride and kept on. When she came up to Thomas she walked so far to one side that her muslin skirt was in danger of catching and tearing on the bushes, and she never raised her eyes, and not a flicker of recognition stirred her sweet pale face as she passed him.

But Thomas started as if she had struck him, and dropped his spray of white flowers, and could not help a smothered cry that was half a sob, as he went on, knocking blindly against the bushes. He went a little way, then he stopped and looked back with his piteous hurt eyes. And Evelina had stopped also, and she had the spray of white flowers which he had dropped, in her hand, and her eyes met his. Then she let the flowers fall again, and clapped both her little hands to her face to cover it, and turned to run; but Thomas was at her side, and he put out his hand and held her softly by her white arm.

“Oh,” he panted, “I—did not mean to be—too presuming, and offend you. I—crave your pardon—”

Evelina had recovered herself. She stood with her little hands clasped, and her eyes cast down before him, but not a quiver stirred her pale face, which seemed turned to marble by this last effort of her maiden pride. "I have nothing to pardon," said she. "It was I, whose bold behavior, unbecoming a modest and well-trained young woman, gave rise to what seemed like presumption on your part." The sense of justice was strong within her, but she made her speech haughtily and primly, as if she had learned it by rote from some maiden school-mistress, and pulled her arm away and turned to go; but Thomas's words stopped her.

"Not—unbecoming if it came—from the heart," said he, brokenly, scarcely daring to speak, and yet not daring to be silent.

Then Evelina turned on him, with a sudden strange pride that lay beneath all other pride, and was of a nobler and truer sort. "Do you think I would have given you the look that I did if it had not come from my heart?" she demanded. "What did you take me to be—false and a jilt? I may be a forward young woman, who has overstepped the bounds of maidenly decorum, and I shall never get over the shame of it, but I am truthful, and I am no jilt." The brilliant color flamed out on Evelina's cheeks. Her blue eyes met Thomas's with that courage of innocence and nature which dares all shame. But it was only for a second; the tears sprang into them. "I beg you to let me go home," she said, pitifully; but Thomas caught her in his arms, and pressed her troubled maiden face against his breast.

"Oh, I love you so!" he whispered—"I love you so, Evelina, and I was afraid you were angry with me for it."

"And I was afraid," she faltered, half weeping and half shrinking from him, "lest you were angry with me for betraying the state of my feelings, when you could not return them." And even then she used that gentle formality of expression with which she had been taught by her maiden preceptors to veil decorously her most ardent emotions. And, in truth, her training stood her in good stead in other ways; for she presently commanded, with that mild dignity of hers which allowed of no remonstrance, that Thomas should take away his arm from her waist, and give her no more kisses for that time.

"It is not becoming for any one," said she, "and much less for a minister of the gospel. And as for myself, I know not what Mistress Perkins would say to me. She has a mind much above me, I fear."

“Mistress Perkins is enjoying her mind in Boston,” said Thomas Merriam, with the laugh of a triumphant young lover.

But Evelina did not laugh. “It might be well for both you and me if she were here,” said she, seriously. However, she tempered a little her decorous following of Mistress Perkins's precepts, and she and Thomas went hand in hand up the lane and across the fields.

There was no dew that night, and the moon was full. It was after nine o'clock when Thomas left her at the gate in the fence which separated Evelina Adams's garden from the field, and watched her disappear between the flowers. The moon shone full on the garden. Evelina walked as it were over a silver dapple, which her light gown seemed to brush away and dispel for a moment. The bushes stood in sweet mysterious clumps of shadow.

Evelina had almost reached the house, and was close to the great althea bush, which cast a wide circle of shadow, when it seemed suddenly to separate and move into life.

The elder Evelina stepped out from the shadow of the bush. “Is that you, Evelina?” she said, in her soft, melancholy voice, which had in it a nervous vibration.

“Yes, Cousin Evelina.”

The elder Evelina's pale face, drooped about with gray curls, had an unfamiliar, almost uncanny, look in the moonlight, and might have been the sorrowful visage of some marble nymph, lovelorn, with unceasing grace. “Who—was with you?” she asked.

“The minister,” replied young Evelina.

“Did he meet you?”

“He met me in the lane, Cousin Evelina.”

“And he walked home with you across the field?”

“Yes, Cousin Evelina.”

Then the two entered the house, and nothing more was said about the matter. Young Evelina and Thomas Merriam agreed that their affection was to be kept a secret for a while. "For," said young Evelina, "I cannot leave Cousin Evelina yet a while, and I cannot have her pestered with thinking about it, at least before another spring, when she has the garden fairly growing again."

