



UPTON SINCLAIR

Sovereign Classic

King Midas

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A ROMANCE





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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	7
CHAPTER II	20
CHAPTER III	31
CHAPTER IV	46
CHAPTER V	63
CHAPTER VI	83
CHAPTER VII	102
CHAPTER VIII	113
CHAPTER IX	126
CHAPTER X	142
CHAPTER XI.	154
CHAPTER XII.	171
CHAPTER XIII	184
 PART II	 203
CHAPTER I	203
CHAPTER II	215
CHAPTER III	229
CHAPTER IV	240

CHAPTER I

“O Madchen, Madchen,
Wie lieb’ ich dich!”

It was that time of year when all the world belongs to poets, for their harvest of joy; when those who seek the country not for beauty, but for coolness, have as yet thought nothing about it, and when those who dwell in it all the time are too busy planting for another harvest to have any thought of poets; so that the latter, and the few others who keep something in their hearts to chime with the great spring-music, have the woods and waters all for their own for two joyful months, from the time that the first snowy bloodroot has blossomed, until the wild rose has faded and nature has no more to say. In those two months there are two weeks, the ones that usher in the May, that bear the prize of all the year for glory; the commonest trees wear green and silver then that would outshine a coronation robe, and if a man has any of that prodigality of spirit which makes imagination, he may hear the song of all the world.

It was on such a May morning in the midst of a great forest of pine trees, one of those forests whose floors are moss-covered ruins that give to them the solemnity of age and demand humility from those who walk within their silences. There was not much there to tell of the springtime, for the pines are unsympathetic, but it seemed as if all the more wealth had been flung about on the carpeting beneath. Where the moss was not were flowing beds of fern, and the ground was dotted with slender harebells and the dusty, half-blossomed corydalis, while from all the rocks the bright red lanterns of the columbine were dangling.

Of the beauty so wonderfully squandered there was but one witness, a young man who was walking slowly along, stepping as it seemed where there were no flowers; and who, whenever he

stopped to gaze at a group of them, left them unmolested in their happiness. He was tall and slenderly built, with a pale face shadowed by dark hair; he was clad in black, and carried in one hand a half-open book, which, however, he seemed to have forgotten.

A short distance ahead was a path, scarcely marked except where the half-rotted trees were trodden through. Down this the young man turned, and a while later, as his ear was caught by the sound of falling water, he quickened his steps a trifle, until he came to a little streamlet which flowed through the forest, taking for its bed the fairest spot in that wonderland of beauty. It fled from rock to rock covered with the brightest of bright green moss and with tender fern that was but half uncurled, and it flashed in the sunlit places and tinkled from the deep black shadows, ever racing faster as if to see what more the forest had to show. The young man's look had been anxious before, but he brightened in spite of himself in the company of the streamlet.

Not far beyond was a place where a tiny rill flowed down from the high rocks above, and where the path broadened out considerably. It was a darkly shadowed spot, and the little rill was gathered in a sunken barrel, which the genius of the place had made haste to cover with the green uniform worn by all else that was to be seen. Beside the spring thus formed the young man seated himself, and after glancing impatiently at his watch, turned his gaze upon the beauty that was about him. Upon the neighboring rocks the columbine and harebell held high revel, but he did not notice them so much as a new sight that flashed upon his eye; for the pool where the two streamlets joined was like a nest which the marsh-marigold had taken for its home. The water was covered with its bright green and yellow, and the young man gazed at the blossoms with eager delight, until finally he knelt and plucked a few of them, which he laid, cool and gleaming, upon the seat by the spring.

The flowers did not hold his attention very long, however; he rose up and turned away towards where, a few steps beyond, the open country could be seen between the tree trunks. Beyond the edge of the woods was a field, through which the footpath and the streamlet both ran, the former to join a road leading to a little town which lay in the distance. The landscape was beautiful in its morning freshness, but it was not that which the young man thought of; he had given but one glance before he

started back with a slight exclamation, his face turning paler. He stepped into the concealment of the thick bushes at one side, where he stood gazing out, motionless except for a slight trembling. Down the road he had seen a white-clad figure just coming out of the village; it was too far away to be recognized, but it was a young girl, walking with a quick and springing step, and he seemed to know who it was.

