

**THE HEART OF ARETHUSA**

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ARETHUSA

# THE HEART OF ARETHUSA

BY  
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WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY  
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TO

GEORGE MADDEN MARTIN

Who found me young; full ignorant of the trade  
To which my soul aspired. So it was she made,  
With friendly kindness of a generous heart,  
Some of her busy hours to know still worthier aim;  
Seeing that I learned a trifle of the writing game.  
And in what I've written, she has had her part.

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# THE HEART OF ARETHUSA

## CHAPTER I

At the end of a long, straight avenue of symmetrically developed water maple trees (the trunks of all the trees whitewashed to precisely the same height from the ground) the house gleamed creamy-white, directly facing the Pike. Its broad front door came exactly within the middle distance of this vista of maples, as though the long-ago builder had known that Miss Eliza's orderly soul would have suffered much unhappiness had it swerved a fraction from the centre and, looking forward to the time when she should rule at the Farm, had planned it all to save her the trouble of a change. Miss Eliza would have been sorely tempted to move either the house or the avenue, had not the front door been so placed as to be viewed from the exact middle of that avenue; such was her passion for neatness and precision.

And there was not a weed nor a ragged-looking patch of grass in the whole length of the brown dirt road between those evenly grown maples; nor a weed nor a ragged-looking patch of grass in the whole of the front yard, enclosed in its white board fence with the one flat board laid all around the top.

This was a board whose position and height from the ground had always made it irresistible to Arethusa. It had been one of the chief delights of an active child-

hood and adolescence to walk it as far as possible before falling off. The day she had negotiated the entire fence without once losing her balance, to return in triumph to the stile where Timothy awaited her, marked an epoch in her development; for it was the last stronghold of Timothy's achievements, as should properly distinguish the boy from the girl, which had thus far held out against her. And it was quite a long way around the top of that fence; the yard was large.

There was no gate into the yard. Those who came to call at the Farm on wheels stopped their vehicle at the end of the avenue outside, by the worn hitching-post with its iron chain and ring, and climbed an old-fashioned stile right from the carriage-block to a straight walk of bricks, laid in a queer criss-cross pattern, that led up to the house.

It was a low-built house, wide-flung, the eaves coming close down over the second-story windows; and one might almost have stepped from the windows of the first floor directly out on to the flagged walk that ran along the whole front. It had a curious appearance of having grown where it was. One could imagine, without very much effort, that it had not been built as were other houses, but had grown up gradually like some queer sort of solid plant.

The pillars of the small front porch were covered thick with a white clematis in full bloom, the pride of Miss Eliza's heart; and well might she be proud, for no other clematis for miles around ever bloomed so profusely or so largely. Flowers nodded gayly in the smallest of formal gardens at one end of the house and honeysuckle vines clambered over frames by the summer-house sheltering the cistern at the other end; but both vines and flowers climbed and nodded in the most

orderly manner, for they were all Miss Eliza's plants.

The house was painted every other spring, painted this creamy-white, and it always seemed a cleaner white than any other white house in the country, no matter if those others were painted just as often. The outside shutters to the twinkling square-paned windows were green, a rich, dark green, that had not been changed since time began for the Farm. On the second day of May every other year (unless that day fell on Sunday) John Gibson drove out from town and began painting at the Farm. If it rained, he painted inside the porches first; but he put one coat of paint all over everything paintable before he was through. He always stayed out at the Farm until his work was done, and then he drove back to town again, to wait until the then two-years' distant second day of May should bring him back.

And everything that was done on the Farm was done in just such well-grooved ruts of habit.

It had been unbearably hot and close all day long.

The brazen, hard-blue sky had seemed to be pressing a blanket of thick, humid air closer and closer to the earth as if bent upon the suffocation of everything living. Everybody at the Farm had been sure it was brewing a storm. They had hoped a good rainstorm; and now. . . . It was almost come.

Down on the horizon the clouds were piling up in great black and dark grey masses, with here and there a lighter grey that showed ominously against its darker background; cloud masses shot through every now and then with an angry-looking red or orange flash that was immediately answered by a low rumble of ever nearing thunder.

The wind had risen, after this gasping day without a breath of air stirring anywhere, and now it blew refreshingly cold and clear almost directly from the north.

It flattened the long parched grass in the yard. It danced the leaves on the trees about so gayly and so madly as they turned their more prominently veined sides to view (which Arethusa knew was almost a sure indication of rain), it did not seem possible their slender stems could hold them to the bending and twisting branches. Indeed, some of them could not hold on and the wind gathered these up and carried them along with bits of twigs and grass to pile up in the fence corners and wait for that sorely needed drink of water there. A garden chair in front of the house rocked violently as though some restless ghost were occupying it and then overturned with a crash. The dust gathered up in the brown dirt road in great swirls and whirled away like miniature cyclone-clouds in their funnel shape towards the Pike to meet other swirls of a lighter dust and go whirling still farther away, until the wind grew tired of such sport and dropped them. The birds' nest in the north cornice which Miss Eliza had been after for weeks blew down, and the straw and bits of feathers were scattered all over the yard; but only to be caught again by the wind and carried on somewhere else. The green shutters on the house swung out on their fastenings as far as they could and then banged back against the house with a tiny crash of sound.

There seemed nothing that the wind overlooked. Even the clouds, as they piled higher and higher and blacker and blacker, had the appearance of being driven by the wind, nearer and nearer the Farm.

Arethusa ran out of the front door and down the long, flagged walk towards the quince bushes, far at the very end of the yard, to meet the storm. She held out her arms to the wind and drank in great deep breaths of its refreshing coolness. It tossed her skirts about her and blew the great rope of coppery red hair which ordinarily hung loosely plaited down her back so that it streamed straight out behind her just like a candle flame.

Of all the things that happened with which she was acquainted, Arethusa loved best a thunder-storm. She felt no slightest tinge of fear; to be out of doors in the wind and rain with thunder crashing and rolling and great flashes of lightning splitting wide the heavens, every now and then, left nothing to be desired towards the perfection of the situation. She had sometimes fancied, after an unusually wide and vivid flash, that she had really been able to see a wee bit of a way into that Heavenly City which she had been taught was high above her, behind all that sky, in the blinding brightness.

But Arethusa's aunts had altogether different ideas, not one of them (save perhaps Miss Asenath, somewhat) understanding in the least this strange and illogical desire to watch the play of the elements out of doors when she could be safe inside a house. It was always their very first move, when a storm was threatened, to bid her remain indoors.

To-day though, so far, the gods had seemed to be with her; she had escaped without being seen. And if her luck continued to hold, she might get clear away to Miss Asenath's Woods before her Aunt 'Liza caught her and haled her back. For they had not had such

a glorious storm as this would be, if its promise were made good, for months and months.

There was a flash of lightning that seemed to play all about the girl running swiftly down the walk; a crash of thunder that seemed to make every window pane in the house rattle in echo, and a few, big, splashing drops of rain fell.

Arethusa stretched her arms high and stood on tip-toe to meet them. She shook her hair loose from its plait and threw back her head, loving it all — the wind and the dark sky and the tense feeling of readiness for the storm with which everything seemed charged — with an almost pagan joy. She even began a dance, a fantastic sort of lonely quadrille (if it could be given any special name), there on the flagged walk by the end of the house.

“ 'Thusa! ”

The call came very faint and far away.

Then — “ 'Thusa! ”

Louder this time, and much nearer, but Arethusa heeded it not if she heard; her dance continued uninterrupted. She swayed like a tall lily to the wind, with a few little steps one way and then a few little steps the other; holding out her cotton skirts; her hair blown all about her like a great, red cloud. There was something elfin, something wild and woodsy, in her manner of dancing; the nymph whose name she bore might so have welcomed a storm in her woods of ancient Greece.

Then — “ A ——— r — e-thusa! ”

And Miss Eliza Redfield's own energetic little person, as trig and trim as a tiny ship with all sails closely reefed, even in this boisterous wind, bore down upon her niece. Miss Eliza's grey crown of glory, parted in the middle with precision and to the exactitude of a

hair, was totally unruffled and remained drawn down across her forehead in smooth, satiny bands of an evenness and rigidity which no other hair, save Miss Eliza's, could possibly have.

She pushed her shiny glasses to the end of her sharp, little nose and over them surveyed the disheveled maiden before her.

"What are you doing?" she asked crisply.

Arethusa turned her glowing face to her aunt, but without pausing in her dance. "Oh, this glorious storm, Aunt 'Liza! I . . ."

Miss Eliza waved her hand. "You need not answer. I can see quite plainly, for myself, it is something foolish. You should not be out here. Come on into the house, Arethusa. Your Aunt 'Titia and I and your Aunt 'Senath wish to talk to you. In the sitting-room."

"Oh, not right now, Aunt 'Liza, please! Can't I . . ."

"No, you can't. Come on into the house. How many times do you have to be told a thing, Arethusa? You know very well how much your Aunt 'Titia objects to your running around in a storm in this outlandish way!"

"Oh, but Aunt 'Liza, it's not storming yet. Just thundering a little," pleaded Arethusa. "Please let me stay out until it really begins. Please! I'll come right in then. I promise. Please!"

"*Arethusa!*"

And this effectually nipped in the bud Arethusa's faint little effort to have her own way.

But it would have been nipped effectually sooner or later, for no one ever dreamed of standing up for long against Miss Eliza, or of being so rash as to contem-



plate such as actual disobedience. Although her stature was that of a child and her figure slight in proportion, she concentrated as much energy and leadership in those four feet eleven inches, as if the figures had been reversed.

Blish, the negro boy who did all the hardest and heaviest work around the house, inside and out, and who stood six feet three in his stockings, hung his head abjectly as before an offended Goliath when his diminutive mistress scolded him for a task she considered slightly performed. Blish had an honest and ingrained terror of Miss Eliza's wrath and the lashings she could give with her tongue; and he was not alone among those on the Farm in this terror.

So Arethusa abandoned her dance and, with her hair still hanging, meekly followed Miss Eliza towards the front door.

"We have had a letter from your father," began Miss Eliza, as this strange Indian-file procession of very tiny old lady and very tall young girl proceeded back along the flagged walk on which it had issued forth in distinct sections such a short while before.

"*Oh!*" Arethusa lunged forward and grabbed Miss Eliza around her neck. "When, Aunt 'Liza? When? This morning? What did he say? Why didn't you tell me? Did he say anything for me? Oh, Aunt 'Liza, what did he say?"

These staccato questions were poured forth as fast as it is possible for human lips to utter words.

Miss Eliza extricated herself from the embrace without interrupting her progress.

"We considered it best, your Aunt 'Titia and I and your Aunt 'Senath," (She never spoke of herself and Arethusa's other great-aunts in any different way or

order, and why, no one could tell) "to discuss it thoroughly among ourselves before we said anything to you about it. It was a very unexpected letter; almost a shock, I might say, the contents. It came yesterday afternoon. I wish, Arethusa, that you would learn not to be so violent. You could have asked me about it without nearly strangling me."

Every fibre of Arethusa's body quivered with impatience. What little self-control she had, and Miss Eliza would have named it none at all, was only managed with the greatest difficulty. Behind her aunt's leadership she proceeded with little hops and skips. Her tongue burned with all the rest of those questions she was so longing to ask.

A Letter from Father in the house ever since yesterday afternoon, and she had not even seen it! It was the one time in weeks that she had not gone down to the mail-box for the mail! So it always happened!

Suddenly Miss Eliza turned.

"You make me so nervous, Arethusa, jumping up and down that way behind me, I could scream! Can't you *walk!*" Then she added, half to herself and rather irrelevantly too, considering the gist of the foregoing conversation. "I must say that I question very strongly the wisdom of Sister 'Titia's decision."

All decisions were, nine cases out of ten, wholly Miss Eliza's; but in conversation responsibility for them was generally shifted to Miss Letitia.

Arethusa made a noble effort to compose herself and did her very utmost to walk as she had been requested.

From long experience of her aunt, she knew it would do no earthly good to ask a single one of those questions she so desired to have answered. Miss Eliza

told a person all that was necessary when she was quite ready for it, herself, and without the least regard as to the state of feverish impatience to which such a proceeding might bring a petitioner. And very often, Arethusa had also discovered, questioning delayed the wished-for loosening of Miss Eliza's tongue.

## CHAPTER II

Miss Eliza paused to shut the front door carefully behind them, latching it against the storm; and Arethusa ran on ahead into the sitting-room at one end of the big, square hall, a "dog-trot" hall which went straight through the centre of the house from front porch to back porch.

This place known as the "sitting-room" was a nondescript apartment crowded with furniture of varied sorts, till every available space was occupied by something. It was too crowded to be really pleasing when one entered it for the first time and yet it possessed certain and unmistakable charm; which was a charm Miss Asenath may have given. Her couch dominated everything, drawn across between the two south windows. But whatever it was, one undoubtedly had a feeling of something about the sitting-room which made it lovable after being in it the shortest possible time.

The furniture which made it seem crowded ran from a new and shiny sewing-machine of very recent purchase, through some pieces belonging unmistakably to the period of temperamentally carved walnut of a generation or so ago, back to the plain wood and simple lines of Colonial days. Miss Eliza's high old secretary, placed to get the best possible light for her slightly near-sighted eyes which she obstinately refused to admit were anything but perfect in their vision, was of the last description. The secretary stood open always,

and was of a consistently immaculate order. The neat little piles of papers and account-books in the various pigeon-holes were arranged so precisely they looked as if they had never been touched since first put in their places, and yet the owner spent many industrious moments, nearly every day, working with them. The piano, which sat almost directly opposite the secretary, was of a trifle later construction. It was large and square, of inlaid rosewood, with handsomely carved legs, and had mother-of-pearl keys faintly tinged with brown all around their edges. From end to end, lengthwise of its top, was a long narrow piece of dark red satin decorated with bunches of tall cat-tails heavily painted in oils. Scattered music lay all over the piano, on the music-rack, sliding down on the keys, and in small, untidy piles hastily placed on the red satin cover. Its scattered condition was conclusive evidence that Arethusa had been handling it, for she was the only person on the place who ever scattered anything about so untidily. There was a wicker sewing-basket in the room, Miss Letitia's property. And a large and pompous what-not of black walnut, elaborately and fantastically carved, guarded the corner nearest the door, bearing as its *pièce de resistance* a bunch of wax flowers under a glass case, flowers shaped by Miss Asenath's gentle fingers a great many years ago; one or two shells wearing landscapes in oils — of colors and tints never yet seen in an actual landscape — also reminiscent of Miss Asenath's artistic girlhood; and several other non-utilitarian objects of varying degrees of beauty, according to the personal taste of the beholder. A much larger shell than those on the what-not, with a landscape containing a cow and other objects no doubt intended as human, propped open the door into the hall.

A white marble clock, with a large piece of white coral lying on its top and under a glass case like the wax flowers, ticked away on the high mantel in the dignified and quiet way which befitted a clock belonging to the Redfields. And there were many other pieces of furniture and bits of old-fashioned ornament in the room.