"That is nearly a whole year; it is August now," said Thomas, half reproachfully, and he tightened his clasp of Evelina's slender fingers.

"I cannot help that," replied Evelina. "It is for you to show Christian patience more than I, Thomas. If you could have seen poor Cousin Evelina, as I have seen her, through the long winter days, when her garden is dead, and she has only the few plants in her window left! When she is not watering and tending them she sits all day in the window and looks out over the garden and the naked bushes and the withered flower-stalks. She used not to be so, but would read her Bible and good books, and busy herself somewhat over fine needle-work, and at one time she was compiling a little floral book, giving a list of the flowers, and poetical selections and sentiments appropriate to each. That was her pastime for three winters, and it is now nearly done; but she has given that up, and all the rest, and sits there in the window and grows older and feebler until spring. It is only I who can divert her mind, by reading aloud to her and singing; and sometimes I paint the flowers she loves the best on card-board with water-colors. I have a poor skill in it, but Cousin Evelina can tell which flower I have tried to represent, and it pleases her greatly. I have even seen her smile. No, I cannot leave her, nor even pester her with telling her before another spring, and you must wait, Thomas," said young Evelina.

And Thomas agreed, as he was likely to do to all which she proposed which touched not his own sense of right and honor. Young Evelina gave Thomas one more kiss for his earnest pleading, and that night wrote out the tale in her journal. "It may be that I overstepped the bounds of maidenly decorum," wrote Evelina, "but my heart did so entreat me," and no blame whatever did she lay upon Thomas.

Young Evelina opened her heart only to her journal, and her cousin was told nothing, and had little cause for suspicion. Thomas Merriam never came to the house to see his sweetheart; he never walked home with her from meeting. Both were anxious to avoid village gossip, until the elder Evelina could be told.

Often in the summer evenings the lovers met, and strolled hand in hand across the fields, and parted at the garden gate with the one kiss which Evelina allowed, and that was all.

Sometimes when young Evelina came in with her lover's kiss still warm upon her lips the elder Evelina looked at her wistfully, with a strange retrospective expression in her blue eyes, as if she were striving to remember something that the girl's face called to mind. And yet she could have had nothing to remember except dreams.

And once, when young Evelina sat sewing through a long summer afternoon and thinking about her lover, the elder Evelina, who was storing rose leaves mixed with sweet spices in a jar, said, suddenly, "He looks as his father used to."

Young Evelina started. "Whom do you mean, Cousin Evelina?" she asked, wonderingly; for the elder Evelina had not glanced at her, nor even seemed to address her at all.

"Nothing," said the elder Evelina, and a soft flush stole over her withered face and neck, and she sprinkled more cassia on the rose leaves in the jar.

Young Evelina said no more; but she wondered, partly because Thomas was always in her mind, and it seemed to her naturally that nearly everything must have a savor of meaning of him, if her cousin Evelina could possibly have referred to him and his likeness to his father. For it was commonly said that Thomas looked very like his father, although his figure was different. The young man was taller and more firmly built, and he had not the meek forward curve of shoulder which had grown upon his father of late years.

When the frosty nights came Thomas and Evelina could not meet and walk hand in hand over the fields behind the Squire's house, and they very seldom could speak to each other. It was nothing except a "good-day" on the street, and a stolen glance, which set them both a-trembling lest all the congregation had noticed, in the meeting-house. When the winter set fairly in they met no more, for the elder Evelina was taken ill, and her young cousin did not leave her even to go to meeting. People said they guessed it was Evelina Adams's last sickness, and they furthermore guessed that she would divide her property between her cousin Martha Loomis and her two girls and Evelina Leonard, and that Evelina would have the house as her share.

Thomas Merriam heard this last with a satisfaction which he did not try to disguise from himself, because he never dreamed of there being any selfish element in it. It was all for Evelina. Many a time he had looked about the humble house where he had been born, and where he would have to take Evelina after he had married her, and striven to see its poor features with her eyes—not with his, for which familiarity had tempered them. Often, as he sat with his parents in the old sitting-room, in which he had kept so far an unquestioning belief, as in a friend of his childhood, the scales of his own personality would fall suddenly from his eyes. Then he would see, as Evelina, the poor, worn, humble face of his home, and his heart would sink. “I don't see how I ever can bring her here,” he thought. He began to save, a few cents at a time, out of his pitiful salary, to at least beautify his own chamber a little when Evelina should come. He made up his mind that she should have a little dressing-table, with an oval mirror, and a white muslin frill around it, like one he had seen in Boston. “She shall have that to sit before while she combs her hair,” he thought, with defiant tenderness, when he stowed away another shilling in a little box in his trunk. It was money which he ordinarily bestowed upon foreign missions; but his Evelina had come between him and the heathen. To procure some dainty furnishings for her bridal-chamber he took away a good half of his tithes for the spread of the gospel in the dark lands. Now and then his conscience smote him, he felt shamefaced before his deacons, but Evelina kept her first claim. He resolved that another year he would hire a piece of land, and combine farming with his ministerial work, and so try to eke out his salary, and get a little more money to beautify his poor home for his bride.