She had not gone very far before she came to a thick hedge which lined the roadside and hid her from the other's view; he could not see her again until she came to the place where the streamlet was crossed by a bridge, and where the little path turned off towards the forest. In the meantime he stood waiting anxiously; for when she reached there he would see her plainly for the first time, and also know if she were coming to the spring. She must have stopped to look at something, for the other had almost started from his hiding place in his eagerness when finally she swept past the bushes. She turned down the path straight towards him, and he clasped his hands together in delight as he gazed at her.

And truly she was a very vision of the springtime, as she passed down the meadows that were gleaming with their first sprinkling of buttercups. She was clad in a dress of snowy white, which the wind swept before her as she walked; and it had stolen one strand of her golden hair to toss about and play with. She came with all the eagerness and spring of the brooklet that danced beside her, her cheeks glowing with health and filled with the laughter of the morning. Surely, of all the flowers of the May-time there is none so fair as the maiden. And the young man thought as he stood watching her that in all the world there was no maiden so fair as this.

She did not see him, for her eyes were lifted to a little bobolink that had come flying down the wind. One does not hear the bobolink at his best unless one goes to hear him; for sheer glorified happiness there is in all our land no bird like him at the hour of sunrise, when he is drunk with the morning breeze and the sight of the dew-filled roses. At present a shower had just passed and the bobolink may have thought that another dawn had come; or perhaps he saw the maiden. At any rate, he perched himself upon the topmost leaf of the maple tree, still half-flying, as if scorning even that much support; and there he

sang his song. First he gave his long prelude that one does not often hear—a few notes a score of times repeated, and growing swift and loud, and more and more strenuous and insistent; as sometimes the orchestra builds up its climax, so that the listener holds his breath and waits for something, he knows not what. Then he paused a moment and turned his head to see if the girl were watching, and filled his throat and poured out his wonderful gushing music, with its watery and bell-like tone that only the streamlet can echo, from its secret places underneath the banks. Again and again he gave it forth, the white patches on his wings flashing in the sunlight and both himself and his song one thrill of joy.

The girl's face was lit up with delight as she tripped down the meadow path. A gust of wind came up behind her, and bowed the grass and the flowers before her and swung the bird upon the tree; and so light was the girl's step that it seemed to lift her and sweep her onward. As it grew stronger she stretched out her arms to it and half leaned upon it and flung her head back for the very fullness of her happiness. The wind tossed her skirts about her, and stole another tress of hair, and swung the lily which she had plucked and which she carried in her hand. It is only when one has heard much music that he understands the morning wind, and knows that it is a living thing about which he can say such things as that; one needs only to train his ear and he can hear its footsteps upon the meadows, and hear it calling to him from the tops of the trees.

The girl was the very spirit of the wind at that moment, and she seemed to feel that some music was needed. She glanced up again at the bobolink, who had ceased his song; she nodded to him once as if for a challenge, and then, still leaning back upon the breeze, and keeping time with the flower in her hand, she broke out into a happy song:

“I heard a streamlet gushing
From out its rocky bed,
Far down the valley rushing,
So fresh and clear it sped.”

But then, as if even Schubert were not equal to the fullness of her heart, or because the language of joy has no words, she left the song unfinished and swept on in a wild carol that rose and swelled and made the forest echo. The bobolink listened

and then flew on to listen again, while still the girl poured out her breathless music, a mad volley of soaring melody; it seemed fairly to lift her from her feet, and she was half dancing as she went. There came another gust of wind and took her in its arms; and the streamlet fled before her; and thus the three, in one wild burst of happiness, swept into the woodland together.

There in its shadows the girl stopped short, her song cut in half by the sight of the old forest in its majesty. One could not have imagined a greater contrast than the darkness and silence which dwelt beneath the vast canopy, and she gazed about her in rapture, first at the trees and then at the royal carpet of green, starred with its fields of flowers. Her breast heaved, and she stretched out her arms as if she would have clasped it all to her.

"Oh, it is so beautiful!" she cried aloud. "It is so beautiful!"

In the meantime the young man, still unseen, had been standing in the shadow of the bushes, drinking in the sight. The landscape and the figure and the song had all faded from his thoughts, or rather blended themselves as a halo about one thing, the face of this girl. For it was one of those faces that a man may see once in a lifetime and keep as a haunting memory ever afterwards, as a vision of the sweetness and glory of woman; at this moment it was a face transfigured with rapture, and the man who was gazing upon it was trembling, and scarcely aware of where he was.

For fully a minute more the girl stood motionless, gazing about at the forest; then she chanced to look towards the spring, where she saw the flowers upon the seat.