The various generations and the lives which each one had lived at the Farm might almost be known by observation of these things in the sitting-room. Each generation and its occupations had seemed to leave behind it an imprint in furniture and ornament.

But had the sitting-room not been a room of rather unusual dimensions, it could never have held all of the diversified objects gathered in it. And they were gathered in it of real necessity, for all the life of the house centered about Miss Asenath, and in this room she spent her whole waking time. Miss Asenath had not left the couch between the two south windows for over fifty years, except to be lifted from it to her bed at night and back to it again in the morning for another day.

She was as tiny as Miss Eliza, but even thinner, and her delicate features made her profile seem like a deliciously tinted cameo against the faded tan of the sitting-room wall. She had an abundance of soft white hair that waved like a fleecy cloud about her face. Her skin was white and waxen clear; her loose gown was of woolly material, white and spotless; the pillows piled all around her were all in immaculate white cases: and though her lips still held a faded rose and her eyes gleamed dark, the only real spot of color anywhere immediately about her was a fluffy wool afghan of a heaven-like shade of deep blue spread across the lower part of her helpless body.

Miss Asenath loved all that had color: the gold of sunlight across the sitting-room floor; the green of the grass and the waxen-leaved coral honeysuckle just outside the sitting-room windows; she even loved the wax flowers because they were so gay. But Miss Letitia loved just as dearly to dress her all in white to match her hair and skin (Miss Letitia was the seamstress for the whole family); so there was a compromise. Miss Asenath wore the soft white gowns of Miss Letitia's making and, with Miss Letitia's own connivance, indulged her fancy for colors in her afghans, which she had in every conceivable shade.

Long ago, Miss Asenath had had a Romance.

She had always been the acknowledged beauty of the family in her Dresden china loveliness, and she had been little more than a child when love had come to her in all the wonder and ecstasy of loving that belongs to youth. But a fall from her riding horse had left her pinned to this couch, never to walk again, so she had sent her boy-lover away.

And although she had known him grow old and had watched him live a full life apart from hers (a life actually ended only a very few years ago), she had seemed to see him always as the boy belonging to her girlhood, to those months she had claimed him as her own. She wore his picture in a locket at her throat hung on a piece of ribbon the color of the afghan for that day. It was a miniature of a smiling boy with waving blonde hair brushed high above his forehead in an unmistakable roll, with eyes of a very deep shade of blue, and dressed in a high stock and much be-ruffled shirt, and a blue coat adorned with brass buttons.

Arethusa dearly loved all of this, the Romance and the Locket. She made it her special bit in the dressing

of Miss Asenath every morning to hang the locket on its bit of ribbon and tie the tiny bow around Miss Asenath's frail neck.

She often wondered just how it would seem when one was old to have been the Heroine of a Situation exactly like a story book. She pictured it as a dramatic scene of renunciation between the lovers, both satisfyingly well-favored — for Miss Asenath's beauty was a tradition and the boy in the locket was undeniably good to look upon —; and her natural inclination to romance was aided by the reading of many old-fashioned novels of unbridled sentimentality.

Arethusa loved Miss Asenath herself even more than the Romance, though everyone loved her; no one could help it. Even Miss Eliza's crisp tones softened when she spoke to her.

Arethusa plumped herself down on her special hassock right beside Miss Asenath's couch. It was a hassock with a wool-worked top of fearful reds and greens and yellows, which always stood just in that place so Arethusa could sit close to Miss Asenath. Miss Asenath smiled a welcome, and then with her slender fingers, so waxen white against the glowing color of the girl's hair, began plaiting up the loose red mass lest Miss Eliza should notice it and scold Arethusa for running about with her hair unbound.

The room was stifling.

Every window was closed tight, and the blinds drawn down, in addition, making a semi-darkness. For Miss Letitia was afraid of storms, thunder storms especially. At the very first distant rumble of thunder she always closed every opening in the house.

She sat bolt upright in the centre of the room, her



plump little person enthroned upon a feather pillow—lightning never struck through feathers—and her never idle fingers were busy crocheting a rose-colored afghan for Miss Asenath. Miss Letitia decidedly preferred steel needles both for crocheting and knitting, but steel was dangerous to use during a storm—it attracted lightning—, so her steel needles were all safe in the very bottom of her bureau drawer underneath her plain assortment of chemises and petticoats. And she had wheeled the sewing machine into the very farthest and darkest corner of the room.

Miss Letitia was like nothing in the world so much as a ridiculously fat edition of Miss Eliza. But she lacked Miss Eliza's precision, and she could never, even with several conscientious trials, get her hair parted exactly in the middle. Arethusa sometimes on very special occasions parted it for her. Miss Eliza liked to see her sister as neat as herself. She liked Miss Letitia's apparel to have the same trim look as her own instead of the comfortably untidy appearance it did have.

But, as Miss Letitia plaintively expressed it, when taken to task because she was not just so, "It's a great deal easier, Sister, to pin things down on a thin person, because there isn't any strain."

Arethusa picked up the last copy of the *Christian Observer*, which was lying near Miss Asenath, and fanned herself vigorously. Her efforts to cool herself were so vigorous that in a very few moments she was wet with perspiration and much warmer than she had been before she started to fan. She felt as if she were about to suffocate in this close room after her glorious little run in the breath of the cold wind.

"May I open a window, Aunt 'Titia," she begged,

"Please, mayn't I? It's not storming yet, and, and, I'm so hot!"

"Never open a window in a storm, 'Thusa. It's a very dangerous thing to do."

Miss Letitia looked at her great-niece just as severely as she knew how, though the severe effect she intended was somewhat marred by that perennial twinkle in her eyes and the rosy cloud in her lap below her round, rosy face. Such a setting made her look more like a grown-up cherub than anything else at the moment.

The whole room, even with its closed blinds, was suddenly illuminated by a blinding glow, and a crashing roll of thunder followed immediately afterwards.

Miss Letitia screamed.

"Mercy on us! How awful! That was so near. Sister 'Liza, you'd better get a pillow! 'Thusa. . . . !"

Always, in a storm, one of Miss Letitia's first duties was to bulwark Miss Asenath who could not get pillows for herself, and so the latter was almost buried in them. Miss Asenath passed one of her many over to Arethusa, who sat on it obediently. Then the gentle creature on the couch rewarded her with a pat; by this conveying her loving intelligence of just how much the sitting on the hot, stuffy protection Miss Letitia insisted upon was hated, and her recognition of the magnanimity of doing so with murmuring. But it was Miss Asenath's way to make anything but good behaviour in her immediate vicinity well-nigh impossible.

Next, she reached over and took the *Christian Observer* from Arethusa's hot grasp, and began herself to fan the overheated girl very slowly and quietly.

“ If you sit quite still, dear,” she said softly, “ you’ll cool off in just a moment.”

Miss Eliza’s sturdy uprightness disdained the “ safety first ” aid of pillows. She was a fatalist.

“ If I’m struck, then I’m struck,” she said, with the finality that admits of no argument.

Arethusa sat quietly on her hassock and under Miss Asenath’s gentle regularity of fanning she cooled off gradually, but her impatience was in no wise abated. Father’s letter was still undiscussed; and Arethusa wished that Miss Eliza would hurry and tell her about it, and what he had said. She seemed so very much longer than usual in getting started on what her niece considered the most burning question of the hour.

She told Miss Letitia about the fall of the bird’s nest which she had noticed on her trip to get Arethusa, and Miss Letitia agreed with her sister that it was a blessing that the wind had blown it down before it rained, else the gutter would surely have flooded again. They discussed with zeal the advisability of putting wire netting over the gutter end to keep those birds from re-building, and the length of time the storm was in actually coming. Miss Letitia ventured the prediction that it was to be a hard rain and she certainly hoped that Blish had remembered to put the barrels under that broken place in the north-east water spout to catch all the rain-water that was possible; and Miss Eliza replied with asperity that if he had not remembered it, he would find himself sorry. But she really considered it decidedly remiss in Jere Conway not to have fixed that spout weeks ago; she herself had told him about it on her last visit to town. Jere Conway was getting lazier and lazier as he got older and less attentive to business. Although she hated very much to employ a strange

man, still if he put off much longer fixing that spout, she was going to send for the new tin-smith at the Junction.

Finally, Arethusa felt that she could not stand all this irrelevancy another second; her impatient longing had to be expressed.

“ Please, Aunt 'Liza, what did Father say? ”

Miss Eliza dropped her glasses to the end of her nose.

“ You must learn to wait, Arethusa. You are much too impatient. Like your father.”

Miss Asenath's gentle voice interposed, “ But why not tell her, Sister? Right now? ”

So Miss Eliza proceeded.

“ Your father,” she announced, in a tone that plainly indicated her hearty disapproval of the whole affair, and plunging at once into the very middle of her subject, “ has married again! ”

“ Married again! ” echoed Arethusa, uncertainly.

The effect of her aunt's disclosure was as though some one had thrown a bulky object at her quite unexpectedly.

“ That's what I said, I believe. It's what I intended to say. Shut your mouth, child,—you look half-witted with it open that way. I always did think he would. And I must confess I never thought he'd wait near as long as he has. Though I'm no great believer in second marriages, myself.”

“ But, Aunt 'Liza . . . ”

Miss Eliza frowned at the interruption.

“ Will you wait, Arethusa? Till I finish! ”

Arethusa might have retorted, and very properly, that nothing had been really begun as yet, by jumping into a middle without preamble. But then, Miss Eliza

had her own most individual way of doing everything, even to telling of the contents of important letters.

"When I have finished, you may read his letter for yourself. His new wife," she crowded a quantity of scorn into those two words, "wants you to come visit them. He says she does. They both do. She has sent . . ."

Arethusa sprang, starry-eyed, from her hassock. Her hands flew, clasped, up to her heart to hold its beating down.

"To Europe? Oh, Aunt 'Liza!"

"Will you *wait!!* I must say! To Europe, indeed! He's in America!"

And then Arethusa gave such a shriek of joy that it echoed through and through the house. Mandy, in the kitchen, looked inquiringly at Blish as it penetrated there. Miss Asenath smiled; Miss Letitia's crochet needle slipped clear out of the stitch she was just taking; and Miss Eliza put her hands over her ears.

"*Arethusa!!* If you don't sit down! . . ."

So Arethusa subsided to the hassock, still quivering. Miss Asenath gave her a reassuring pat and her frail hand was grabbed and held tight. Such composure as could be managed came easier with something to squeeze.

Miss Eliza continued her tale.

"Yes, his new wife, thank heaven, is an American, and I reckon she wants to live at home." Then to herself, parenthetically, "I was always afraid he'd marry one of those frog-eating foreigners he's been trotting around with so long, and I must say I'm mightily surprised that he didn't."

She paused a moment and looked at Arethusa over her glasses as if Arethusa were the one to blame for

this situation. Although the girl did not dare open her mouth in face of such an expression, she gave a little jump of impatience. It did seem as if Miss Eliza might finish telling It, and tell It straight, in some sort of order, if she were going to tell It at all.

"They want you to come visit them," repeated Miss Eliza, after her parenthesis and the little pause, "and your father's sent the money, as he says, for your 'immediate needs.' Over one hundred dollars it is. He says his wife gave it to him. She must be mighty well-off. 'Immediate needs,' indeed! I can buy your whole winter wardrobe with that money!"

Then once more did Arethusa rush recklessly in where angels would have feared to tread.

"Oh, Aunt 'Liza! . . ." A belated discretion came to her aid before she finished.

Miss Eliza frowned again. Her lips drew ominously down, and reprimand of some sort was plainly to be detected hovering there, but, for some obscure reason, she also changed her mind.

"Your Aunt 'Titia," she said, rather mildly, and thus apparently shifting all responsibility for any evil which might ensue from this step to Miss Letitia's plumper shoulders, "your Aunt 'Titia has decided that so long as this is nearly August, there's no earthly use in your going to visit them until fall. So I'm going to write your father that. He may not like it, because he wants you right away, his letter says. But it would be downright foolishness to get you more summer clothes this late in the season; and you haven't near enough now, nor the right kind, to visit in a city. It's just like him, for all the world, this whole affair. Letting you alone for this long, and then all of a sudden wanting you to be bundled right off to him! You'll

be needing winter clothes in a month or two," she finished decidedly, "so you're going in the fall." Then she added, much more to herself, however, than to Arethusa, "But I must say, I strongly doubt the wisdom of your going at all."

She settled back in her chair with the air of one having said her say, but leaving her niece with a feeling strongly resembling dissatisfaction.

Miss Eliza had simply flung these few facts at her without any elaboration; sketched in the bare outlines to what, viewed by Arethusa, a whole volume might be added without doing anywhere near full justice to the Subject. There was that matter of the "new wife," especially. One's only father does not get married every day, and to dismiss the lady of his choice by simply stating her existence does not gratify a thousandth part of natural curiosity. Her father, she knew, had written more than just the simple fact of his marriage. If he had done just that; then it was certainly not her father who had written the letter.

Miss Eliza had not told her when . . . or where . . . or . . .

Arethusa gazed at her aunt, clasping and unclasping her hands helplessly; her lips parted for speech, but no words came, for so many words trembled there, they literally dammed one another up.

"I . . . Did Father . . ." she managed to gasp, finally.

But Miss Eliza seemed to read through this inadequacy of expression some of that chaos of thought which whirled round and round in Arethusa's brain. She reached down in the little leather pocket that always hung at her belt and drew out a large, square envelope.

"Here, child, I said you could read it," and although her tone was as sharp as always, it was not unkind. "That woman he married. You want to know, I reckon. Some more about her. It's perfectly natural. He's gone into all sorts of raptures over her, of course. He wouldn't be Ross Worthington if he hadn't. And she is very probably just an ordinary female woman."

Arethusa seized the outstretched envelope eagerly.

"May I . . . ?" she asked.

She spoke to Miss Asenath, who nodded a permission to the unfinished but evident request before either of the other aunts had a chance to refuse it.

So Arethusa was off like the wind, unheeding of the anxious call Miss Letitia sent after her.

Out through the back of the house this time, and on through the kitchen where she paused only long enough to squeeze Mandy, one of her staunchest allies and a certain sharer in all joys, to whirl her clear around from her table where she was working, and to wave the Letter at her excitedly and then plunge on, leaving Mandy absolutely breathless with the suddenness of this onslaught.

The rain was falling now, slowly but steadily, in big heavy drops, and the darkest clouds were lowering, apparently right above her head; but the flying girl paid no attention to these evidences of the imminence of her storm. She held the Letter pressed close against her as if to protect it and made straight for Miss Asenath's Woods, via the orchard.



### CHAPTER III

Arethusa flung herself flat on a mossy spot of ground underneath the largest and tallest of the trees in Miss Asenath's Woods.