Now if Evelina Adams had come to the appointed time for the closing of her solitary life, and if her young cousin should inherit a share of her goodly property and the fine old mansion-house, all necessity for anxiety of this kind was over. Young Evelina would not need to be taken away, for the sake of her love, from all these comforts and luxuries. Thomas Merriam rejoiced innocently, without a thought for himself.

In the course of the winter he confided in his father; he couldn't keep it to himself any longer. Then there was another reason. Seeing Evelina so little made him at times almost doubt the reality of it all. There were days when he was depressed, and inclined to ask himself if he had not dreamed it. Telling somebody gave it substance.

His father listened soberly when he told him; he had grown old of late.

“Well,” said he, “she 'ain't been used to living the way you have, though you have had advantages that none of your folks ever had; but if she likes you, that's all there is to it, I s'pose.”

The old man sighed wearily. He sat in his arm-chair at the kitchen fireplace; his wife had gone in to one of the neighbors, and the two were alone.

“Of course,” said Thomas, simply, “if Evelina Adams shouldn't live, the chances are that I shouldn't have to bring her here. She wouldn't have to give up anything on my account—you know that, father.”

Then the young man started, for his father turned suddenly on him with a pale, wrathful face. “You ain't countin' on that!” he shouted. “You ain't countin' on that—a son of mine countin' on anything like that!”

Thomas colored. “Why, father,” he stammered, “you don't think—you know, it's all for *her*—and they say she can't live anyway. I had never thought of such a thing before. I was wondering how I could make it comfortable for Evelina here.”

But his father did not seem to listen. “Countin' on that!” he repeated. “Countin' on a poor old soul, that 'ain't ever had anything to set her heart on but a few posies, dyin' to make room for other folks to have what she's been cheated out on. Countin' on that!” The old man's voice broke into a hoarse sob; he got up, and went hurriedly out of the room.

“Why, father!” his son called after him, in alarm. He got up to follow him, but his father waved him back and shut the door hard.

“Father must be getting childish,” Thomas thought, wonderingly. He did not bring up the subject to him again.

Evelina Adams died in March. One morning the bell tolled seventy long melancholy tones before people had eaten their breakfasts. They ran to their doors and counted. “It's her,” they said, nodding, when they had waited a little after the seventieth stroke. Directly Mrs. Martha Loomis and her two girls were seen hustling importantly down the road, with their shawls over their heads, to the Squire's house. “Mis' Loomis can lay her out,” they said. “It ain't likely that young Evelina knows anything about such things. Guess she'll be thankful she's got somebody to call on now, if she 'ain't mixed much with the Loomises.” Then

they wondered when the funeral would be, and the women furbished up their black gowns and bonnets, and even in a few cases drove to the next town and borrowed from relatives; but there was a great disappointment in store for them.

Evelina Adams died on a Saturday. The next day it was announced from the pulpit that the funeral would be private, by the particular request of the deceased. Evelina Adams had carried her delicate seclusion beyond death, to the very borders of the grave. Nobody, outside the family, was bidden to the funeral, except the doctor, the minister, and the two deacons of the church. They were to be the bearers. The burial also was to be private, in the Squire's family burial-lot, at the north of the house. The bearers would carry the coffin across the yard, and there would not only be no funeral, but no funeral procession, and no hearse. "It don't seem scarcely decent," the women whispered to each other; "and more than all that, she ain't goin' to be *seen*." The deacons' wives were especially disturbed by this last, as they might otherwise have gained many interesting particulars by proxy.

Monday was the day set for the burial. Early in the morning old Thomas Merriam walked feebly up the road to the Squire's house. People noticed him as he passed. "How terribly fast he's grown old lately!" they said. He opened the gate which led into the Squire's front yard with fumbling fingers, and went up the walk to the front door, under the Corinthian pillars, and raised the brass knocker.

Evelina opened the door, and started and blushed when she saw him. She had been crying; there were red rings around her blue eyes, and her pretty lips were swollen. She tried to smile at Thomas's father, and she held out her hand with shy welcome.

"I want to see her," the old man said, abruptly.

Evelina started, and looked at him wonderingly. "I—don't believe—I know who you mean," said she. "Do you want to see Mrs. Loomis?"