"Why, someone has left a nosegay!" she exclaimed, as she started forward; but that seemed to suggest another thought to her, and she looked around. As she did so she caught sight of the young man and sprang towards him. "Why, Arthur! You here!" she cried.

The other started forward as if he would have clasped her in his arms; but then recollecting himself he came forward very slowly, half lowering his eyes before the girl's beauty.

"So you recollect me, Helen, do you?" he said, in a low voice.

"Recollect you?" was the answer. "Why, you dear, foolish boy, of course I recollect you. But how in the world do you come to be here?"

"I came here to see you, Helen."

"To see me?" exclaimed she. "But pray how—" and then she stopped, and a look of delight swept across her face. "You mean that you knew I would come here the first thing?"

"I do indeed."

"Why, that was beautiful!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad I did come."

The glance which she gave made his heart leap up; for a moment or two they were silent, looking at each other, and then suddenly another thought struck the girl. "Arthur," she cried, "I forgot! Do you mean to tell me that you have come all the way from Hilltown?"

"Yes, Helen."

"And just to see me?"

"Yes, Helen."

"And this morning?"

She received the same answer again. "It is twelve miles," she exclaimed; "who ever heard of such a thing? You must be tired to death."

She put out her hand, which he took tremblingly.

"Let us go sit down on the bench," she said, "and then we can talk about things. I am perfectly delighted that you came," she added when she had seated herself, with the marigolds and the lily in her lap. "It will seem just like old times; just think how long ago it was that I saw you last, Arthur,—three whole years! And do you know, as I left the town I thought of you, and that I might find you here."

The young man's face flushed with pleasure.

"But I'd forgotten you since!" went on the girl, eyeing him mischievously; "for oh, I was so happy, coming down the old, old path, and seeing all the old sights! Things haven't changed a bit, Arthur; the woods look exactly the same, and the bridge hasn't altered a mite since the days we used to sit on the edge and let our feet hang in. Do you remember that, Arthur?"

"Perfectly," was the answer.

"And that was over a dozen years ago! How old are you now, Arthur,—twenty-one—no, twenty-two; and I am just nineteen. To-day is my birthday, you know!"

"I had not forgotten it, Helen."

"You came to welcome me! And so did everything else. Do you know, I don't think I'd ever been so happy in my life as I

was just now. For I thought the old trees greeted me, and the bridge, and the stream! And I'm sure that was the same bobolink! They don't have any bobolinks in Germany, and so that one was the first I have heard in three years. You heard him, didn't you, Arthur?"

"I did—at first," said Arthur.

"And then you heard me, you wicked boy! You heard me come in here singing and talking to myself like a mad creature! I don't think I ever felt so like singing before; they make hard work out of singing and everything else in Germany, you know, so I never sang out of business hours; but I believe I could sing all day now, because I'm so happy."

"Go on," said the other, seriously; "I could listen."

"No; I want to talk to you just now," said Helen. "You should have kept yourself hidden and then you'd have heard all sorts of wonderful things that you'll never have another chance to hear. For I was just going to make a speech to the forest, and I think I should have kissed each one of the flowers. You might have put it all into a poem,—for oh, father tells me you're going to be a great poet!"

"I'm going to try," said Arthur, blushing.

"Just think how romantic that would be!" the girl laughed; "and I could write your memoir and tell all I knew about you. Tell me about yourself, Arthur—I don't mean for the memoir, but because I want to know the news."

"There isn't any, Helen, except that I finished college last spring, as I wrote you, and I'm teaching school at Hilltown."

"And you like it?"

"I hate it; but I have to keep alive, to try to be a poet. And that is the news about myself."

"Except," added Helen, "that you walked twelve miles this glorious Saturday morning to welcome me home, which was beautiful. And of course you'll stay over Sunday, now you're here; I can invite you myself, you know, for I've come home to take the reins of government. You never saw such a sight in your life as my poor father has made of our house; he's got the parlor all full of those horrible theological works of his, just as if God had never made anything beautiful! And since I've been away that dreadful Mrs. Dale has gotten complete charge of the church, and she's one of those creatures that wouldn't allow you

to burn a candle in the organ loft; and father never was of any use for quarreling about things.” (Helen’s father, the Reverend Austin Davis, was the rector of the little Episcopal church in the town of Oakdale just across the fields.) “I only arrived last night,” the girl prattled on, venting her happiness in that way instead of singing; “but I hunted up two tallow candles in the attic, and you shall see them in church to-morrow. If there’s any complaint about the smell, I’ll tell Mrs. Dale we ought to have incense, and she’ll get so excited about that that I’ll carry the candles by default. I’m going to institute other reforms also,—I’m going to make the choir sing in tune!”