Like the vaulted ceiling of a huge green cathedral, the branches far above her curved in graceful arches. And they were so thickly interlaced and grown with leaves, that although this first slow-falling rain of the storm could be distinctly heard in its noisy pattering on those leaves, very little came through them, save an extra large and splashing drop every now and then.

Having run every step of the way from the house, Arethusa was completely out of breath; and she could only lie panting for some moments, the Letter still clutched to her breast.

The wind had died down, and it was as hot and close out here in the open under the trees as it had seemed in the shut-up sitting room. But she was far from any thought of physical discomfort now.

At the beginning of Miss Asenath's Romance those many years ago, her father, Arethusa's great-grandfather Redfield, had set aside this strip of woodland in which to build his daughter a house.

It was not nearly so heavily wooded then, and the lovers had wandered over it and selected a spot for the little home, mute evidence of their choice of site remaining in a half-dug foundation, overgrown with vines and weeds and almost indistinguishable save for

the few heavy stones that marked one side of the depression. But the walls of the little house had risen in fancy for her with such reality, that, when the sad ending to her love-story came and the building was abandoned, at Miss Asenath's request the woodland was fenced off. Hence, its name of "Miss Asenath's Woods." She had never gone there since the day when with her own hands she had spread a layer of mortar between two stones "for luck," but she knew every inch of it as it was now, every tree and bush, from Arethusa's vivid description. Arethusa's imagination could for herself, from Miss Asenath's telling, place the little house on its ghostly foundation in all the actuality it was once to have had.

Arethusa loved the woodland quite as much as Miss Asenath did, even apart from the significance of its connections with her aunt's love-story. It was the only spot on the place that Miss Eliza did not keep straight; the only bit of the Farm that was not inspected, often, by that keen glance which, even if a trifle near-sighted, so little escaped. But she never went near the woodland on any pretext.

There was nothing "combed" or "fixed" about Miss Asenath's Woods; no white-washed trees or clipped grass. Bees droned and birds sang and wild-flowers bloomed there all uninterrupted; squirrels chattered in the trees, friends of Arethusa's that were tame enough to perch on her shoulder if she sat quite still; and funny little, Molly-cotton-tail rabbits often scampered in front of her while she was reading, so close she could have touched them. It was a bit of nature that no human hand had ever spoiled, the never finished foundation was only an addition in its suggestion; therefore, the girl's woodsy heart claimed it as her very

own, although by name it belonged to Miss Asenath.

But, since the time she was a wee scrap and, running away from Miss Eliza's scolding, had stumbled on this enchanted spot entirely by accident and had brought her dolls down here for play, Arethusa had found congenial occupation in the woodland. And now that she was older, she spent long hours of reading and dreaming instead of play.

In her favorite position, flat on her stomach with her heels in the air and her chin propped in her hands (which position Miss Eliza contended was far removed from the dignity befitting Arethusa's years and had forbidden in her, Miss Eliza's, presence) she read old-fashioned novels that she smuggled out of the bookcase in the parlor. When the book was closed, she invariably added long chapters of her own fancy to the "lived happily ever after" ending. Yet all that she read did not, by any means, end thus happily, for she loved sad stories also. She knew "The Scottish Chiefs" almost by heart. It was foolish, perhaps, to lie under the trees and read sobbingly until she could hardly see what she was reading for the tears, and then dab at her eyes with a sopping wet handkerchief; but . . . it was Arethusa. She was most Incurably Romantick.

She kept a few of her greatest favorites here in this hollow tree in the centre of the woodland, for a story one likes cannot be read too often, thought this gentle reader.

Here also, for the hollow tree somewhat resembled a treasure chest in its interior, she had a length of green of the same soft shade as the lichen of the woods around her. It was a green ribbon so thoroughly sat-

isfying in its color that only to spread it out on the grass where her eyes might gaze upon it delighted Arethusa's soul.

Some day . . . Some day . . . She would have a green dress of just that identical shade. "And Aunt 'Liza may say all she pleases about my hair!"

Of which bit of meditated defiance, Miss Eliza remained in total ignorance.

For Arethusa's hair was an uncompromising red. It was a deep, rich brown-red in shadow and a burnished coppery-red in the sunlight, wonderful to behold, but still red. And there was a decided difference of opinion between Miss Eliza and her niece as to the color most suitable for the clothes that were to be worn with such a top-knot. Miss Eliza was horrified at the bare thought of any but the plainest of shades beside it; generally standing up strongly for blue, a very dark blue. Arethusa, although she rather preferred other colors of an infinite variety, would not have minded blue so much had Miss Eliza's selections been less depressingly somber. Abortive attempts to enliven her wardrobe were immediately crushed with scathing references to the fiery locks. And the wardrobe remained of an unwaveringly dull tone.

According to Miss Eliza, Arethusa's red hair was wholly to blame for her temper, which was of a somewhat quick and lively nature. She seemed, at times, almost to consider it a deep disgrace to the family that her niece should be so crowned. Arethusa was the only red-haired person that had ever been in the whole family connection, so far as anyone knew; an off-shoot, so to speak. But Miss Asenath dearly loved its bright color, and she was never tired of running her fingers

through the ruddy masses and of curling and twisting the little shining tendrils of curls that clustered in the nape of the girl's neck.

Arethusa had the warm white skin that nearly always accompanies red locks, somewhat freckled, it is true, but not enough so really to matter; and deep greenish-grey eyes, rimmed all around with the most unbelievably long lashes. They were real Irish eyes, which excitement darkened and made to shine like big stars. It naturally followed that they were dark and starry the greater part of the time, for she was Arethusa and in an almost constant state of excitement.

And she was quite tall and slender, very unlike the Redfields. They were all small and compactly built; but Arethusa had got her height from her father.

Having arrived almost at a state of natural breathing once more, Arethusa rolled over and spread the Letter out before her. She studied her father's bold handwriting with shining eyes, and kissed his signature rapturously.

When she was a baby of about six months or so her father had given her into Miss Eliza's keeping and started for a foreign trip, "of a few months," he had said then. But that was nearly eighteen years ago, and he was still on the other side, with never so much as the most flying visit to the little daughter in America in all that time. Yet the love and loyalty of that little daughter had never wavered from the day Miss Asenath had put his photograph into her tiny hands, and taught her to call it "Father," and to kiss it through the glass.

This love and loyalty were not founded upon memories, for she had none. They were given a father

created by her own vivid fancy, aided by the photograph. This was a faded likeness of an unusually handsome man with waving hair of an eccentric length and bold dark eyes smiling straight out of the picture as if he were just about to speak to the Arethusa who worshipped it. He wore a Byronic sort of collar, with a wide tie, and his shoulders were draped in an Italian military cape, effectively thrown back from the one wide frog that clasped it just below the flowing ends of the tie. So he was not like other fathers; not at all like those most commonplace male parents with which Arethusa was acquainted. He was far more like the Hero in one of those sentimental novels she never tired of reading. She could but give him all the most desirable of the attributes of the men-folk who lived in those pages; for they seemed so far superior to any man she knew in the flesh.

Miss Asenath, with her stories of him, had helped unconsciously in the creation of this ideal. Miss Asenath had loved him very dearly,—loved his bright youth as she did all youth. Miss Eliza's bark was always much worse than her bite, and she, although she spoke very slightly of him at times, had been quite fond of him. So, too, had Miss Letitia. The little daughter had grown up in an atmosphere that fostered her hero-worship.

Arethusa's most carefully cherished Dream, through childhood to the very present time, had been that some day this wonderful father of hers would come home, here to the Farm. She had planned their meeting, to the smallest detail, many and many a time. And he had written that he was coming, over and over again; only to add a little later that "he would not be able to get across this year." But these repeated disappoint-

ments had in no wise chilled the glow of his daughter's anticipation.

And now . . . he was actually on this side of the Atlantic! No longer the broad ocean rolled between them. If he had not come clear back to the Farm, he had come much nearer to it than he had ever been in Arethusa's recollection of him; and, moreover, he had come with a *wife!*

Small wonder that Arethusa was excited!

But the Letter . . . The Letter would tell her all about it.

"My dear Miss Eliza," it ran —

"I may as well come to the point at once — you always liked that best, as I recall — and tell you that I am married; was married in Italy, at the American Consulate at Florence, the second of last June. My wife is the very finest woman God ever made, bar none; save perhaps you ladies to whom I write. And I, who was ever for peace, will fight to a finish him who avers aught to the contrary. I cannot expect you, who have never seen her, to share my enthusiasm, of course. But if you knew her, Miss Eliza, if you knew her!

"Words fail me in an effort at description, but will it suffice to say that I am perfectly satisfied to gaze at her all day long, day in and day out? This surely must convey something to you who knew me well of old and will remember that I was ever most critical, having the idea then that my bent was artistic.

"I could hardly believe in my own good fortune, Miss Eliza, when she said she would have me. I asked her all over again, immediately, just to make sure. So now the former Miss Elinor Harvey is Mrs. Ross Worthington.

"To make a long story short, I have told her about Arethusa, and she is most anxious to know her new

daughter. As she is possessed of considerably more of this world's goods than is your humble servant — the one thing I have against her — she has insisted upon herself enclosing a check for our daughter's immediate needs, and this daughter is to come as soon as you and Miss Letitia can get her ready. Don't be sparing with this check; I am instructed to add, more will be sent if necessary.

“My wife — I do love to write that word, Miss Eliza,— says that she will write, herself, very shortly. She is most busy at present, turning her house upside down from garret to cellar, but she says that when it is finished it will be a most beautiful house.

“Give my love to Miss Letitia and my darling daughter, Arethusa, and my most knightly devotion always to Miss Asenath, bless her! My wife joins me in all kind wishes for your household.

“Yours affectionately,

“ROSS WORTHINGTON.”

Arethusa hugged herself ecstatically and then pressed her lips to the Letter until the ink smudged. It was a wonderful Letter!

And the whole of the situation revealed in it appealed to her. The Romance (a love story brought even nearer home than Miss Asenath's, for it was her own dearest father who was living it right now); the Beauty of the bride, so plainly stated, and Arethusa loved beauty with all the fire of her romantic young soul; and the bride's Wealth, undoubtedly intimated, which gave the necessary touch of luxury to the picture, for Arethusa loved the fleshpots also, if an innocent liking for silks and satins and baronial halls could be called “love of the fleshpots,” — it was as perfect a situation as any created by any one of her favorite novel-



ists. She was visioning a Rarely Handsome Couple, hand in hand, moving with slow and stately grace through the vast halls of a Mansion.

“Elinor” was a beautiful name; far more beautiful than any other name she knew.

In short, being constitutionally unable to do anything by halves, Arethusa fell most completely in love with the newcomer into the family, when she might have had other feelings about her, perhaps just as strong. But there was not the slightest trace of anything resembling resentment in the daughter’s heart that a strange woman had taken the first place with her father; she would not have understood if anyone had suggested to her that it might be permissible under the circumstances. There was only a very deep gratitude that flooded her whole being. She realized quite plainly from the Letter that it was owing a great deal to the “New Wife” that her dream of so many years was coming true. She had brought Ross back to America, so much nearer to his daughter, and she had sent her, Arethusa, (sent it herself because it was positively so stated) the money whereby she was to make reality that long anticipated meeting.

But she did not waste much time in speculation as to the spending of that “check for her immediate needs”; such would have been truly idle dreaming. Miss Eliza would spend it. She would attend to the providing of a wardrobe for the visit, and that wardrobe would be utilitarian first and foremost, and durable. All of Miss Eliza’s purchases had the virtue of durability. For best, perhaps, Arethusa might have a silk dress (her Sunday silk of the season before was almost worn out), but it would be a dark blue one, undoubtedly;

and one was convinced before it was even bought that it would be a sensible dress.

Had Arethusa had the spending of the money her outfit might present a very different appearance.

She had been so absorbed in her Letter that she had not noticed that the storm had begun to increase in violence. The wind was rising again and the rain was beginning to come rapidly through the leaves.

Suddenly, with a roar like the approach of some vast army across the fields, it came from the northwest in a blinding sheet, and in just a moment she was drenched. She scrambled hastily to her feet and thrust the Letter far down in the hollow of the tree to keep it dry, and then flattened herself against the trunk to watch, as much protected as she could be, and with the intensest admiration, this masterpiece of the Storm King. She was not in the least bit frightened of the vivid lightning that played almost incessantly about her, or of the rolling and crashing thunder. She lifted up her face to feel the rain upon it, and smiled in sheer joy of the wonderful beauty of the graceful long sweep of that falling rain.

But with a crack of thunder which Miss Letitia would have said was "near," most certainly, for it sounded as though the heavens themselves were fallen, Arethusa's eyes closed involuntarily.

## CHAPTER IV

Timothy Jarvis was making preparations to salt the cattle down in the " V " lot on his place (so-called because a wedge of the Redfield property carved out a bit of its very centre) when those angry black clouds began piling up.

He was not very weather wise as yet, this sturdy boy farmer, Timothy, and so his study of the brooding sky did not help him as much, in his prognostication of what it would bring forth, as it might have helped older folk more acquainted with the vagaries of weather. Mandy or Miss Eliza or Blish could have told him that black clouds in the north west always meant a bad storm, and one that came quickly. But Timothy thought of his sleek red cattle, of which he was so proud, which were needing salt so dreadfully, and he decided that he had plenty of time in which to go on ahead and finish his job before the storm should really break. He hated to leave them until every last one had had a chance at the coarse salt he spread out for them on the rocks by the Branch. And the clouds would probably go on piling up that way for some hours.

So sure was he that this prediction was correct that he sent the man who was helping him back to the barn with the mule and spring-wagon, and planned to walk himself. He wanted a look at the bunch in the woodlot, and now, while he was so near it, was as good a time as he could find in which to visit that other herd.

But the first falling drops caught him before he was half way to the wood-lot, so he turned around without attempting that visit and started for home. Then that great downpour which had trapped Arethusa under the hollow tree caught him just as he was passing Miss Ase-nath's Woods, and he decided to go on up to the Red-field house, as it was so much nearer than his own; nearly a mile and a half nearer, this way.

He climbed the snake fence into the woodland and splashed rapidly through the wet growth. The big leaves that he brushed in passing, emptied their load of water upon him; Timothy was getting wetter and wetter, but rather enjoying it all. Then he spied Arethusa propped up against her tree with her eyes shut tight, and he stopped short in amazement.

"A — re — thusa Worthington!"

Her eyes flew open. She screamed; for Timothy had appeared before her as suddenly as though he had come in that clap of thunder.

"Timothy! You nasty thing! You scared me almost to death!"

"What on earth are you doing out here?"

"Picking water lilies!" she replied pertly.

"You must have fallen in then, because I never did see anything just as wet! But I thought you weren't afraid of storms?"

"I'm not. I love 'em."

"Why do you screw up your eyes for when it thunders then?" he asked, teasingly, as at another terrific sound her eyes shut just as tight as before.

But she only made a face at him in reply.

"Does Miss 'Liza know you're out here?" Timothy demanded next.

"She does."