"No; I want to see her."

"*Her?*"

"Yes, *her*."

Evelina turned pale as she stared at him. There was something strange about his face. "But—Cousin Evelina," she faltered—"she—didn't want— Perhaps you don't know: she left special directions that nobody was to look at her."

"*I want to see her,*" said the old man, and Evelina gave way. She stood aside for him to enter, and led him into the great north parlor, where Evelina Adams lay in her mournful state. The shutters were closed, and one on entering could distinguish nothing but that long black shadow in the middle of the room. Young Evelina opened a shutter a little way, and a slanting shaft of spring sunlight came in and shot athwart the coffin. The old man tiptoed up and leaned over and looked at the dead woman. Evelina Adams had left further instructions about her funeral, which no one understood, but which were faithfully carried out. She wished, she had said, to be attired for her long sleep in a certain rose-colored gown, laid away in rose leaves and lavender in a certain chest in a certain chamber. There were also silken hose and satin shoes with it, and these were to be put on, and a wrought lace tucker fastened with a pearl brooch.

It was the costume she had worn one Sabbath day back in her youth, when she had looked across the meeting-house and her eyes had met young Thomas Merriam's; but nobody knew nor remembered; even young Evelina thought it was simply a vagary of her dead cousin's.

"It don't seem to me decent to lay away anybody dressed so," said Mrs. Martha Loomis; "but of course last wishes must be respected."

The two Loomis girls said they were thankful nobody was to see the departed in her rose-colored shroud.

Even old Thomas Merriam, leaning over poor Evelina, cold and dead in the garb of her youth, did not remember it, and saw no meaning in it. He looked at her long. The beautiful color was all faded out of the yellow-white face; the sweet full lips were set and thin; the closed blue eyes sunken in dark hollows; the yellow hair showed a line of gray at the edge of her old woman's cap, and thin gray curls lay against the hollow cheeks. But old Thomas Merriam drew a long breath when he looked at her. It was like a gasp of admiration and wonder; a strange rapture came into his dim eyes; his lips moved as if he whispered to her, but young Evelina could not hear a sound. She watched him, half frightened, but finally he turned to her. "I 'ain't seen her—fairly," said he, hoarsely—"I 'ain't seen her, savin' a glimpse of her at the window, for over forty year, and she 'ain't

changed, not a look. I'd have known her anywheres. She's the same as she was when she was a girl. It's wonderful—wonderful!”

Young Evelina shrank a little. “We think she looks natural,” she said, hesitatingly.

“She looks jest as she did when she was a girl and used to come into the meetin'-house. She *is* jest the same,” the old man repeated, in his eager, hoarse voice. Then he bent over the coffin, and his lips moved again. Young Evelina would have called Mrs. Loomis, for she was frightened, had he not been Thomas's father, and had it not been for her vague feeling that there might be some old story to explain this which she had never heard. “Maybe he was in love with poor Cousin Evelina, as Thomas is with me,” thought young Evelina, using her own leaping-pole of love to land straight at the truth. But she never told her surmise to any one except Thomas, and that was long afterwards, when the old man was dead. Now she watched him with her blue dilated eyes. But soon he turned away from the coffin and made his way straight out of the room, without a word. Evelina followed him through the entry and opened the outer door. He turned on the threshold and looked back at her, his face working.

“Don't ye go to lottin' too much on what ye're goin' to get through folks that have died an' not had anything,” he said; and he shook his head almost fiercely at her.

“No, I won't. I don't think I understand what you mean, sir,” stammered Evelina.

The old man stood looking at her a moment. Suddenly she saw the tears rolling over his old cheeks. “I'm much obliged to ye for lettin' of me see her,” he said, hoarsely, and crept feebly down the steps.

Evelina went back trembling to the room where her dead cousin lay, and covered her face, and closed the shutter again. Then she went about her household duties, wondering. She could not understand what it all meant; but one thing she understood—that in some way this old dead woman, Evelina Adams, had gotten immortal youth and beauty in one human heart. “She looked to him just as she did when she was a girl,” Evelina kept thinking to herself with awe. She said nothing about it to Mrs. Martha Loomis or her daughters. They had been in the back part of the house, and had not heard old Thomas Merriam come in, and they never knew about it.

Mrs. Loomis and the two girls stayed in the house day and night until after the funeral. They confidently expected to live there in the future. “It isn't likely that Evelina Adams thought a young woman no older than Evelina Leonard could

live here alone in this great house with nobody but that old Sarah Judd. It would not be proper nor becoming,” said Martha Loomis to her two daughters; and they agreed, and brought over many of their possessions under cover of night to the Squire's house during the interval before the funeral.