“If you will only sing as you were singing just now, nobody will hear the rest of the choir,” vowed the young man, who during her remarks had never taken his eyes off the girl’s radiant face.

Helen seemed not to notice it, for she had been arranging the marigolds; now she was drying them with her handkerchief before fastening them upon her dress.

“You ought to learn to sing yourself,” she said while she bent her head down at that task. “Do you care for music any more than you used to?”

“I think I shall care for it just as I did then,” was the answer, “whenever you sing it.”

“Pooh!” said Helen, looking up from her marigolds; “the idea of a dumb poet anyway, a man who cannot sing his own songs! Don’t you know that if you could sing and make yourself gloriously happy as I was just now, and as I mean to be some more, you could write poetry whenever you wish.”

“I can believe that,” said Arthur.

“Then why haven’t you ever learned? Our English poets have all been ridiculous creatures about music, any how; I don’t believe there was one in this century, except Browning, that really knew anything about it, and all their groaning and pining for inspiration was nothing in the world but a need of some music; I was reading the ‘Palace of Art’ only the other day, and there was that ‘lordly pleasure house’ with all its modern improvements, and without a sound of music. Of course the poor soul had to go back to the suffering world, if it were only to hear a hand-organ again.”

“That is certainly a novel theory,” admitted the young poet.

"I shall come to you when I need inspiration."

"Come and bring me your songs," added the girl, "and I will sing them to you. You can write me a poem about that brook, for one thing. I was thinking just as I came down the road that if I were a poet I should have beautiful things to say to that brook. Will you do it for me?"

"I have already tried to write one," said the young man, hesitatingly.

"A song?" asked Helen.

"Yes."

"Oh, good! And I shall make some music for it; will you tell it to me?"

"When?"

"Now, if you can remember it," said Helen. "Can you?"

"If you wish it," said Arthur, simply; "I wrote it two or three months ago, when the country was different from now."

He fumbled in his pocket for some papers, and then in a low tone he read these words to the girl:

AT MIDNIGHT

The burden of the winter
The year haa borne too long,
And oh, my heart is weary
For a springtime song!

The moonbeams shrink unwelcomed
From the frozen lake;
Of all the forest voices
There is but one awake

I seek thee, happy streamlet
That murmurest on thy way,
As a child in troubled slumber
Still dreaming of its play;

I ask thee where in thy journey
Thou seeest so fair a sight,
That thou hast joy and singing
All through the winter night.

Helen was silent for a few moments, then she said, "I think

that is beautiful, Arthur; but it is not what I want."

"Why not?" he asked.

"I should have liked it when you wrote it, but now the spring has come, and we must be happy. You have heard the springtime song."

"Yes," said Arthur, "and the streamlet has led me to the beautiful sight."

"It is beautiful," said Helen, gazing about her with that native unconsciousness which "every wise man's son doth know" is one thing he may never trust in a woman. "It could not be more beautiful," she added, "and you must write me something about it, instead of wandering around our pasture-pond on winter nights till your imagination turns it into a frozen lake."

The young poet put away his papers rather suddenly at that, and Helen, after gazing at him for a moment, and laughing to herself, sprang up from the seat.

"Come!" she cried, "why are we sitting here, anyway, talking about all sorts of things, and forgetting the springtime altogether? I haven't been half as happy yet as I mean to be."

She seemed to have forgotten her friend's twelve mile walk; but he had forgotten it too, just as he soon forgot the rather wintry reception of his little song. It was not possible for him to remain dull very long in the presence of the girl's glowing energy; for once upon her feet, Helen's dancing mood seemed to come back to her, if indeed it had ever more than half left her. The brooklet struck up the measure again, and the wind shook the trees far above them, to tell that it was still awake, and the girl was the very spirit of the springtime once more.

"Oh, Arthur," she said as she led him down the path, "just think how happy I ought to be, to welcome all the old things after so long, and to find them all so beautiful; it is just as if the country had put on its finest dress to give me greeting, and I feel as if I were not half gay enough in return. Just think what this springtime is, how all over the country everything is growing and rejoicing; that is what I want you to put into the poem for me."