"I'll just bet she doesn't," he contradicted calmly. "You better come go in. You are wet clear through."

"So are you," retorted Arethusa.

"I think you had better come go in," persisted Timothy. "Honest, Arethusa! It's dangerous," he added, quickly, for just as he spoke a great tree in the outer edge of the woodland went crashing to the ground.

"I shan't go in." She stamped her foot for emphasis. "Run along, Timothy, if *you're* afraid. *I'm* going to stay. I love it!"

That implication of fear put him on his masculine mettle at once.

"I'm not afraid," he declared, stoutly. "It's just foolish, that's all. Come on, Arethusa."

She resented this tone of authority.

"No!" she said, most positively.

"Well, then . . . I'll take you," announced Timothy, equally positive, "I just can't let you tempt Providence this way."

Her eyes blazed dark. "If you so much as dare touch me, Timothy Jarvis, even; I'll . . . I'll . . ." Words failed her.

Timothy regarded her in helpless exasperation. Being very well acquainted with Arethusa and Arethusa's ways, he knew that she would have retaliated in some very real and immediate fashion, had he made a single move to carry out his threat. And nothing he could do along this line would have brought the going in any nearer, for in a scuffle she was quite as strong as he was.

They had been forced to converse in shouts in order to be heard above the noise of the storm through the swaying and bending trees, and the whole affair: — the loud argument which got nowhere, and the subsequent

tableau of the girl and himself standing here under the big tree glaring at each other while the fury of the rain lashed against them and the storm dinned about them, suddenly struck Timothy as funny.

He laughed.

“Stop laughing!” screamed Arethusa, angrily.

“I can’t help it! You — you look so perfectly funny!” Timothy’s mirth peeled forth again.

Arethusa’s hair hung about her face in long, wet locks; her eyes, in her white face, were like great, dark pools of wrath; and she had spread her arms out behind her against the tree as if she had gripped it to hold should Timothy attempt force to make her leave her stronghold.

“You look just like a drowned rat, yourself!” she exclaimed furiously. “And — and you’ve got a whole pond in your Jimmy!”

So Timothy took off his big Jimmy hat and shook the pool of rain water out of the curved brim.

Had she not been so angry with him, Arethusa might have likened him then to a young river god instead of a “drowned rat,” and the comparison would have fitted much better. And with his blonde head, which the dampness had merely made to wave a little more, for his thickly plaited straw hat had somewhat protected it from a thorough wetting, she might even have called him a young Viking, without any very great misuse of metaphor; Timothy was so thoroughly of the outdoors in his appearance, with all his youthful strength.

His deep blue eyes gleamed with determination as plainly as the grey eyes opposite him gleamed with anger, for Timothy meant that Arethusa should go into the house; and that without much more delay.

But he changed his tactics to accomplish this. Although he was nothing of a weather prophet, he displayed, at times, wisdom rather beyond his years.

"Arethusa, do be reasonable, now," he said, in the most friendly of coaxing tones. "Suppose that tree should be struck; you'd be killed. I would too."

"That wouldn't make very much difference," she replied, naughtily.

But he ignored this interruption. "I might enjoy doing this some other time, Arethusa, when the lightning and thunder aren't so bad. This is the very worst electrical storm we've had this whole summer. And you know that I never do mind being out in the rain, don't you? I've always been quite willing to play Alpheus for you, whenever you wanted." (Timothy had studied mythology when he was in Freeport at college.) "But think," he added, much more seriously, "think of poor Miss 'Titia. You can be sure she's just having one fit right after the other with you out here. I call it dirt mean to make her suffer so. And it's not a bit like you to be mean, Arethusa, not a bit."

Arethusa yielded.

The picture Timothy presented of Miss Letitia's distress was all the more sad to contemplate because she knew it, only too well, to be true. She was getting a trifle tired of it, besides; it was only obstinacy that had kept her out so long. Yet it would never do to have him find that out. She conveyed the intelligence to him that nothing in the wide world but the thought of Miss Letitia and Miss Letitia's unhappiness would ever have dragged her away from the tree, lest he become unduly convinced of the idea that any of his other, and more immediately personal, arguments had influenced.

"And," she added, "I wanted to get real wet, for just once. But I couldn't get any wetter if I stayed. My shoes slosh now."

He agreed with her perfectly. "Without a doubt they do; I can hear 'em. You were certainly well named Arethusa, you crazy thing!" He tucked her arm in his with an authoritative air, "Let's run for it."

Nothing suited Arethusa better.

They had a glorious race through the wet orchard and brought up with a grand flourish on the back porch, where Mandy greeted their finale with many horrified exclamations and much gesturing.

"Ef Mis' 'Liza wuz to see you! Ef Mis' 'Liza wuz jes' to see you all now!"

"Well, she musn't," cautioned Timothy. "Stop making so much noise, Mandy, and smuggle Arethusa in."

"I don't really care if she does see me," Arethusa herself announced most recklessly. "I've had so much fun! Listen . . ." She slapped her wet dress against her, "Doesn't that make a funny sound? And, oh, Timothy, see what a puddle I've made already, just running off me!! Look!"

"Mis' 'Titia's ben havin' one hystik atter anothah, Arethusie, she were so sure you wuz struck w'en we heered that big tree go down in Mis' 'Senath's Woods. An' Mis' 'Liza's . . ."

"Well, Arethusa! I must say that this is a performance!"

And the three on the back porch turned to see Miss Eliza regarding them grimly from the kitchen doorway.

Timothy gallantly removed his Jimmy hat and



bowed, but Miss Eliza's expression did not soften in the least.

"I don't think she's hurt at all, Miss 'Liza," he said, with the worthy intent to soothe, "I found her in Miss 'Senath's Woods and brought her in."

"I can see she isn't," replied Miss Eliza.

Arethusa glared at Timothy for his statement of the situation.

"Arethusa," continued Miss Eliza, "I must say that I think this is going a little bit too far. You have almost made your Aunt 'Titia ill by running off in this storm. You know perfectly well just how they affect her. And I brought you into the house — once. You were certainly expected to stay. Sometimes you seem to me to be absolutely lacking in any finer sensibilities; especially in consideration for others. And you behave just like a child!"

"Oh, Miss 'Liza," interposed Timothy, "please don't jack Arethusa up so hard! I know she didn't mean to make Miss 'Titia ill. She loves a storm herself, so much, that she doesn't always remember that other people are afraid of them. But she did come in just as soon as she remembered it. She . . ."

"You needn't say all that stuff, Timothy Jarvis," interrupted Arethusa, angrily, "I reckon I can tell Aunt 'Liza anything I want, without you butting in. I'm sorry about Aunt 'Titia, Aunt 'Liza, I truly am, and I'll go right straight and tell her so; but . . ."

"That will do, Arethusa," interrupted Miss Eliza, in her turn. "Don't add rudeness to Timothy to the rest of your behaviour. And you've been told a number of times not to use that vulgar expression. Timothy is not a goat. But there is not the slightest use in my standing here arguing with you over your dis-

obedience while you and Timothy are catching your death of cold. You'd better take off those wet shoes and go right up to your room and change the rest of your things — immediately. Mandy will make you a hot lemonade. And I want it drunk this time. We won't take any risks from this escapade." (Arethusa hated hot lemonade.) "And, Timothy, you will stay to supper, of course. We are a household of women, and I have nothing to offer you as dry clothes except those old garments of Mr. Worthington's. But at least they are warm and dry, and will be better than what you have on. You just go on up to the west bedroom and I'll send them to you there."

"Timothy *shan't* wear Father's clothes!"

"*Arethusa!*"

Arethusa toed the mark, although with a very bad grace.

"It wasn't me that invited you to supper, Timothy Jarvis," she announced, as a small measure of retaliation, "remember that, please! And I don't want you, either!"

"I'm sorry," replied Timothy calmly, and his eyes danced, "because I'm going to stay. Miss 'Liza asked me. Mandy's going to have hot biscuit,— I see 'em; and Miss 'Liza 'll get me out some of her strawberry preserves, I know."

Miss Eliza smiled indulgently at this request, and reached down into her leather pocket for the key to the preserve closet.

"You better make lots of biscuit, Mandy," continued Timothy; "I'm as hungry as a bear."

Arethusa sniffed disdainfully and, with her red head high in the air, started off down the passage in the direction of the sitting-room.

"Where are you going?" called Miss Eliza after her.

"To tell Aunt 'Titia I'm sorry I scared her."

"Did you hear me tell you to take off your shoes and go straight to your room?" Miss Eliza's tone was awful.

Although Arethusa towered a good head and shoulders over Miss Eliza, she obeyed as meekly as the tiniest child. She returned to the kitchen to remove her shoes and then went down the side passage to the boxed-in steps, Miss Eliza surveying her sternly all the while.

As Arethusa passed Timothy on her way out of the kitchen, she leaned close to him and whispered, "I'll fix you for all this, Timothy Jarvis! You just wait and see if I don't!"

It was hardly fair to blame Timothy for any of it, but if she had threatened to "fix" Miss Eliza total annihilation would have followed immediately. Yet overcharged feelings must be somehow relieved.

With the disappearance of her niece, Miss Eliza took occasion to apologize to the guest of the evening for any and all of her behaviour, which might have appeared unseemly. This proceeding so delighted Timothy he could hardly repress a whoop; for he well knew that nothing would make Arethusa so furious as to know her aunt had apologized (to him) for anything she had done.

One of the chief joys of Timothy's existence was teasing Arethusa.

What fun to tell her of this!

## CHAPTER V

Miss Eliza presided with gentle dignity at the head of the supper table. She seemed to shed some of her militant spirit when seated before the white expanse of table-cloth on her own board. Hospitality was her passion; nothing so thoroughly delighted her as a "guest in the home."

Mandy had made floating custard for dessert this evening, and when Miss Eliza helped it, she helped it with a deprecatory air, as though despite its superlative value as a custard which she very well knew, it really was not fit to be offered to a guest: it might do for just the family. Timothy ate as many as three meals every week of his life in this very dining-room, but not being a member of the immediate home circle, he came quite under the head of guests.

At the other end of the table Miss Letitia carved the beautifully pink old ham into paper thin slices. She was still visibly nervous and her hands trembled a bit, every now and then (that storm had been a terrible experience); but such was habit with Miss Letitia that not a single slice was a bit ragged or a sliver too thick.

Arethusa had paid Miss Letitia a visit just before supper to make her peace, and Miss Letitia had forgiven her, as she always did. And even had she suffered far more on the girl's account than she actually had, who could have resisted such pleading to be forgiven? Contrition had been so plainly visible in those

grey-green eyes, and Arethusa had given so many kisses — soft and fleeting as thistledown they were, yet very satisfactory to Miss Letitia as kisses — that it was quite impossible for Miss Letitia not to believe in the perfect genuineness of Arethusa's apology.

She had promised fervently, "Never, so long as I live, to run out in a storm — ever again. Hope I may die right in my tracks if I do!"

While Miss Letitia had deprecated the latter part of that promise as savoring slightly of sacrilege, she had accepted the first part in good faith; and experience should have taught her otherwise.

Miss Asenath had one whole side of the table to herself, her couch took up so much room. It was Blish's duty, generally, to wheel the couch across the hall from the sitting-room, but whenever Timothy stayed to meals, he took this office upon himself. And he took it with a gallantry and old-fashioned deference that brought a faint pink flush to Miss Asenath's soft old cheek. Timothy was a great favorite of hers.

He and Arethusa sat together on the other side; but Arethusa ignored him just as much as possible. Timothy took special delight in moving such dishes of eatables as were nearest him too far away from his neighbor for her to reach herself, so that she would be forced to ask him for them. She might have eaten her supper, and managed very well, without any of this food that Timothy had commandeered, had not one of those dishes been the plate of biscuit, an absolute necessity.

Miss Eliza's sharp eyes would certainly have noticed, had her niece helped herself to too many at a time, so poor Arethusa was most unpleasantly situated. And every request that she was forced to make for that

plate of bread, for Timothy pretended every now and then not to hear the first time she asked, added to her fury with him.

But this continued warfare did not seem to affect Timothy's appetite in the slightest. He consumed a most alarming quantity of biscuits and those strawberry preserves Miss Eliza had produced in his honor.

When he was receiving his third helping of ham, Arethusa leaned over close and whispered in his ear, but very, very softly, so that Miss Eliza would not hear her, "*Pig!*"

She also lost no single opportunity of conveying to him, though much more by expression than by actual word of mouth, how exceedingly ridiculous she thought he looked in his borrowed clothing. It was far too small for him in every possible way. Ross Worthington was a large man, but Timothy was even larger. He topped Arethusa, who was quite tall for a girl, by considerably more than half a head, and he was built all over in proportion.

When he was not covertly teasing his next-door neighbor, Timothy carried on a very polite conversation with Miss Eliza on sundry country matters. He complimented the stand of corn in the Redfield lot near that "V" lot of his own, and told her that it did not seem to show the need of rain so badly as did his corn; and Miss Eliza bridled at the compliment. She was proud of her ability as a farmer, and that the "Redfield Farm" could hold its own among the other farms in the county, even after all the male members of the family had been long gone to their reward, was due solely to Miss Eliza's indefatigable energy. She deserved the compliment; and any others of like tenor that Timothy might have given.

But she was modestly deprecatory, though her old eyes did shine, and her appreciation was written all over her. That had always been a wet piece of ground, said Miss Eliza; she hadn't been so sure corn would do at all well there. She was a bit surprised herself.

It was rather sad, remarked Timothy, after a bit, that this rain couldn't have come just two or three weeks sooner. He was afraid that some of their farmer friends had lost some money by the drought.

Miss Eliza agreed that it was sad. She specified one or two persons whose crops had not seemed to her to be quite up to the mark. And there was a field or two of her own which, if Timothy were to see, he would not compliment quite so highly; but this rain would work wonders in a great many places. It hadn't come altogether too late.

In a slight lull which followed Timothy's third helping to ham, Miss Letitia asked Arethusa if she had brought her father's letter back to the house with her.

Arethusa's eyes shone immediately.

"Yes," she replied. Then she remembered, "No, I didn't either. I left it down in the Hollow Tree."

"It happened to be *my* letter," said Miss Eliza, drily.

"I know, but it won't be hurt. I can get it tomorrow. It'll keep perfectly safe and dry. And, oh Aunt 'Liza, please let me go now! He said just as soon as I could get ready. Please don't make me wait 'til fall! Please!"

"Go where?" enquired Timothy.

Arethusa pretended that she had not heard him. Miss Eliza, however, answered.

"Ross Worthington has married again, Timothy,

and come back to America. He wants Arethusa to come make him a visit."

Timothy dropped the biscuit he was holding halfway to his mouth.

"Since I was a yellow pup!" he ejaculated feelingly.

"You still are one," Arethusa remarked sweetly for him alone; but Timothy magnanimously allowed this interpolation to pass without retaliation.

"He married an American, thank heaven," continued Miss Eliza, "married her over there somewhere. In Italy, I think he said. She seems to be well-off. It was she sent the money to Arethusa for the visit."