But after the funeral and the reading of the will the Loomises made sundry trips after dusk back to their old home, with their best petticoats and cloaks over their arms, and their bonnets dangling by their strings at their sides. For Evelina Adams's last will and testament had been read, and therein provision was made for the continuance of the annuity heretofore paid them for their support, with the condition affixed that not one night should they spend after the reading of the will in the house known as the Squire Adams house. The annuity was an ample one, and would provide the widow Martha Loomis and her daughters, as it had done before, with all the needfuls of life; but upon hearing the will they stiffened their double chins into their kerchiefs with indignation, for they had looked for more.

Evelina Adams's will was a will of conditions, for unto it she had affixed two more, and those affected her beloved cousin Evelina Leonard. It was notable that “beloved” had not preceded her cousin Martha Loomis's name in the will. No pretence of love, when she felt none, had she ever made in her life. The entire property of Evelina Adams, spinster, deceased, with the exception of Widow Martha Loomis's provision, fell to this beloved young Evelina Leonard, subject to two conditions—firstly, she was never to enter into matrimony, with any person whomsoever, at any time whatsoever; secondly, she was never to let the said spinster Evelina Adams's garden, situated at the rear and southward of the house known as the Squire Adams house, die through any neglect of hers. Due allowance was to be made for the dispensations of Providence: for hail and withering frost and long-continued drought, and for times wherein the said Evelina Leonard might, by reason of being confined to the house by sickness, be prevented from attending to the needs of the growing plants, and the verdict in such cases was to rest with the minister and the deacons of the church. But should this beloved Evelina love and wed, or should she let, through any wilful neglect, that garden perish in the season of flowers, all that goodly property would she forfeit to a person unknown, whose name, enclosed in a sealed envelope, was to be held meantime in the hands of the executor, who had also drawn up the will, Lawyer Joshua Lang.

There was great excitement in the village over this strange and unwonted will.

Some were there who held that Evelina Adams had not been of sound mind, and it should be contested. It was even rumored that Widow Martha Loomis had visited Lawyer Joshua Lang and broached the subject, but he had dismissed the matter peremptorily by telling her that Evelina Adams, spinster, deceased, had been as much in her right mind at the time of drawing the will as anybody of his acquaintance.

“Not setting store by relations, and not wanting to have them under your roof, doesn't go far in law nor common-sense to send folks to the madhouse,” old Lawyer Lang, who was famed for his sharp tongue, was reported to have said. However, Mrs. Martha Loomis was somewhat comforted by her firm belief that either her own name or that of one of her daughters was in that sealed envelope kept by Lawyer Joshua Lang in his strong-box, and by her firm purpose to watch carefully lest Evelina prove derelict in fulfilling the two conditions whereby she held the property.

Larger peep-holes were soon cut away mysteriously in the high arbor-vitæ hedge, and therein were often set for a few moments, when they passed that way, the eager eyes of Mrs. Martha or her daughter Flora or Fidelia Loomis. Frequent calls they also made upon Evelina, living alone with the old woman Sarah Judd, who had been called in during her cousin's illness, and they strolled into the garden, spying anxiously for withered leaves or dry stalks. They at every opportunity interviewed the old man who assisted Evelina in her care of the garden concerning its welfare. But small progress they made with him, standing digging at the earth with his spade while they talked, as if in truth his wits had gone therein before his body and he would uncover them.

Moreover, Mrs. Martha Loomis talked much slyly to mothers of young men, and sometimes with bold insinuations to the young men themselves, of the sad lot of poor young Evelina, condemned to a solitary and loveless life, and of her sweetness and beauty and desirability in herself, although she could not bring the old Squire's money to her husband. And once, but no more than that, she touched lightly upon the subject to the young minister, Thomas Merriam, when he was making a pastoral call.

“My heart bleeds for the poor child living all alone in that great house,” said she. And she looked down mournfully, and did not see how white the young minister's face turned. “It seems almost a pity,” said she, furthermore—“Evelina is a good housekeeper, and has rare qualities in herself, and so many get poor

wives nowadays—that some godly young man should not court her in spite of the will. I doubt, too, if she would not have a happier lot than growing old over that garden, as poor Cousin Evelina did before her, even if she has a fine house to live in and a goodly sum in the bank. She looks pindling enough lately. I'll warrant she has lost a good ten pound since poor Evelina was laid away, and—”

But Thomas Merriam cut her short. “I see no profit in discussing matters which do not concern us,” said he, and only his ministerial estate saved him from the charge of impertinence.

As it was, Martha Loomis colored high. “I'll warrant he'll look out which side his bread is buttered on; ministers always do,” she said to her daughters after he had gone. She never dreamed how her talk had cut him to the heart.