And so she led him on into the forest, carried on by joy herself, and taking all things into her song. She did not notice that the young man's forehead was flushed, or that his hand was burning when she took it in hers as they walked; if she noticed

it, she chose at any rate to pretend not to. She sang to him about the forest and the flowers, and some more of the merry song which she had sung before; then she stopped to shake her head at a saucy adder's tongue that thrust its yellow face up through the dead leaves at her feet, and to ask that wisest-looking of all flowers what secrets it knew about the spring-time. Later on they came to a place where the brook fled faster, sparkling brightly in the sunlight over its shallow bed of pebbles; it was only her runaway caroling that could keep pace with that, and so her glee mounted higher, the young man at her side half in a trance, watching her laughing face and drinking in the sound of her voice.

How long that might have lasted there is no telling, had it not been that the woods came to an end, disclosing more open fields and a village beyond. "We'd better not go any farther," said Helen, laughing; "if any of the earth creatures should hear us carrying on they would not know it was 'Trunkenheit ohne Wein.'"

She stretched out her hand to her companion, and led him to a seat upon a fallen log nearby. "Poor boy," she said, "I forgot that you were supposed to be tired."

"It does not make any difference," was the reply; "I hadn't thought of it."

"There's no need to walk farther," said Helen, "for I've seen all that I wish to see. How dear this walk ought to be to us, Arthur!"

"I do not know about you, Helen," said the young man, "but it has been dear to me indeed. I could not tell you how many times I have walked over it, all alone, since you left; and I used to think about the many times I had walked it with you. You haven't forgotten, Helen, have you?"

"No," said Helen.

"Not one?"

"Not one."

The young man was resting his head upon his hand and gazing steadily at the girl.

"Do you remember, Helen—?" He stopped; and she turned with her bright clear eyes and gazed into his.

"Remember what?" she asked.

"Do you remember the last time we took it, Helen?"

She flushed a trifle, and half involuntarily turned her glance

away again.

"Do you remember?" he asked again, seeing that she was silent.

"Yes, I remember," said the girl, her voice lower—"But I'd rather you did not—." She stopped short.

"You wish to forget it, Helen?" asked Arthur.

He was trembling with anxiety, and his hands, which were clasped about his knee, were twitching. "Oh, Helen, how can you?" he went on, his voice breaking. "Do you not remember the last night that we sat there by the spring, and you were going away, no one knew for how long—and how you told me that it was more than you could bear; and the promise that you made me? Oh, Helen!"

The girl gazed at him with a frightened look; he had sunk down upon his knee before her, and he caught her hand which lay upon the log at her side.

"Helen!" he cried, "you cannot mean to forget that? For that promise has been the one joy of my life, that for which I have labored so hard! My one hope, Helen! I came to-day to claim it, to tell you—"

And with a wild glance about her, the girl sprang to her feet, snatching her hand away from his.

"Arthur!" she cried; "Arthur, you must not speak to me so!"

"I must not, Helen?"

"No, no," she cried, trembling; "we were only children, and we did not know the meaning of the words we used. You must not talk to me that way, Arthur."

"Helen!" he protested, helplessly.

"No, no, I will not allow it!" she cried more vehemently, stepping back as he started towards her, and holding close to her the hand he had held. "I had no idea there was such a thought in your mind—"

Helen stopped, breathlessly.

"—or you would not have been so kind to me?" the other added faintly.

"I thought of you as an old friend," said Helen. "I was but a child when I went away. I wish you still to be a friend, Arthur; but you must not act in that way."

The young man glanced once at her, and when he saw the stern look upon her face he buried his head in his arms without

a sound.

For fully a minute they remained thus, in silence; then as Helen watched him, her chest ceased gradually to heave, and a gentler look returned to her face. She came and sat down on the log again.

"Arthur," she said after another silence, "can we not just be friends?"

The young man answered nothing, but he raised his head and gazed at her; and she saw that there were tears in his eyes, and a look of mute helplessness upon his face. She trembled slightly, and rose to her feet again.

"Arthur," she said gravely, "this must not be; we must not sit here any longer. I must go."

"Helen!" exclaimed the other, springing up.

But he saw her brow knit again, and he stopped short. The girl gazed about her, and the village in the distance caught her eye.

"Listen," she said, with forced calmness; "I promised father that I would go and see old Mrs. Woodward, who was asking for me. You may wait here, if you like, and walk home with me, for I shall not be gone very long. Will you do it?"