Timothy picked up his biscuit, in his agitation he re-buttered it extravagantly on top of butter already there, and resumed operations.

"Well," he said, between mouthfuls, "this is certainly some bunch of news to hand a fellow all of a sudden. Arethusa's father married! That's enough by itself for a starter!" For to the twenty-two year old mind of Timothy, Ross Worthington seemed far too aged for anything like matrimony. "But wanting Arethusa to come visit him! You going to let her go, Miss Liza?"

"Of course she is!" burst from Arethusa, indignantly.

"Sister 'Titia and I and Sister 'Senath," replied Miss Eliza to Timothy's question, as calmly as if Arethusa had not opened her mouth, "have decided to let her go in the fall. Though I must say I'm not sure it's wise to let her go at all. I never did think it was a very good place for girls, or boys, either, for that matter, the city. Still, Arethusa's never been and a



little visit might not do her any harm. After all, he's her father when you get right down, and I reckon he won't let anything happen to his own flesh and blood."

"No," agreed Timothy, with becoming gravity, although his blue eyes danced merrily, "I don't suppose he would. What city is it, Miss 'Liza?"

"He don't say. It's just like him. But the envelope was post-marked 'Lewisburg,' so I reckon it's pretty safe to say that's where he is. I'm glad it's in the State. I wouldn't want Arethusa traveling too far."

Arethusa was irritated beyond her always slight endurance by this little discussion of her and her affairs, carried on so much as if she were not present. She plunged suddenly into the conversation without any invitation.

"I'm not going just to visit," she announced, flatly, "I'm going to Live. Father didn't say just 'visit.'"

This created all the stir she could have wished; a chorus of outcry from Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia and Timothy. Only Miss Asenath smiled. Arethusa pushed her chair back from the table and surveyed them all defiantly.

"I reckon I can go live with my own father!"

"Of course not," snapped Miss Eliza; "you *live* here!"

"Of course you do," affirmed Timothy; "it's perfectly foolish to talk of living any place else but here, Arethusa. And even if you do go make your father a visit, you won't stay very long. I know. You see, I've been there and I know what it's like, and I know you, too, Arethusa; so I know very well you won't want to stay!"

With this calm assurance and assumption of supe-

riority on Timothy's part, Arethusa's rage at him boiled over, openly, despite Miss Eliza's presence.

"Nobody asked your opinion, Timothy Jarvis, that I heard! And you know absolutely nothing whatever about what I'm going to do!"

"Oh, yes, but I do," he replied, still maddeningly superior, "I know . . ."

Arethusa fairly quivered in her fury.

"You do *not*," she interrupted, in flat contradiction. "I'm going there to *live*. And if you want to know just why, Timothy Jarvis, it's because then I shan't ever have to lay eyes on you again!"

"*Arethusa!*" from Miss Eliza.

Whereat Arethusa, retaining some small remnants of the instinct for self-preservation, subsided, though her eyes still blazed with honest anger directed at Timothy. And when Miss Eliza's attention was distracted elsewhere for a brief moment, she seized the occasion to whisper to him; "Don't you dare stay a minute after supper, Timothy; don't you dare! I'll go right straight to bed if you do!"

"Which wouldn't harm me at all, if you did," he whispered pleasantly in reply, "just yourself. And Miss 'Liza wouldn't let you do it anyway, even if I stayed and you wanted to. She'd say it was rude, and you know it. But don't worry; keep your shirt on," he added, most inelegantly, "I've got something else to do, so I'm going right on home." Then, very meanly, for it was taking a rather unfair advantage, as Miss Eliza's gimlet eyes were just then boring right through Arethusa to prevent any outburst of suitable venom from her, "And, take it from me, Arethusa, you won't stay long in Lewisburg."

He escaped to Miss Asenath's side to wheel the

couch back into the sitting-room, as Miss Eliza had risen just as he finished that last speech and signified that supper was over. Arethusa remained seated for a moment, speechless with wrath, and with that helpless, cheated feeling she always experienced when the last word was Timothy's.

The rain had stopped, so the guest departed with immediacy for home, wearing his borrowed clothing and carrying his own under his arm, much to Arethusa's further ire. She considered that he might just as well have changed before he left, for his own things had got perfectly dry by the roaring kitchen stove.

Then came the lecture for her niece which had been steadily gathering momentum with Miss Eliza for some little time. But Arethusa sat on the end of Miss Ase-nath's couch, to hold her hand, and did not mind it quite so much. Besides, in the depths of her conscience, she was guiltily aware of rather deserving it.

After the atmosphere had cleared, conversation once more veered around to the Letter, and the aunts sat in solemn consultation over it and the proposed visit and Arethusa.

## CHAPTER VI

One of the most agitating parts of this whole affair was the actual traveling that must be done by Arethusa in order to reach her father.

Miss Eliza's first idea was to find out if anyone in the County would be making a trip to the City this fall and to place her niece under that person's protection; provided that person was of the irreproachable character she deemed requisite before being entrusted with such a charge.

Miss Letitia then ventured to mention, most timidly, the State Fair, which was held in Lewisburg every September. Some one of the county's agricultural population would most surely be going there then.

Perhaps Timothy, answered Miss Eliza, graciously conceding Miss Letitia a stroke of real mentality in her suggestion. If he was planning to attend, it would be just the thing; the girl could go with him. She was sorry she had not broached the subject at supper.

But Arethusa vehemently opposed this idea. She would not go a single step with Timothy. And why could she not go alone, anyway? She was quite large enough, and she was all of eighteen this summer.

This very radical departure from the established order of things raised a storm of protest immediately from Miss Letitia and Miss Eliza; Miss Eliza especially. Such was not to be considered for a moment! An absolutely unprotected female traveling alone! And a young female at that!

"No," said Miss Eliza, firmly.

If the worst came to the worst, and it could not possibly be managed any other way, she would go with Arethusa herself, rather than have her make that four hour trip totally unattended; at which presented alternative Arethusa's mobile face clouded over most completely. This was a much worse prospect than Timothy.

Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia suggested and counter-suggested, and then rejected everything. No one idea seemed altogether to suit.

Now all this commotion over the trip and Arethusa's making it alone was really not so uncalled-for when one realized all the circumstances.

She had never been on a railroad train; never having spent longer than a portion of a day away from the Farm in all of her eighteen years, nor slept, even for one night, under any other roof.

The family did their shopping in "Blue Spring," five miles away down the Pike, only by courtesy a town. It was a "town" of six hundred inhabitants, including babes in arms and counting very carefully. On two most memorable occasions Arethusa had visited the county-seat, twelve miles farther on, on the same Pike (for Blue Spring had preempted a portion of the State road as its Main street); and these were occasions truly never to be forgotten. For there ran the railroad, through the heart of the town; there were electric lights and paved streets; the little place in its aping of a city gave her glimpses of a world of fascinating bustle and confusion. To Arethusa, the county-seat seemed bewilderingly active and alive.

But Miss Eliza was not much of a believer in going to town, and she considered it a waste of time to drive

about merely to be driving. The old-fashioned surrey, with its dark green felt upholstery, and its flapping curtains, was rarely taken out of the barn without a distinct objective point in view. Church and prayer-meeting at the tiny frame house of worship on the Pike were the principal dissipations of this "household of women." Though Arethusa had often rebelled inwardly at these arbitrary decisions which so limited her excursions abroad, outward rebellion would have done her no good; Miss Eliza was firm and ruled her little kingdom with a rod of iron.

Under cover of the discussion between Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia, Miss Asenath was having a few ideas of her own on other subjects.

"Why," she asked Arethusa, in her soft voice, "why do you dislike Timothy so much, dear?"

"Dislike Timothy, Aunt 'Senath!" Arethusa's eyes opened wide in surprise, "Why, I don't, at all! I like him just lots!"

"Then why," continued Miss Asenath, smiling just a little, "do you quarrel with him so?"

"I don't quarrel with him, Aunt 'Senath, dear . . . Not . . . Not much . . ." added for the sake of honesty, after thought.

"I thought you all had rather a bad time at supper."

"Oh, that," Arethusa tossed her head, "that was all Timothy's fault. He's . . . He's just awful sometimes. He makes me so mad I could just . . ." both hands clenched, "and he had on Father's clothes!"

"I see. But he's worn them before, dear."

"I know he has, Aunt 'Senath, and every time he does, it makes me just as mad. He . . . He doesn't belong in Father's clothes! They don't suit him at all!"

Miss Asenath was silent.

'Way deep down in her heart was a Wish; but it was a Wish she had never expressed to anyone because she was wise, and she knew that wishes expressed were often not granted.

Timothy and Arethusa were nearer and dearer to her than any two people in the world. Timothy was his grandfather over again, name and all, she sometimes thought.

Miss Asenath had not resented it when that first Timothy Jarvis had married. It had hurt her a little, naturally, when she had first heard of it; but her loving heart had very soon understood. An active man could not be expected to view those months before that terrible fall as did she, pinned always to the one spot. There were long hours of both day and night in which she had naught to do but to lie still and remember the joy of those months. And nothing could ever take that away from her, she told herself; it was hers for always, and it was a great deal. So she had clung to her miniature and her memories and sent for him to wish him happiness; and she had wished it with her whole soul from the bottom of her heart. She had loved his sons and daughters when they came, but even more than they, she loved this grandson and namesake, Timothy.

And to see Timothy and Arethusa pick up the threads of her love-story where she had laid them down would almost have compensated Miss Asenath for living all these years with only memories.

Miss Asenath laid her hand on the locket at her throat, and fell to dreaming.

"Timothy," said Arethusa, half to herself, "Timothy and I get along just beautifully sometimes . . . when he behaves. But he knows all the things I hate,

and I think he does them just for spite to see me get mad. He says he likes to see me get mad, and I . . . just like a goose, go right straight ahead and get mad for him. But I'll fix Timothy Jarvis yet for to-night! Just let him wait! If he thinks I'm going to let him ride all over me like that, he's mightily mistaken! Timothy Jarvis!!" with a most scornful emphasis, her voice rising.

Miss Asenath was conscious, although her thoughts were so very far away, of the vindictiveness of this ending, and smiled; Miss Eliza, catching Timothy's name through the sound of her own conversation, asked sharply:—

"What did you say about Timothy, Arethusa?"

Miss Eliza had a Wish also, but her Wish was quite often expressed; she had other ideas than Miss Asenath. She kept Arethusa fully cognizant of what her heart most earnestly desired.

"Nothing very much, Aunt 'Liza."

"Yes, you did. I heard you. Arethusa," Miss Eliza straightened her glasses and attacked directly, "the way you treated Timothy at the supper-table . . . all through the meal. . . . It's beyond my comprehension how you can! But he was a gentleman through the whole thing, I must say, a perfect gentleman. Which ought to make you more than ever ashamed of yourself. Sometimes I'm forced to think that all the training your Aunt 'Titia and I and your Aunt 'Senath have given you has gone for naught. To treat a guest in your own home the way you did Timothy! I was scandalized!! Simply scandalized! But I must say that Timothy behaved like a gentleman."

It was what Timothy would have termed "dirt



mean" of Miss Eliza to add this extra chapter to the thorough scolding for the afternoon which she had given Arethusa such a short while before. But Timothy was Miss Eliza's most vulnerable spot; one of her few weaknesses.

"He always does," muttered Arethusa, "according to you. But you don't hear anything he says, he's too smart!"

"What's that?" Miss Eliza looked quite ready for battle.

"Nothing, Aunt 'Liza."

"There was something. You said something about Timothy, Arethusa, for I heard you . . . again. That habit of yours of answering 'nothing,' when I ask you to repeat what you have said, is decidedly disrespectful."

Miss Eliza reached around for a copy of the *Christian Observer* which was lying on the sitting room table (the most secular reading she ever did were the stories and articles in its pages) and settled her shiny glasses firmly on the bridge of her nose. Then she drew the lamp nearer and turned it up just a trifle, preparing to enjoy a long discussion of the burning of Servetus which she had been saving for several weeks to read when she would have time to do so uninterrupted. It was signed "Calvinist," and Miss Eliza had the feeling that she was going to agree with every word of it.

Then as a parting shot, as she rattled the pages open:

"You must conduct yourself more like a lady with Timothy, Arethusa, or I'm very much afraid he won't want to marry you."

"Won't want to marry me!" Arethusa sprang

hotly from her seat on the couch. "It's me that don't want to marry Timothy!"

"You do not know what you are saying," very coldly and decidedly from Miss Eliza. "Of course you want to. It is fitting in every way, most fitting. He is the right age, the families have known each other always, and the lands adjoin."

This with Miss Eliza was the clinching argument. The Jarvis Farm was on both sides of the Pike, but on one side it enclosed the Redfield Farm north and west and south, and went nearly to town. The "V" lot, especially, seemed to Miss Eliza to be in a position that made annexation desirable. The marriage of Timothy and Arethusa would make one Farm of the two, and straighten all those irregular boundaries. When so made, it would be by far the largest individual piece of property in the County. For to Arethusa, as the sole descendant of the Redfields, would go some day all the land of their owning, and to Timothy had already been left the home Farm of his grandfather, because of his name.

"I shall never marry Timothy," said Arethusa, "Never! If the land was plaited in and out, I never would!"

Miss Eliza put the *Christian Observer* down in her lap; her glasses slipped to the end of her nose.

"Why?"

"Oh, Sister, don't!"

Miss Letitia gazed distressfully from Miss Eliza to Arethusa, and then back to Miss Eliza again. Her round, good-natured little face was all drawn up and distorted with worry, just as it always was when war threatened, even remotely, between Miss Eliza and Arethusa. And these bouts concerning the girl's mar-

riage to Timothy occurred so often without any advantage to either side.

"Because I shan't."

"That's no reason. You must have some sort of a reason. You can have no really valid objection to Timothy, Arethusa. He is quite handsome, and very likeable. *I am devoted to him, myself.*"

Miss Asenath felt quite like answering for Arethusa that this last statement was most irrelevant, but she refrained. There was really no use in adding the slightest fuel to flames already sufficiently high.

"You speak of the land being plaited in and out," continued Miss Eliza, looking sternly over her glasses. "That was a most foolish remark. Such a thing could never be, and you know it. I do not want you to marry Timothy for his land, of course. I merely mention its situation as next to what will some day be your own as making the alliance just that much more desirable. For heaven knows what will happen to the Farm when you do get it, if you haven't some sensible man to take care of it for you! But there are other things about Timothy that would make him a husband any girl could be proud of. There are plenty of them in this very County would jump at the chance you've had."

"They're very welcome to him!"

Arethusa thought it best not to say this too loud, but unfortunately Miss Eliza heard.

"I'm ashamed of you, Arethusa, if you're not ashamed of yourself. It's throwing away the opportunity of a life-time. I wish I was young, and in your shoes. Have you refused him lately?"