Had he not seen more plainly than any one else, Sunday after Sunday, when he glanced down at her once or twice cautiously from his pulpit, how weary-looking and thin she was growing? And her bright color was wellnigh gone, and there were pitiful downward lines at the corners of her sweet mouth. Poor young Evelina was fading like one of her own flowers, as if some celestial gardener had failed in his care of her. And Thomas saw it, and in his heart of hearts he knew the reason, and yet he would not yield. Not once had he entered the old Squire's house since he attended the dead Evelina's funeral, and stood praying and eulogizing, with her coffin between him and the living Evelina, with her pale face shrouded in black bombazine. He had never spoken to her since, nor entered the house; but he had written her a letter, in which all the fierce passion and anguish of his heart was cramped and held down by formal words and phrases, and poor young Evelina did not see beneath them. When her lover wrote her that he felt it inconsistent with his Christian duty and the higher aims of his existence to take any further steps towards a matrimonial alliance, she felt merely that Thomas either cared no more for her, or had come to consider, upon due reflection, that she was not fit to undertake the responsible position of a minister's wife. “It may be that in some way I failed in my attendance upon Cousin Evelina,” thought poor young Evelina, “or it may be that he thinks I have not enough dignity of character to inspire respect among the older women in the church.” And sometimes, with a sharp thrust of misery that shook her out of her enforced patience and meekness, she wondered if indeed her own loving freedom with him had turned him against her, and led him in his later and sober judgment to consider her too light-minded for a minister's wife. “It may be that I was guilty of great indecorum, and almost indeed forfeited my claim to respect

for maidenly modesty, inasmuch as I suffered him to give me kisses, and did almost bring myself to return them in kind. But my heart did so entreat me, and in truth it seemed almost like a lack of sincerity for me to wholly withstand it," wrote poor young Evelina in her journal at that time; and she further wrote: "It is indeed hard for one who has so little knowledge to be fully certain of what is or is not becoming and a Christian duty in matters of this kind; but if I have in any manner, through my ignorance or unwarrantable affection, failed, and so lost the love and respect of a good man, and the opportunity to become his helpmeet during life, I pray that I may be forgiven—for I sinned not wilfully—that the lesson may be sanctified unto me, and that I may live as the Lord order, in Christian patience and meekness, and not repining." It never occurred to young Evelina that possibly Thomas Merriam's sense of duty might be strengthened by the loss of all her cousin's property should she marry him, and neither did she dream that he might hesitate to take her from affluence into poverty for her own sake. For herself the property, as put in the balance beside her love, was lighter than air itself. It was so light that it had no place in her consciousness. She simply had thought, upon hearing the will, of Martha Loomis and her daughters in possession of the property, and herself with Thomas, with perfect acquiescence and rapture.

Evelina Adams's disapprobation of her marriage, which was supposedly expressed in the will, had indeed, without reference to the property, somewhat troubled her tender heart, but she told herself that Cousin Evelina had not known she had promised to marry Thomas; that she would not wish her to break her solemn promise. And furthermore, it seemed to her quite reasonable that the condition had been inserted in the will mainly through concern for the beloved garden.

"Cousin Evelina might have thought perhaps I would let the flowers die when I had a husband and children to take care of," said Evelina. And so she had disposed of all the considerations which had disturbed her, and had thought of no others.

She did not answer Thomas's letter. It was so worded that it seemed to require no reply, and she felt that he must be sure of her acquiescence in whatever he thought best. She laid the letter away in a little rosewood box, in which she had always kept her dearest treasures since her school-days. Sometimes she took it out and read it, and it seemed to her that the pain in her heart would put an end to her in spite of all her prayers for Christian fortitude; and yet she could not help

reading it again.

It was seldom that she stole a look at her old lover as he stood in the pulpit in the meeting-house, but when she did she thought with an anxious pang that he looked worn and ill, and that night she prayed that the Lord would restore his health to him for the sake of his people.

It was four months after Evelina Adams's death, and her garden was in the full glory of midsummer, when one evening, towards dusk, young Evelina went slowly down the street. She seldom walked abroad now, but kept herself almost as secluded as her cousin had done before her. But that night a great restlessness was upon her, and she put a little black silk shawl over her shoulders and went out. It was quite cool, although it was midsummer. The dusk was deepening fast; the katydids called back and forth from the wayside bushes. Evelina met nobody for some distance. Then she saw a man coming towards her, and her heart stood still, and she was about to turn back, for she thought for a minute it was the young minister. Then she saw it was his father, and she went on slowly, with her eyes downcast. When she met him she looked up and said good-evening, gravely, and would have passed on, but he stood in her way.