The other gazed at her for a moment or two; he was trying to read the girl's heart, but he saw only the quiet firmness of her features.

"Will you wait, Arthur?" she asked again.

And Arthur's head sank upon his breast. "Yes, Helen," he said. When he lifted it again, the girl was gone; she had disappeared in the thicket, and he could hear her footsteps as she passed swiftly down the hillside.

He went to the edge of the woods, where he could see her a short distance below, hurrying down the path with a step as light and free as ever. The wind had met her at the forest's edge and joined her once more, playing about her skirts and tossing the lily again. As Arthur watched her, the old music came back into his heart; his eyes sparkled, and all his soul seemed to be dancing in time with her light motion. Thus it went until she came to a place where the path must hide her from his view. The young man held his breath, and when she turned a cry of joy escaped him; she saw him and waved her hand to him gaily as she swept on out of his sight.

For a moment afterwards he stood rooted to the spot, then whirled about and laughed aloud. He put his hand to his forehead, which was flushed and hot, and he gazed about him, as if he were not sure where he was. "Oh, she is so beautiful!" he cried, his face a picture of rapture. "So beautiful!"

And he started through the forest as wildly as any madman, now muttering to himself and now laughing aloud and making the forest echo with Helen's name. When he stopped again he was far away from the path, in a desolate spot, but tho he was staring around him, he saw no more than before. Trembling had seized his limbs, and he sank down upon the yellow forest leaves, hiding his face in his hands and whispering, "Oh, if I should lose her! If I should lose her!" As old Polonius has it, truly it was "the very ecstasy of love."

CHAPTER II

"A dancing shape, an image gay, To haunt, to startle, and waylay."

The town of Oakdale is at the present time a flourishing place, inhabited principally by "suburbanites," for it lies not very far from New York; but the Reverend Austin Davis, who was the spiritual guardian of most of them, had come to Oakdale some twenty and more years ago, when it was only a little village, with a struggling church which it was the task of the young clergyman to keep alive. Perhaps the growth of the town had as much to do with his success as his own efforts; but however that might have been he had received his temporal reward some ten years later, in the shape of a fine stone church, with a little parsonage beside it. He had lived there ever since, alone with his one child,—for just after coming to Oakdale he had married

a daughter of one of the wealthy families of the neighborhood, and been left a widower a year or two later.

A more unromantic and thoroughly busy man than Mr. Davis at the age of forty-five, when this story begins, it would not have been easy to find; but nevertheless people spoke of no less than two romances that had been connected with his life. One of them had been his early marriage, which had created a mild sensation, while the other had come into his life even sooner, in fact on the very first day of his arrival at Oakdale.

Mr. Davis could still bring back to his mind with perfect clearness the first night he had spent in the little wooden cottage which he had hired for his residence; how while busily unpacking his trunk and trying to bring the disordered place into shape, he had opened the door in answer to a knock and beheld a woman stagger in out of the storm. She was a young girl, surely not yet out of her teens, her pale and sunken face showing marks of refinement and of former beauty. She carried in her arms a child of about a year's age, and she dropped it upon the sofa and sank down beside it, half fainting from exhaustion. The young clergyman's anxious inquiries having succeeded in eliciting but incoherent replies, he had left the room to procure some nourishment for the exhausted woman; it was upon his return that the discovery of the romance alluded to was made, for the woman had disappeared in the darkness and storm, and the baby was still lying upon the sofa.

It was not altogether a pleasant romance, as is probably the case with a good many romances in reality. Mr. Davis was destined to retain for a long time a vivid recollection of the first night which he spent in alternately feeding that baby with a spoon, and in walking the floor with it; and also to remember the sly glances which his parishioners only half hid from him when his unpleasant plight was made known.

It happened that the poorhouse at Hilltown near by, to which the infant would have gone if he had left it to the care of the county, was at that time being "investigated," with all that the name implies when referring to public matters; the clergy of the neighborhood being active in pushing the charges, Mr. Davis felt that at present it would look best for him to provide for the child himself. As the investigation came to nothing, the inducement was made a permanent one; perhaps also the memory of the

mother's wan face had something to do with the matter. At any rate the young clergyman, tho but scantily provided for himself, managed to spare enough to engage a woman in the town to take care of the young charge. Subsequently when Mr. Davis' wife died the woman became Helen's nurse, and so it was that Arthur, as the baby boy had been christened, became permanently adopted into the clergyman's little family.