No answer from Arethusa. She picked at the soft blue fleece of Miss Asenath's comfort until she had

collected quite a little pile of down, which she made into a ball and put as carefully to one side as if she intended it for some future use. Miss Asenath watched her sympathetically. If it would have done the slightest good she would have entered the breach, but when Miss Eliza reached the stage of her argument of pointblank questions, it meant pursuit to the bitter end.

Miss Letitia was not so wise. She had made three attempts to catch the loop of the same stitch in her crocheting, and failed each time, in her excitement. This was a most unusual performance for her. Her crochet needle poised in mid-air.

"Sister," she pleaded, "please. I wouldn't ask the child such a personal question, if I were you. Please!"

"Please what, 'Titia?" Miss Eliza was distracted for the fraction of a moment to Miss Letitia. "Why do you sit there saying, 'Please,' in that silly way? I will ask my niece Arethusa anything I wish. When I was young we were supposed to answer all the questions of our elders, personal or not, as you call them. Arethusa!"

When Miss Eliza spoke of "my niece Arethusa," it meant business. The poor niece turned desperately, and just in time to receive the broadside of a still more emphatic, "Arethusa!"

"Yes, I have, Aunt 'Liza. Timothy has asked me to marry him every summer since I was five years old, and in between times too, and I've said, 'No,' every single time. And if he keeps on asking me until I'm five hundred years old, I'll still keep on saying, 'no!' I shall never, never, marry Timothy!"

She left her refuge of the couch and started toward the door.

"I did not hear you asking permission to leave the room, Arethusa, and I do wish you would not exaggerate so violently. It is simply telling falsehoods. You told two in that one sentence. You know perfectly well Timothy hasn't been asking you to marry him since he was nine—a child of that age doesn't think of marriage. And you also know just as well as I do that you'll not live to be five hundred. It's absurd to make such statements. Come back here, Arethusa? Now what is your real reason for acting this way whenever I speak to you of Timothy. I want to know? You know just how your Aunt 'Titia and I and your Aunt 'Senath feel about it. Why do you persist in going against our wishes?"

Arethusa gazed wildly around the room. She seemed to hunt on walls and floor an answer to the uncompromisingly plain question. Close to the door she was poised like some wild bird arrested in its flight. One glance that included Miss Asenath and Miss Letitia absolved them both from participation in the scheme so dear to Miss Eliza's heart.

"I don't love Timothy," she said, at last, desperately.

"Nonsense!"

"But I don't!"

"Bah! . . . Love!" Miss Eliza was thoroughly disgusted. "What do you want to be so mawkish and sentimental for? Just like your father! You like Timothy, don't you? Then that's quite enough."

"But I couldn't marry anybody I didn't love." The persecuted one edged a little bit of a way nearer to the door.

"You don't know anything about it," declared Miss Eliza, flatly. "What you call love is just pure silly!"

"Well," Arethusa despairingly presented her final bit of reasoning, "I hate Timothy! I think it's the very ugliest name I ever heard. I could never be happy married to anybody called 'Timothy'."

Miss Eliza sniffed. The girl was getting more and more foolish! "That certainly means nothing!"

"I always thought 'Timothy' was a good name," came softly from Miss Asenath. "I always liked 'Timothy' very much myself."

Arethusa melted suddenly. She remembered.

How could she have been so cruel as to say such a thing and hurt dear Aunt 'Senath's feelings? With a rush she was across the room and both strong young arms had clasped the frail figure of the best-loved aunt closely to her.

"Oh, Aunt 'Senath, Aunt 'Senath!" she sobbed, wildly penitent. "I was a beast! I didn't think! Your Timothy was a lovely name!"

It sounded a trifle illogical and inconsistent, but Miss Asenath seemed to understand perfectly. She whispered her forgiveness to the weeping Arethusa, who could only squeeze her and murmur incoherent avowals of her lack of intent to be unkind. To be unkind to Aunt 'Titia was bad enough, but to be unkind to Aunt 'Senath! It was the last word in perfidy.

"It all depends on what we think of the person, what we may think of the name, Arethusa, dear," said Miss Asenath. "I know you didn't mean it."

And Arethusa wept some more, scalding tears of still another sort of penitence; Aunt 'Senath was such a darling! The back of Miss Asenath's woolly white wrapper was rapidly getting damper and damper.

Such scenes as the one just past generally ended in just this way, with Arethusa's tears; and the tears

nearly always cleared the air. Miss Eliza took up the *Christian Observer* once more, and Miss Letitia resumed her rosy crocheting, after raveling out almost a whole row which she had put in as wrong as was possible.

"If I were you, Arethusa," remarked Miss Eliza drily, after awhile, looking up from her magazine to bend her sharp glance on the pair on the sofa, "I would not crush my aunt into jelly in order to show her your sorrow at being so thoughtless and unfeeling. And you will make her quite ill; very likely it will bring on one of her bad headaches, if you carry on much longer that way."

Miss Asenath's headaches were periods of much anxiety for all the family, with the great suffering they brought the gentle invalid. Arethusa drew away from the couch abruptly. She felt suddenly overwhelmed with her inability ever to do the right thing; a feeling which Miss Eliza was quite often successful in arousing in her niece.

Miss Asenath offered her own cobwebby handkerchief to dry Arethusa's reddened eyes. Then she asked Miss Eliza if she would not be good enough to read aloud to them for awhile. Miss Asenath had some of the makings of a diplomat.

None of the roomful of women would really listen, for Miss Letitia would be far too intent on counting stitches, and Miss Asenath would dream, and to Arethusa, Miss Eliza's choice of reading matter was anything but interesting; but Miss Eliza herself would be made beatific. She considered herself somewhat gifted as an elocutionist; during her course at the old Freeport Seminary, now so long ago, she had had the most lady-like of instruction. She prided herself on her

ability to put "expression" into her reading. Thus would amiability be especially restored in her quarter, and poor, persecuted Arethusa might have a little while in which to attain some degree of calmness once more.

So Miss Asenath patted the place at her side invitingly. Arethusa cuddled up very close; Miss Eliza went back to the beginning of her article, having read a paragraph or two; and peace began to reign with the very first word of the reading aloud.

When Miss Eliza's voice, with all the proper inflections, had followed the various whys and wherefores of the death of Servetus to a triumphant conclusion, she was a different person. All the sharpness aroused by Arethusa's seeming scorn of Timothy had disappeared. She was even ready to say, when her niece stooped to kiss her good-night, that she was sorry if she had made her unhappy in her manner of discussing Timothy, and Timothy's matrimonial possibilities; and this was a very great concession for Miss Eliza.

"But you are making a great big mistake, Arethusa," she could not help adding, "every way, in not taking Timothy while you can."

Yet it was amiably said, and did not cause the slightest excitement.

Which goes but to prove more surely that Miss Asenath seemed to have missed her calling.



## CHAPTER VII

“That was such a pretty girl that just went past us, Ross.”

Elinor Worthington's smiling glance followed the girl far down the deck.

For the creature was so deliciously young, everything about her; her slenderness; the joyful way she swung when she walked; even the cut of her clothes spelled youth. And she was undeniably pretty, with eyes like bits of blue sky and quantities of silky, corn-colored hair. Her mouth was almost too large, but even that could not spoil the essential prettiness of her. She was laughing at her escort, with glowing upturned face, as they swept past Elinor and Ross in their quiet corner, and her laugh displayed an unusually straight row of the whitest teeth imaginable.

“Was she?” Ross seemed most indifferent. “I didn't notice her. I never look at other women when you're around, my dear.”

Elinor laughed. “You goose!” But 'way deep down in her heart she couldn't help feeling a bit flattered.

It was just past tea-time on the big home-coming liner, and it might seem as if all of its voyagers were taking an afternoon stroll. There was only one more day — to-morrow — left of the voyage before Boston Harbor, and everyone was full of the repressed excitement and restlessness of getting home. The decks were alive with couples and single folk, passing and

repassing in both directions; some very briskly in real constitutionals, and some much more leisurely as though merely for the occupation of movement.

But Ross felt very lazy. He had buried himself deep in his steamer-chair and refused to budge an inch when Elinor had suggested that they might join that strolling throng.

"I'm a married man now," he said, "and I don't have to worry about exercising to keep my figure. Besides, I had much rather sit here in the corner and hold your hand under the rug."

So Elinor had humored him about the sitting still, and arranged a fat pillow under his head the way he liked it best; but she had no intention of permitting that even so newly married a couple as themselves should be seen holding hands in broad daylight on a crowded deck. Whereat, Ross pretended to sulk; he tilted his cap far down over his eyes; thrust his hands deep into his coat pockets and sprawled full-length in his chair. Though instead of conveying to the passers-by any idea of displeasure, with anything or anybody, his attitude only succeeded in picturing lazy comfort.

Arethusa would hardly have known this Ross Worthington reclining so easefully in the steamer-chair as the original of her beloved photograph. She might have recognized the eyes, keen and bright in their glance as ever, and with the same debonair smiling; but the wavy dark hair was clipped as closely as the hair of any other male biped and had greyed a trifle just at the temples. He was less like a novelist's creation, and more like the men Arethusa had known in the flesh, in his appearance, certainly. For this older Ross Worthington had discarded Italian military capes and Byronic

collars and flowing ties for more conventional attire. He was as commonplace and ordinary as to clothing, in every respect, as any other man on that huge steamship.

But Elinor Worthington would have attracted attention almost anywhere, and more than one of the pedestrians had given her a second glance of surreptitious admiration as they passed her. She was rather a wonderful looking person. Ross's raptures had not been altogether exaggeration. She had a world of soft white hair, pure white it was, worn simply coiled around a beautifully shaped head; its elderly color in strange and attractive contrast to the smooth youthfulness of her lovely skin. Her eyes were brown, a warm, dark brown, under long dark lashes and slightly arched dark eyebrows; and the tiny gleam of unmistakable fun that lurked in their quiet depths was again a contrast to the almost classical severity of finely cut features, straight nose, and delicately chiseled mouth, and cleanly rounded chin. And she was as graceful in her slender tallness as the girl she had admired — this woman of forty or more. It was small wonder that Ross had declared he loved to look at her.

Here in this corner with her husband, Elinor Worthington was all herself. She glowed like a rose, with none of the little stiffness in her manner she so often unfortunately showed to strangers and which only the discerning few correctly named as shyness. To the majority of people she was likely to seem cold, almost distant.

"What are you thinking about? You look so serious and far away," Ross remarked after an interval of silence.

He believed in the power of the spoken word. It

was not given him to remain quiet for long. He might have managed it with the communion of a hand-clasp; but without, it was impossible.

Just then the pretty girl and her escort passed by them again. Elinor's brown eyes watched the pair this second time until they had turned the corner of the deck.

"That girl," she said, half wistfully, "she is so delicious and young. I can't help wishing she were mine. There is something too utterly adorable about a young girl."

"She seems merely silly to me," Ross replied. "I don't see anything particularly interesting or unusual about her that should make you want to own her, or any other callow young thing her age. However, if you say she is adorable, I suppose she is. . . . Merciful Heavens!!"

"Ross Worthington!"

"And I never thought of her, I'll swear, until this very moment!" he muttered.

"Thought of who?"

"The child."

"What child? Ross, will you kindly make one remark that is intelligible? What on earth are you talking about? Or who?"

"My child." He turned his face to hers, ruefully smiling. "Heaven knows what you'll think of me! But . . . But, Elinor, I'll swear I never thought of her until this very moment!"

His wife very nearly went over backwards.

She had thought she was getting used to Ross, and had been sure she was quite prepared for anything he might do or say that smacked of the unusual, which seemed to be one of his peculiar gifts; but this far surpassed anything yet. She had known him very well for

nearly three years and while he had once, long ago, told her of a previous marriage, he had never mentioned the existence of a child; or intimated in any way that there were any ties to have drawn him to America.

But that gleam of fun was not in her brown eyes for nothing, and so she laughed. And it was such a merry peal of unrestrained mirth that Ross rose, deeply offended.

"There is nothing at all ludicrous in this, I assure you, Elinor. It's quite serious!"

"I am quite ready to believe it is. But, Ross, I . . . Please think for just a moment. I can't help laughing. It is rather funny!"

Then he smiled himself. One of his greatest charms was the ability to view his own performances, as it were, from a detached perspective.

"You're quite right there, I'll have to admit. To leave you in ignorance of any family, and suddenly, after months and years of such ignorance, produce a daughter!"

"You say a daughter? Are there," Elinor's eyes danced mischievously, "are there any sons you have concealed at home, in case I should admire a passing small boy? Are you going to spend the rest of your life thus immediately granting my idle wishes?"

"No, I'm afraid I've done my very best. I'm no genie of the lamp, although it does look a bit like it."

"Then sit down and tell me all about her," she patted his empty chair invitingly. "Begin at the very beginning and tell me everything you can about your daughter."

Ross obediently draped himself once more in the steamer-chair. But he buried his chin deep in his hands

and sat staring long without speaking, across the slowly rising and falling rail, at the sea.

His own disclosure had been as much, if not more, of a shock to himself as it had been to Elinor. He had not thought very definitely of Arethusa in weeks, or even months; and now, suddenly with the chance passing of another young female creature, and his wife's admiration of her, his daughter's personality had intruded itself as one which must be reckoned with, and taken somewhat into his calculations. For the first time he realized that he had not been considering his child at all, in any plans he had made for the future; and the thought was a bit disturbing.

"What is her name?" prompted Elinor.

"Arethusa."

"Arethusa!"

"Yes. I know it's a most awful mouthful. But her mother named her," his voice softened, "her own name was Matilda; and she had always disliked it so." How long the time had been since he had thought of the mother, either! Once more he stared across the rail, out at the sunlit sea.

Elinor laid her hand gently on his arm for just a moment; a fleeting caress of sympathy for his sobered mood.

"Ross, dear," her speaking voice was unusually beautiful, as soft and clear as a bell, but it had never sounded more like low music than just now. "Ross, would you tell me something about her? Arethusa's mother, I mean. But if you'd rather not . . . I've no sort of wish to arouse any memories which might hurt; but I can't help feeling, dear, that I would like to know something about her. I've never asked you before,

because it seemed impertinent; but I really do not mean it at all in that sense."

"I know," he answered slowly. "But it was all so long ago, Elinor, there is nothing left to hurt. It seems sometimes now as if I had dreamed every bit of it. She was a slip of a thing; just a girl."

It had not been very long, his first cycle of love.

It was just a little more than two years from the summer day he had first met her, with her cornflower eyes as blue as the ribbons on the muslin dress she wore, and her dainty tininess, until that summer day when he had turned away from a low mound in the country cemetery, with hot rebellion in his heart that the one had been taken and the other left.

He had not wanted to go to that country party. With all a city boy's superiority he had yawned at the suggestion; then decided to go just to watch "the rubes"; and there he had found her, and his visit to the distant cousin had assumed a new significance. After they were married, he had wanted to take her away with him, but she had clung to her own home; and so he had stayed with her on the Redfield Farm, making lazy efforts to learn a trade that had no sort of attraction for him, just because she wished it.