“I've got a word to say to ye, if ye'll listen,” he said.

Evelina looked at him tremblingly. There was something strained and solemn in his manner. “I'll hear whatever you have to say, sir,” she said.

The old man leaned his pale face over her and raised a shaking forefinger. “I've made up my mind to say something,” said he. “I don't know as I've got any right to, and maybe my son will blame me, but I'm goin' to see that you have a chance. It's been borne in upon me that women folks don't always have a fair chance. It's jest this I'm goin' to say: I don't know whether you know how my son feels about it or not. I don't know how open he's been with you. Do you know jest why he quit you?”

Evelina shook her head. “No,” she panted—“I don't—I never knew. He said it was his duty.”

“Duty can get to be an idol of wood and stone, an' I don't know but Thomas's is,” said the old man. “Well, I'll tell you. He don't think it's right for him to marry you, and make you leave that big house, and lose all that money. He don't care anything about it for himself, but it's for you. Did you know that?”

Evelina grasped the old man's arm hard with her little fingers.

"You don't mean that—was why he did it!" she gasped.

"Yes, that was why."

Evelina drew away from him. She was ashamed to have Thomas's father see the joy in her face. "Thank you, sir," she said. "I did not understand. I—will write to him."

"Maybe my son will think I have done wrong coming betwixt him and his ideas of duty," said old Thomas Merriam, "but sometimes there's a good deal lost for lack of a word, and I wanted you to have a fair chance an' a fair say. It's been borne in upon me that women folks don't always have it. Now you can do jest as you think best, but you must remember one thing—riches ain't all. A little likin' for you that's goin' to last, and keep honest and faithful to you as long as you live, is worth more; an' it's worth more to women folks than 't is to men, an' it's worth enough to them. My son's poorly. His mother and I are worried about him. He don't eat nor sleep—walks his chamber nights. His mother don't know what the matter is, but he let on to me some time since."

"I'll write a letter to him," gasped Evelina again. "Good-night, sir." She pulled her little black silk shawl over her head and hastened home, and all night long her candle burned, while her weary little fingers toiled over pages of foolscap-paper to convince Thomas Merriam fully, and yet in terms not exceeding maidenly reserve, that the love of his heart and the companionship of his life were worth more to her than all the silver and gold in the world. Then the next morning she despatched it, all neatly folded and sealed, and waited.

It was strange that a letter like that could not have moved Thomas Merriam, when his heart too pleaded with him so hard to be moved. But that might have been the very reason why he could withstand her, and why the consciousness of his own weakness gave him strength. Thomas Merriam was one, when he had once fairly laid hold of duty, to grasp it hard, although it might be to his own pain and death, and maybe to that of others. He wrote to poor young Evelina another letter, in which he emphasized and repeated his strict adherence to what he believed the line of duty in their separation, and ended it with a prayer for her welfare and happiness, in which, indeed, for a second, the passionate heart of the man showed forth. Then he locked himself in his chamber, and nobody ever

knew what he suffered there. But one pang he did not suffer which Evelina would have suffered in his place. He mourned not over nor realized the grief of her tender heart when she should read his letter, otherwise he could not have sent it. He writhed under his own pain alone, and his duty hugged him hard, like the iron maiden of the old tortures, but he would not yield.

As for Evelina, when she got his letter, and had read it through, she sat still and white for a long time, and did not seem to hear when old Sarah Judd spoke to her. But at last she rose and went to her chamber, and knelt down, and prayed for a long time; and then she went out in the garden and cut all the most beautiful flowers, and tied them in wreaths and bouquets, and carried them out to the north side of the house, where her cousin Evelina was buried, and covered her grave with them. And then she knelt down there, and hid her face among them, and said, in a low voice, as if in a listening ear, "I pray you, Cousin Evelina, forgive me for what I am about to do."

And then she returned to the house, and sat at her needlework as usual; but the old woman kept looking at her, and asking if she were sick, for there was a strange look in her face.

She and old Sarah Judd had always their tea at five o'clock, and put the candles out at nine, and this night they did as they were wont. But at one o'clock in the morning young Evelina stole softly down the stairs with her lighted candle, and passed through into the kitchen; and a half-hour after she came forth into the garden, which lay in full moonlight, and she had in her hand a steaming teakettle, and she passed around among the shrubs and watered them, and a white cloud of steam rose around them. Back and forth she went to the kitchen; for she had heated the great copper wash-kettle full of water; and she watered all the shrubs in the garden, moving amid curling white wreaths of steam, until the water was gone. And then she set to work and tore up by the roots with her little hands and trampled with her little feet all the beautiful tender flower-beds; all the time weeping, and moaning softly: "Poor Cousin Evelina! poor Cousin Evelina! Oh, forgive me, poor Cousin Evelina!"