It had not been possible to keep from Arthur the secret of his parentage, and the fact that it was known to all served to keep him aloof from the other children of the town, and to drive him still more to the confidence of Helen. One of the phrases which Mr. Davis had caught from the mother's lips had been that the boy was a "gentleman's son;" and Helen was wont to solace him by that reminder. Perhaps the phrase, constantly repeated, had much to do with the proud sensitiveness and the resolute independence which soon manifested itself in the lad's character. He had scarcely passed the age of twelve before, tho treated by Mr. Davis with the love and kindness of a father, he astonished the good man by declaring that he was old enough to take care of himself; and tho Mr. Davis was better situated financially by that time, nothing that he could say could alter the boy's quiet determination to leave school and be independent, a resolution in which he was seconded by Helen, a little miss of some nine years. The two children had talked it over for months, as it appeared, and concluded that it was best to sacrifice in the cause of honor the privilege of going to school together, and of spending the long holidays roaming about the country.

So the lad had served with childish dignity, first as an errand boy, and then as a store clerk, always contributing his mite of "board" to Mr. Davis' household expenses; meanwhile, possibly because he was really "a gentleman's son," and had inherited a taste for study, he had made by himself about as much progress as if he had been at school. Some years later, to the delight of Helen and Mr. Davis, he had carried off a prize scholarship above the heads of the graduates of the Hilltown High School, and still refusing all help, had gone away to college, to support himself there while studying by such work as he could find, knowing well that a true gentleman's son is ashamed of nothing honest.

He spent his vacations at home, where he and Helen studied

together,—or such rather had been his hope; it was realized only for the first year.

Helen had an aunt upon her mother's side, a woman of wealth and social position, who owned a large country home near Oakdale, and who was by no means inclined to view with the complacency of Mr. Davis the idyllic friendship of the two young people. Mrs. Roberts, or "Aunt Polly" as she was known to the family, had plans of her own concerning the future of the beauty which she saw unfolding itself at the Oakdale parsonage. She said nothing to Mr. Davis, for he, being busy with theological works and charitable organizations, was not considered a man from whom one might hope for proper ideas about life. But with her own more practical husband she had frequently discussed the danger, and the possible methods of warding it off.

To send Helen to a boarding school would have been of no use, for the vacations were the times of danger; so it was that the trip abroad was finally decided upon. Aunt Polly, having traveled herself, had a wholesome regard for German culture, believing that music and things of that sort were paying investments. It chanced, also, that her own eldest daughter, who was a year older than Helen, was about through with all that American teachers had to impart; and so after much argument with Mr. Davis, it was finally arranged that she and Helen should study in Germany together. Just when poor Arthur was returning home with the sublime title of junior, his dream of all things divine was carried off by Aunt Polly, and after a summer spent in "doing" Europe, was installed in a girl's school in Leipzig.

And now, three years having passed, Helen has left her cousin for another year of travel, and returned home in all the glory of her own springtime and of Nature's; which brings us to where we left her, hurrying away to pay a duty call in the little settlement on the hillside.

The visit had not been entirely a subterfuge, for Helen's father had mentioned to her that the elderly person whom she had named to Arthur was expecting to see her when she returned, and Helen had been troubled by the thought that she would never have any peace until she had paid that visit. It was by no means an agreeable one, for old Mrs. Woodward was exceedingly dull, and Helen felt that she was called upon to make war upon dullness. However, it had occurred to her to get her task out of the

way at once, while she felt that she ought to leave Arthur.

The visit proved to be quite as depressing as she had expected, for it is sad to have to record that Helen, however sensitive to the streamlet and the flowers, had not the least sympathy in the world for an old woman who had a very sharp chin, who stared at one through two pairs of spectacles, and whose conversation was about her own health and the dampness of the springtime, besides the dreariest gossip about Oakdale's least interesting people. Perhaps it might have occurred to the girl that it is very forlorn to have nothing else to talk about, and that even old Mrs. Woodward might have liked to hear about some of the things in the forest, or to have been offered the lily and the marigold. Unfortunately, however, Helen did not think about any of that, but only moved restlessly about in her chair and gazed around the ugly room. Finally when she could stand it no more, she sprang up between two of Mrs. Woodward's longest sentences and remarked that it was very late and a long way home, and that she would come again some time.