But after she was gone, the farming had lost its excuse for being, and the tiny baby daughter, who cried when he picked her up, and who only wanted to eat and sleep, had no real power to hold him where she was. He wandered restlessly about the country-side, trying to find some place where the mother's personality had never been; and then one day he had announced to Miss Eliza that he was going abroad, to work at something congenial where no memories made it hard for him to stay. He had not intended to remain very

long, a year or two perhaps. But Ross followed the line of least resistance nearly always, and the friends he had made and the life he had lived had proved attractive; little by little the ties that had bound him to the Farm had slackened, until he hardly felt them at all.

Time had done what his first hot, youthful grief would never have admitted that it could do, and had faded the glowing colors in the pictures of that chapter in his life; and it was now, as he had said, almost like something dreamed.

"Then she died just after Arethusa was born?"

Ross nodded.

"That was an odd name to give her, dear; 'Arethusa'! Was she named for anyone?"

"No, just because her mother liked it. I was a great goose in those days, with large ideas of the necessity for the revival of Grecian "pure beauty," as I called it. Heaven knows where I got the phrase! I had just graduated from college that June before I met her and I had a lot of stuff I had taken to the country with me. Then I sent for more. I used to devour volumes about vase paintings, and classical ideals, and I read worlds of it aloud to her. Miss Eliza used to think it was atheistic, I'm quite sure. She didn't say so, but she wouldn't let me read my mythology in the house at least, aloud. Matilda and I had to go down to the Branch, so we wouldn't be heard. It was from Bulfinch, I believe, she got the story of the fountain nymph that seemed to appeal to her so strangely. And I was quite willing to saddle my daughter with it; it was like taking a firm stand for my ideas. They were hardly ideals." He sighed.

"You poor babies!" said Elinor softly, to herself.



“What did you do with the little girl, Ross?”

“Her great-aunts kept her. The same women, Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia Redfield, that had raised her mother. Matilda’s mother was their sister. Miss Asenath, the third aunt, is a cripple. You must know her some day, Elinor. She is ‘pure beauty’ and pure everything else. And what a friend she was to me when I needed her!”

“How old would she be?”

“Who, Miss Asenath? About seventy.”

“No, of course not, dear goose! Arethusa.”

“Oh, I don’t know. Eighteen, I suppose. Yes, just about.”

Elinor looked for a moment as if she did not believe what she had heard him say.

“Ross Worthington!”

“I’m all attention.”

“Am I to understand that you actually haven’t seen that child for eighteen whole years!”

“You are.”

“Why, Ross!”

“Well, I told you why I didn’t go back home just at first, Elinor. A scrap of an infant who seemed to thoroughly dislike the sound of my voice, for as I remember it, she howled vociferously every time I went near her, was not much attraction. And then I just put off going back and kept putting it off, year after year. Now do you still wonder”—suddenly whimsical—“that I could forget all about her?”

“I never wonder at anything you do, Ross,” replied his wife. Her tone was grave. “I gave that up a long time ago. But I would call your behaviour, in this instance, heartless; if I didn’t know you well enough

to know you wouldn't really be consciously harsh to a fly."

"Heartless!" he echoed.

"Yes, heartless!" she repeated firmly. "Your own child! And eighteen whole years! Oh, Ross!"

"But she's been well taken care of," he protested, though somewhat feebly.

"Very probably she has. But you're her father. I verily believe, Ross Worthington," she added suddenly, "that you haven't even told her you were going to be married!"

The pendulum of Ross's moods swung very rapidly, as rapidly as ever that of his daughter. The little softness aroused by the thought of Arethusa's mother had passed, and now his eyes were full of unmistakable fun.

"No," he replied, "I will have to confess that I haven't. I didn't think she would be very much interested. And 'Where ignorance is bliss,' you know."

"Ross!"

"Oh, come now, Elinor, do make some allowances! You ought to be feeling flattered, instead of getting all up in the air about it. It shows such a complete absorption in you, I think. But I did mean to write, if it will make you feel any less convinced that I'm a hardened wretch with no natural affections. I've really never seen her, in a sense, and writing to a person you've never seen is . . . Don't look so stern, Woman, I do write her often. I'll have you to know my daughter and I are very good friends."

"How often?" pursued Elinor, remorselessly.

"Once or twice, or maybe three times a year. I never make a point of counting letters with anyone. It seems so terribly small!"

Elinor shook her head helplessly. "Oh, Ross, Ross," she sighed. "Thank heaven, there's only one of you!"

"Yes," he answered, very placidly. "Thank heaven! I was never in the least ambitious to be a twin!"

And now it was the wife's turn to stare out at the sea and think of Arethusa.

She was even more vexed with Ross for this dreadful neglect of his daughter than she had shown him. Elinor had a very high ideal of parenthood. Her own happy childhood, with a father and mother who had included her as the third in all their pleasures and even in every day commonplaces, as naturally as they had included themselves, had given her no hazy picture of what a very beautiful thing such a relation could be. She could not understand how Ross could take the idea of his fatherhood so very indifferently. Surely he must love his child!

When Elinor loved, she gave royally of herself. If she spoiled the objects of her affection a bit, along with this giving, it was not a sort of spoiling that hurt. So now her heart went straight across the miles that still separated them and found Arethusa. That she was Ross's daughter was reason enough by itself, thought Ross's wife, to love her, had not the story of that blue-eyed girl who had died so long ago, also drawn Elinor's heart to the motherless baby the girl had left. And the motherless baby was grown!

Elinor could not help wondering how Arethusa would feel about her father's re-marriage; she was bound to have some ideas on such a subject. It was cruel of Ross to leave her so long in ignorance. He had been married over a month; six whole weeks in

fact. He should have written to the Farm as soon as his marriage was a settled fact. But he would not have been Ross if he had. A slight smile flitted across Elinor's face at this thought of the consistency of the whole performance.

She felt as if it had devolved upon her to make all of this neglect up to Arethusa, and to love down the resentment, if there was any at all. And so she could not know the girl a moment too soon.

"Ross, what were you going to do about Arethusa? Did you think of going down to see her when we got home?"

"I haven't had time to think very much about any of it yet. I had left her out of things altogether until just this afternoon, by forgetting about her. Why?"

"Well, then," Elinor's voice trembled slightly, "please let me write and ask her to come and see us, in Lewisburg. Away from the aunts. So we can get acquainted by ourselves. And . . . And then . . . Ross . . . if she likes us, we can keep her with us and make three in the family"

"Does any one wonder," he murmured, apparently to the world at large, "that I love this woman as much as I do? Elinor, dearest, it is very plain to me that I am going to be very jealous of my own daughter."

"Do be serious, Ross."

"I am, never was more so in my life."

"You mean . . . I may write her to come? You ought to write to her too," she was as eager as any girl. "And I shall send her the money for the trip. It will be my first gift to my new daughter."

"No," said Ross, very decidedly, to the end of this speech, "I can't let you do that."

And all the eagerness died out of Elinor's face.

"Oh, Ross, now please don't spoil it all by being a mule," she pleaded. "We have so many of these disagreeable arguments about money, and it is so very foolish! Why can't I send Arethusa a little check without your behaving so!"

"Because I won't have you, that's why. Arethusa isn't your incumbrance, in any way. She's *my* daughter, and I'm not such a pauper that I can't manage to support her, for I most certainly did not marry you to have you caring for my various relatives. You write your letter, and I'll enclose the check."

"You haven't been treating her very much as if she were your daughter." The gentle Elinor could not help saying this and saying it quite sharply.

She so rarely let her temper slip for even the fraction of a moment, but Ross was always so horrid and obstinate about this question of money. He never seemed to realize her side of it; that one of the greatest joys of its possession was what she could do for him and others that she loved by means of it. To say that she should not have the very simple pleasure of sending a trifle of her abundance to Arethusa, was almost too much! The little thought had caused such a glow when it had come.

"I shall do just what I please with my own money," she continued, "and send every bit of it to Arethusa if I wish. You have no earthly right to forbid me any natural use of it."

But this money of his wife's was a thing about which Ross Worthington was almost foolishly sensitive. The fact that Elinor's monetary possession far exceeded his had kept him a great many months from asking her to marry him, when the most casual observer might have read his secret with the greatest ease.

So enormous was the discrepancy between their quotas of this world's good that more than one spiteful minded person had intimated it had had something to do with his choice. He knew this only too well, and the thought rankled. Elinor had so much; she could do so much; she could do so much more for herself than he could ever do for her that it was a great sore spot. They were to live in Elinor's house; ride about in Elinor's expensive automobile; be waited upon like royalty, as he phrased it, by Elinor's servants; they were even now, after a lengthy argument about it, traveling home with Elinor's wealth in a far more luxurious manner than he had ever been able to travel on his own money.

The most foolish sort of false pride considered this offer to send a check to Arethusa a sort of finishing straw. He would keep all expenditure for his daughter strictly for himself.

"I wish you would! I wish you would send it all to somebody! I wish to goodness you didn't have a cent of the money!" He rose, his jaw set savagely, and turned away. "I didn't marry you for it, though from the way you spend it on me I'm not at all surprised that a great many people say I did!"

And he was off down the deck in an almost blind rage. Arethusa's temper came not so much from the fact that her hair was red, as right straight from her father.

Elinor stared after him, too hurt to want to follow him, or to try to call him back. They had had many a heated discussion as to which portion of the expense she was to bear and what was to be left for him, but none had gone so far; never degenerated into as real a quarrel as this.

But Ross was too tempestuously moody to remain angry long. It needed only one turn of the deck for him to be back at her feet, ready to humble himself in the dirt in the abjectness of his apology.

The outcome of it was that Ross himself wrote a letter to enclose Elinor's check, that letter Arethusa had kissed under the hollow tree. It required much persuasion on the part of his wife to keep him from describing the whole affair in detail, how abominably he had acted about the check, and how badly he had made her feel. It would make his abasement more complete and lasting in effect, he said, if some one else were to know about it. Ross, like Arethusa, did nothing by halves.

Yet Miss Eliza unwittingly disappointed Elinor's eagerness to see Arethusa, by announcing that Arethusa could not come until the fall. It was far more of a disappointment to his wife than it was to Ross. Ross was very happy with things just as they were.

Elinor made a room ready for the girl to be her very own, when doing over the rest of her house; and she put into it all the love and little personal touches that Arethusa's own mother might have given it.

"She might not be," she said, thoughtfully considering when selecting the wall-paper, "a pink or blue person at all. Ross doesn't know the color of her eyes or hair or anything that he ought to. He's been woefully remiss as a parent. White might perhaps be safest."

Which choice was surely most fortunate.

So white with a silky, silvery stripe was chosen for the walls of the big, sunny room with its rows of windows on two sides which had been set aside as Arethusa's. It was a white ground with garlands of

flowers in soft pastel shades near the ceiling. And green, a soft, dull green, was chosen for the side curtains of those sunny windows, and for the sofa cushions and the upholstery on the window seats and the "squishy" chairs. The largest pieces of furniture were of a satiny brown walnut combined with cane. There was a green rug, the color of the moss in Arethusa's own beloved woods and so soft and thick that her feet would sink deep into it, for the floor. Then Elinor put a long, soft sofa at the foot of the bed, and Arethusa's room was ready for her coming.

The bathroom adjoining, which was also to belong to the daughter of the house, was white, shiny tile from floor to ceiling, and it contained every conceivable device known to the mind of a modern plumber that makes for comfort in a bathroom. Could Elinor have but glimpsed the high-backed tin tub in which Arethusa had bathed all of her life at the Farm!

"You've done too much," was Ross's comment, when Elinor showed him this nest, "and spent a fortune besides, on my child. When . . ."

"Our child," interrupted Elinor gently, "I thought we had settled that once for all. Please, Ross, don't be eternally dragging in the cost of things . . . I didn't bring you up here for that . . . But tell me if you think Arethusa will like it."

"Like it! Ye gods! Think of the Farm! And the woman asks if Arethusa will like it!"

But Arethusa's actual coming was postponed by Miss Eliza for various reasons several times. The correspondence on this subject was all between her and Elinor, for Miss Eliza wrote a stilted, old-fashioned hand, not easy to read, which Ross's impatience refused to take the time to decipher.



First, it was hard finding suitable company for Arethusa,—no date could be fixed until that was settled; and then Miss Letitia had a little spell of illness and the making of the clothes was interrupted; and so on. But the last postponement, until late October, was the Worthingtons' own fault. It was far too hot in Lewisburg that September, so off they scurried to the seashore before Arethusa was nearly ready to join them.

“Just like Ross Worthington,” said Miss Eliza, grimly, when the letter telling of this move reached the Farm. “He just can't stay put. I reckon the Lord didn't make the place where he'd be happy long at a time.”

## CHAPTER VIII

Arethusa sat on a big, smooth stone at the edge of the Branch, under the low-drooping willow tree that leaned far over those clear waters, and absent-mindedly flipped at the water with a long switch broken from the tree. Under the stone it was cool shadow and the rocks on the bottom of the Branch gleamed invitingly green. Something like a fresh-water seaweed moved slowly back and forth, as Arethusa stirred the water above it. But for all its inviting appearance, it was treacherously slimy. It would have been hard for even nimble-footed Arethusa to keep her balance on those rocks. A tiny snake darted out from under the big stone and shot across to the other side; Arethusa leaned far over to watch it.

"A baby snake," she exclaimed delightedly. "I wonder if there're any more!" Then she poked farther back under the stone, but no more appeared. It was probably the only child in its family, thought Arethusa. It was rather late for baby snakes.

She straightened up once more and resumed her absent-minded switching at the water. Farther out, where the shadow of the weeping willow did not reach, the sunlight shone with dazzling brightness on the water, and the hundreds of little drops that flew off the end of Arethusa's switch gleamed like tiny diamonds as they fell back into the Branch.

It was a terrifically hot day.

The September sun blazed away so fiercely that the whole landscape drooped under it. Even Arethusa,

whose enthusiasm no amount of ordinary heat had the power to lessen, felt wilted.

But despite the heat, work on her outfit for the Visit did not slacken. Miss Letitia and Miss Eliza were sewing away for dear life. Even Arethusa herself had been pressed into service. Miss Eliza believed in being ready for your occasions; rather ready with a long waiting, than not be ready. She would have the simple wardrobe finished and all carefully packed days before it was time to leave so there would be no flurry at the last moment; Miss Eliza hated flurry.

But Arethusa did not sew with ease. What little she knew of that art had been acquired with painful effort. And with the heat and her uncontrollable excitement when she considered what this work was for, the sewing had stuck to her hands so badly this morning, and the thread had knotted with such diabolic persistency, that Miss Asenath had taken it all away from her and suggested that she run outside for awhile. She was, however, to remain within easy calling distance of the house, so she had come down here to the willow tree at the Branch.