And at dawn the garden lay in ruin, for all the tender plants she had torn up by the roots and trampled down, and all the stronger-rooted shrubs she had striven to kill with boiling water and salt.

Then Evelina went into the house, and made herself tidy as well as she could

when she trembled so, and put her little shawl over her head, and went down the road to the Merriams' house. It was so early the village was scarcely astir, but there was smoke coming out of the kitchen chimney at the Merriams'; and when she knocked, Mrs. Merriam opened the door at once, and stared at her.

"Is Sarah Judd dead?" she cried; for her first thought was that something must have happened when she saw the girl standing there with her wild pale face.

"I want to see the minister," said Evelina, faintly, and she looked at Thomas's mother with piteous eyes.

"Be you sick?" asked Mrs. Merriam. She laid a hard hand on the girl's arm, and led her into the sitting-room, and put her into the rocking-chair with the feather cushion. "You look real poorly," said she. "Sha'n't I get you a little of my elderberry wine?"

"I want to see him," said Evelina, and she almost sobbed.

"I'll go right and speak to him," said Mrs. Merriam. "He's up, I guess. He gets up early to write. But hadn't I better get you something to take first? You do look sick."

But Evelina only shook her head. She had her face covered with her hands, and was weeping softly. Mrs. Merriam left the room, with a long backward glance at her. Presently the door opened and Thomas came in. Evelina stood up before him. Her pale face was all wet with tears, but there was an air of strange triumph about her.

"The garden is dead," said she.

"What do you mean?" he cried out, staring at her, for indeed he thought for a minute that her wits had left her.

"The garden is dead," said she. "Last night I watered the roses with boiling water and salt, and I pulled the other flowers up by their roots. The garden is dead, and I have lost all Cousin Evelina's money, and it need not come between us any longer." She said that, and looked up in his face with her blue eyes, through which the love of the whole race of loving women from which she had sprung, as well as her own, seemed to look, and held out her little hands; but even then Thomas Merriam could not understand, and stood looking at her.

“Why—did you do it?” he stammered.

“Because you would have me no other way, and—I couldn't bear that anything like that should come between us,” she said, and her voice shook like a harp-string, and her pale face went red, then pale again.

But Thomas still stood staring at her. Then her heart failed her. She thought that he did not care, and she had been mistaken. She felt as if it were the hour of her death, and turned to go. And then he caught her in his arms.

“Oh,” he cried, with a great sob, “the Lord make me worthy of thee, Evelina!”

There had never been so much excitement in the village as when the fact of the ruined garden came to light. Flora Loomis, peeping through the hedge on her way to the store, had spied it first. Then she had run home for her mother, who had in turn sought Lawyer Lang, panting bonnetless down the road. But before the lawyer had started for the scene of disaster, the minister, Thomas Merriam, had appeared, and asked for a word in private with him. Nobody ever knew just what that word was, but the lawyer was singularly uncommunicative and reticent as to the ruined garden.

“Do you think the young woman is out of her mind?” one of the deacons asked him, in a whisper.

“I wish all the young women were as much in their minds; we'd have a better world,” said the lawyer, gruffly.

“When do you think we can begin to move in here?” asked Mrs. Martha Loomis, her wide skirts sweeping a bed of uprooted verbenas.

“When your claim is established,” returned the lawyer, shortly, and turned on his heel and went away, his dry old face scanning the ground like a dog on a scent. That afternoon he opened the sealed document in the presence of witnesses, and the name of the heir to whom the property fell was disclosed. It was “Thomas Merriam, the beloved and esteemed minister of this parish,” and young Evelina would gain her wealth instead of losing it by her marriage. And furthermore, after the declaration of the name of the heir was this added: “This do I in the hope and belief that neither the greed of riches nor the fear of them shall prevent that which is good and wise in the sight of the Lord, and with the surety that a love which shall triumph over so much in its way shall endure, and shall be a

blessing and not a curse to my beloved cousin, Evelina Leonard.”

Thomas Merriam and Evelina were married before the leaves fell in that same year, by the minister of the next village, who rode over in his chaise, and brought his wife, who was also a bride, and wore her wedding-dress of a pink and pearl shot silk. But young Evelina wore the blue bridal array which had been worn by old Squire Adams's bride, all remodelled daintily to suit the fashion of the times; and as she moved, the fragrances of roses and lavender of the old summers during which it had been laid away were evident, like sweet memories.

***END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EVELINA'S
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