Then at last when she was out in the open air, she drew a deep breath and fled away to the woods, wondering what could be God's reason for such things. It was not until she was half way up the hillside that she could feel that the wind, which blew now upon her forehead, had quite swept away the depression which had settled upon her. She drank in the odors which blew from the woods, and began singing to herself again, and looking out for Arthur.

She was rather surprised not to see him at once, and still more surprised when she came nearer and raised her voice to call him; for she reached the forest and came to the place where she had left him without a reply having come. She shouted his name again and again, until at last, not without a half secret chagrin to have been so quickly forgotten, she was obliged to set out for home alone.

"Perhaps he's gone on ahead," she thought, quickening her pace.

For a time she watched anxiously, expecting to see his darkly clad figure; but she soon wearied of continued failure, and because it was her birthday, and because the brook was still at her side and the beautiful forest still about her, she took to singing again, and was quickly as happy and glorious as before, ceasing

her caroling and moderating her woodland pace only when she neared the town. She passed down the main street of Oakdale, not quite without an exulting consciousness that her walk had crowned her beauty and that no one whom she saw was thinking about anything else; and so she came to her home, to the dear old parsonage, with its spreading ivy vines, and its two great elms.

When she had hurried up the steps and shut the door behind her, Helen felt privileged again to be just as merry as she chose, for she was even more at home here than in the woods; it seemed as if everything were stretching out its arms to her to welcome her, and to invite her to carry out her declared purpose of taking the reins of government in her own hands.

Upon one side of the hallway was a parlor, and on the other side two rooms, which Mr. Davis had used as a reception room and a study. The parlor had never been opened, and Helen promised herself a jolly time superintending the fixing up of that; on the other side she had already taken possession of the front room, symbolically at any rate, by having her piano moved in and her music unpacked, and a case emptied for the books she had brought from Germany. To be sure, on the other side was still a dreary wall of theological treatises in funereal black, but Helen was not without hopes that continued doses of cheerfulness might cure her father of such incomprehensible habits, and obtain for her the permission to move the books to the attic.

To start things in that direction the girl now danced gaily into the study where her father was in the act of writing "thirdly, brethren," for his next day's sermon; and crying out merrily,

"Up, up my friend, and quit your books,

Or surely you'll grow double!"

she saluted her reverend father with the sweetest of kisses, and then seated herself on the arm of his chair and gravely took his pen out of his hand, and closed his inkstand. She turned over the "thirdly, brethren," without blotting it, and recited solemnly:

"One impulse from a vernal wood

May teach you more of man,

Of moral evil and of good.

Than all the sages can!"

And then she laughed the merriest of merry laughs and added, "Daddy, dear, I am an impulse! And I want you to spare some

time for me."

"Yes, my love," said Mr. Davis, smiling upon her, though groaning inwardly for his lost ideas. "You are beautiful this morning, Helen. What have you been doing?"

"I've had a glorious walk," replied the girl, "and all kinds of wonderful adventures; I've had a dance with the morning wind, and a race of a mile or two with a brook, and I've sung duets with all the flowers,—and here you are writing uninteresting things!"

"It's my sermon, Helen," said Mr. Davis.

"I know it," said Helen, gravely.

"But it must be done for to-morrow," protested the other.

"Half your congregation is going to be so excited about two tallow candles that it won't know what you preach about," answered the girl, swinging herself on the arm of the chair; "and I'm going to sing for the other half, and so they won't care either. And besides, Daddy, I've got news to tell you; you've no idea what a good girl I've been."

"How, my love?"

"I went to see Mrs. Woodward."

"You didn't!"

"Yes; and it was just to show you how dutiful I'm going to be. Daddy, I felt so sorry for the poor old lady; it is so beautiful to know that one is doing good and bringing happiness into other people's lives! I think I'll go and see her often, and carry her something nice if you'll let me."

Helen said all that as gravely as a judge; but Mr. Davis was agreeing so delightedly that she feared she was carrying the joke too far. She changed the subject quickly.

"Oh, Daddy!" she cried, "I forgot to tell you—I met a genius to-day!"

"A genius?" inquired the other.

"Yes," said Helen, "and I've been walking around with him all morning out in the woods! Did you never hear that every place like that has a genius?"

"Yes," assented Mr. Davis, "but I don't understand your joke."

"This was the genius of Hilltown High School," laughed Helen.

"Oh, Arthur!"

"Yes; will you believe it, the dear boy had walked all the way from there to see me; and he waited out by the old seat at the