It was just a little over a month now until Arethusa was actually to go. She had counted the days on the calendar until October twenty-fifth and then multiplied them by twenty-four. And every night, with puckered brow and moistened pencil and great care so that no smallest mistake should be made in so important a subtraction, she subtracted twenty-four more from those hours still remaining. The number of figures on the slip of yellow paper stuck in the mirror of her bureau had increased as the size of the remainder decreased with each passing day. This method of showing the

flight of time appealed to her very strongly. It made it seem as if so much more had been covered every day when she subtracted twenty-four from the larger number of hours, than if she simply took one away from the number of days.

She lay back on the big stone and clasped her hands under her head, smiling up into the willow branches as if she saw something there which pleased her exceedingly. And so did any contemplation of the limitless possibilities for happiness before her in the Visit bring just such a smile to curve her lips. A few sweat-bees buzzed half-heartedly about her head, but Arethusia did not even trouble to brush them away. It was too hot for any more exertion than was absolutely necessary.

Miss Johnson, Arethusia's fox terrier, sat right beside her mistress, with her small red tongue hanging out at one side of her mouth, and panting as if her small heart would burst through her ribs.

Miss Johnson had been the gift of Timothy, who owned her mother. But it had needed all his blandishments to induce Miss Eliza to allow Arethusia to have the little dog, for Miss Eliza cared nothing whatever for dogs of any kind or size or degree, either far or near. And once Timothy's cajolements had carried his point, and Miss Johnson had taken up her abode at the Farm, she had been hedged about with restrictions. She was never permitted to set foot inside the sacred precincts of the house, or even on either porch, or to go near the flower garden; and she knew it quite as well as anybody. Experience still remains the best of teachers. When Miss Eliza appeared on her horizon, Miss Johnson would put what was left of her tail be-

tween her legs and scuttle for cover. She was a wise little dog, and did not have to be told who wielded brooms and slapped.

But out in the open, her disposition was much less humble. She and Arethusa were boon companions; her mistress had the whole of that small heart which thumped so violently. One of her paws rested on a dumpy, round stick which she had selected as a good plaything, and she gave a short, sharp bark of frantic appeal when she saw Arethusa lie down on the stone.

It was never too hot for Miss John to play at chasing sticks; her energy never flagged in the least, even though it might seem that she would pant herself to death the very next moment.

Arethusa raised her head to one elbow to look very reproachfully at Miss Johnson.

"I told you twice it was too hot, Miss Johnson."

Miss Johnson barked. There were almost words in that bark, it was so entreating.

"Yes, 'tis. There's nothing you can say will make me think it isn't, and it's very bad for you to run in the heat."

Another bark.

"No, I'm not going to throw it for you. I've told you so over and over. Besides, you ought not to want to run with an old stick when I'm going away so soon. You ought to be glad to sit with me while you can."

But Miss Johnson believed in snatching at the pleasures of the present rather than in preparation for the sorrows of the future. She sat up quite straight and begged beseechingly. Her tiny fore-paws were so irresistible in their appealing waving that Arethusa relented.

"But just this once, only," she warned, as she sat up and reached for the stick.

Miss Johnson jumped about, with excitement at the highest tension; and her mistress lifted that round bit of wood high above her head and threw it with a swing which had far more grace than aim, and all the force she could muster.

And it hit Timothy, stealing up quietly to surprise her, square between the eyes.

"Suffering cats, Arethusa!"

Timothy grabbed Miss Johnson's plaything and continued its flight so very far away that the poor little dog could not find it at all, although she searched most diligently for it for a long, long time.

Arethusa almost jumped off the big stone into the Branch.

"Why don't you look where you're throwing things occasionally! You nearly put my eyes out!" There was a fast growing red spot on his nose; Timothy rubbed it ruefully.

"Served you quite right if I had! How could I know you were sneaking there!" Then Arethusa turned her back to Timothy, and she turned it with a movement of the greatest dignity. "I thought I told you last night," she added, "not to come to see me any more, ever."

Timothy was silent for a moment . . . "I didn't think you really meant it," he said, miserably.

"Well, I did."

Arethusa's back looked decidedly inhospitable; there was an uncompromising rigidity about the way she stared straight before her. Even the long rope of red hair seemed to have become suddenly as stiff as the

rest of her. It was not an attitude in a hostess conducive to easy conversation, or to make one's thoughts flow smoothly.

Miss Johnson flew about, hunting for her stick, every now and then coming back to Timothy with frantic little questioning yelps; but Timothy, ordinarily such a friend of hers, paid no sort of attention. He had eyes only for Arethusa. It was hard for Miss Johnson to understand.

Finally, Timothy flung himself down on the ground at the side of the big stone. "Do you mind if I stay, Arethusa?"

"Suit yourself," she replied, indifferently. "It's not on my land. But it seems to me you have an awful lot of time to loaf around for anybody who calls himself a farmer." There was scorn in Arethusa's tone.

"I came over here just especially to tell you I was sorry. I saw you from the hemp-field and came."

"You better go on back to the hemp-field then," said Arethusa, "now that you've said it."

Timothy gathered a handful of small stones lying near him and began to idly skip them one by one across the Branch. It was an accomplishment which Arethusa deeply envied him; her stones invariably fell in without skipping. Yet she made no move to show him that she saw how beautifully every single stone that Timothy skipped sped across the top of the water to the other side. Miss Johnson came and sat down between them, worn out in her vain search for her stick, and she panted and gazed inquiringly from one to the other of her playmates, so unusually silent.

"I don't see why," said Timothy suddenly, "that you want to act this way, Arethusa. I've said I was sorry. That ought to be quite enough; and . . . and

. . . Anyway, I don't see why one kiss should make you so mad."

"Oh, you don't?" replied Arethusa, very sarcastically.

Life had seemed a gloomy affair to Timothy since the day he had realized that Arethusa was actually going on this Visit. He did not want her to go, to put it very plainly. Not that he thought she would not have a good time; he thought she would have a good time; in fact, he thought she would have far too good a time, his verbal expression to Arethusa of the contrary idea, notwithstanding. Timothy had made more than one visit to Lewisburg; he was well acquainted with the variety of its attractions. He could not help but vision the oceans of beings of the opposite sex it was inevitable she should meet, and he saw in these meetings his own eclipse as a suitor.

Timothy's Ardent Wish for Arethusa and himself was identical with Miss Asenath's Secret Hope and Miss Eliza's Openly Expressed Desire. And Arethusa had not exaggerated in the least, to Miss Eliza, the number of his proposals. He had been proposing to her every summer with worthy persistence since he was nine or ten, childish though those first proposals may have been; and sometimes twice a summer.

Ever since that time when she had made the first appeal to his chivalry when he had met her, a chubby little scrap of only three scant summers, wandering off down the Pike, every little footfall taking her farther and farther away from the Farm, and she had raised her eyes, brimming over with tears in their wonderful tangle of black lashes, and said, with a tiny catch in her voice, "I'm losted. Tate me home, Boy!"; and he, with the superior knowledge of location which



seven years gives over three, had led her safely back to Miss Eliza — ever since that long-past day, Arethusa had made up the most of Timothy's world. They had played together all through childhood and boyhood and girlhood, and quarreled violently and much over their play, and then made up with commendable immediacy; Timothy was the nearest approach to a brother Arethusa had ever known. But Timothy's feeling for Arethusa had ever been, and especially these last few years, more than a brother's love. It was the clean whole-hearted affection which a boy gives to the one girl in the world who seems to him superior to other girls. Even when Timothy had gone away to a neighboring town to college, his allegiance had never for a moment been shaken; in all those four long years he had never seen a single maiden, among the many he had met, who came anywhere near Arethusa in his estimation.

Timothy had had some dim idea that it might be quite wise to get her safely promised to himself before she went away. The last point-blank refusal she had made him, earlier in this summer, had not left him altogether disheartened. He knew Arethusa was given to moods. Then, too, persistence often wins the reluctant; dripping water wears away a stone. There are a great many aphorisms dealing directly with such a state of mind as Timothy's.

So the evening just before this hot September morning, he had dressed himself in his very best and strolled over to the Farm, fully determined on a definite course of action.

He had made his formal proposal for Arethusa's hand to Arethusa herself, as they sat side by side on the top step of the worn stone steps to the front porch.

But she had laughed at him, so derisively, that Timothy, goaded into rashness by the laughter, had kissed her with a resounding smack. Then he had been slapped by the indignant Arethusa until his cheek stung with the pain, sent straight home and told never to come back again as long as he lived.

And he had wondered, as he cut across the fields, a chastened and a sadder Timothy under the friendly stars which winked so sympathetically, and rubbing his still stinging cheek as he walked, if there would ever be anybody who would understand Arethusa. He didn't. He could recall occasions when he had kissed her and had not been slapped.

Now Miss Eliza had unfortunately heard the conversation and the kiss and the slap and the dismissal of Timothy, from inside the sitting-room; and she had called Arethusa into her after the rejected suitor had fled and outdone even herself in the quality of her scolding. She had gone so far as to make a threat of such a truly horrible nature that it had turned Arethusa absolutely cold with the fear that she might really carry it out.

Arethusa had every right to be very angry with Timothy.

Timothy gathered him another little heap of stones, and one by one, with a perfect mastery of the art, skipped those all across the water. But he did it very gloomily, with no apparent pleasure, hardly as if conscious of what he were doing. And Arethusa continued to stare straight before her as if she had found new and unexpected beauties in a familiar landscape.

"I hate for us to be mad," said Timothy after awhile, making another attempt to break the hostile little silence.

"So do I," replied Arethusa non-committally. Timothy brightened.

"But I expect to be mad at you as long as I live," she continued, and Timothy lapsed into gloom once more, "when you act the way you do. I don't see why you want to be always bothering me about marrying you; unless Aunt 'Liza puts you up to it. I don't want to marry you, Timothy; and I'll never change my mind about it. You needn't ask me again, ever. I want to be very good friends with you, because you're the very oldest friend I've got, but we can't be friends if you're going to be so silly and sentimental all the time. I hate sentimental people!"

Had Timothy's sense of humor not deserted him absolutely, he must have laughed at this; as it was, he took it very seriously.

Just then came a faint, "Ar — ee-thu — sa!" from the direction of the house, and Arethusa rose quickly to answer the call.

"Oh, I forgot," Timothy rolled over. "Miss 'Titia called to me from the house as I came by to tell you she was ready for you."

"Why didn't you tell me then, an hour ago? You've been here a half hour at least and haven't said a word about it!"

"I forgot," replied Timothy humbly, thoroughly ground to the earth by that speech of Arethusa's with its "I'll be a sister to you" tone.

"That's evident. She probably thinks I'm lost or something by this time. If you weren't so busy always seeing how you can annoy me, you might remember when people give you messages to deliver!" Arethusa swept majestically off, bending her head to escape the low-growing willow branches, and Timothy watched

her miserably. But she had gone only about six or seven paces when she turned and came back to him, "And Timothy," she announced, as sternly as Miss Eliza herself might have spoken, "if you ever even try to kiss me again, like you did last night, I'll do something worse to you than just slap. I'll . . . I'll . . . It's . . . I don't like to be kissed."

"But you used to kiss me," Timothy sat upright, here was his alibi and a chance to defend himself.

"I know I did, but we were babies. That was ages ago, and it's very, very different. Grown girls don't kiss grown men. It's not nice. It's . . . It's just like poor white trash!"

And with last stroke of annihilation, Arethusa departed for the house and Miss Letitia and her fitting, with Miss Johnson trotting at her heels, leaving Timothy in abject abandonment to misery under the willow tree.

## CHAPTER IX

Miss Eliza eyed Arethusa over her glasses with stern displeasure. She dropped her sewing into her lap and prepared to take the delinquent one to task.

"Where have you been all this time? Your Aunt 'Titia's been ready and waiting for you a half hour at least."

"Oh, Sister, not quite that long." Miss Letitia's deprecatory accents made an attempt (and it could always be only an attempt) to stem the tide of Miss Eliza's severity. "It's not been more than fifteen minutes, I'm sure."

"Your aunt has been ready and waiting for you a half hour at least!" repeated Miss Eliza, firmly. "Didn't you understand from her message that she wanted you? And I had to call you, myself, finally."

"Well, I didn't get any message . . . Timothy didn't tell me she wanted me, so how was I to know? I came right straight away when I heard you."

"You've been quarreling with Timothy again!"

*"I have not!"*

And at Arethusa's irritable tone, Miss Asenath looked up, startled. It was so decided a contradiction, and not one of the household ever contradicted Miss Eliza. This gentlest one was a trifle the most discerning of the sisters, and she wondered if any other chapters to last night's incident had been added under the willow tree.

"Don't you speak to me in that manner, Arethusa,"

Miss Eliza was surprised almost into a mildness of reproof.

"I didn't mean to be impertinent, Aunt 'Liza," faltered the culprit.

She was a wee bit frightened at her own temerity after that emphatic contradiction had burst forth. But anger at Timothy had over-ridden discretion, with that question concerning him and Miss Eliza's obvious inclination to side with him; last night's events were still clear in Arethusa's mind, and Miss Eliza had been most unfair in her viewpoint on that occasion. There still rankled, with both aunt and niece, a little of the bitterness then aroused.

"You are getting," remarked Miss Eliza grimly, "absolutely incomprehensible to me. Ever since that letter came from your father, you have been utterly demoralized. I've half a mind to . . ."

Miss Letitia hastily held up the dress to be slipped on. She felt it was undoubtedly the moment, the moment sometimes called psychological, at which to introduce a counter-irritant.

It was the dark blue silk dress that Arethusa had been sure she would have. It was as beautifully made as all Miss Letitia's garments were, but very plain; only lightened at throat and wrists with the simplest white collar and cuffs. Arethusa was very grateful to Miss Letitia for having made it. She expressed her gratitude by an all-enveloping hug which ruffled the small portion of Miss Letitia's hair remaining comparatively smooth until this moment. But she did wish, most decidedly, that it was not quite so plain.

Miss Letitia smoothed the folds in the skirt and put a pin in one place in the hem where she believed it hung a little bit long.

"Do you think," she enquired anxiously of Miss Eliza, "that it hangs all right in other places, Sister?"

"If Arethusa would stop spinning around like a top long enough for me to get a good look at it, I might be able to tell you something about it," replied Miss Eliza, severely.

Arethusa straightened up like a drum major and began turning very slowly, as slowly as it was possible and keep her balance at the same time, and Miss Eliza viewed the lower edge of the garment critically from all sides.

"Yes," was her crisp verdict, "I may say I think it hangs even everywhere . . . But just that one place."

Miss Letitia breathed a deep sigh of relief. Arethusa echoed the sigh. They dreaded equally the task of hanging a skirt (when it had not hung right at first) with Miss Eliza's accurate eyes fixed upon the operation.

"That is a very pretty dress, Sister 'Titia," remarked Miss Asenath. She had quite a point of vantage on her couch; all fitting processes were visible in an entirety. "Don't you think so, Arethusa?"

Arethusa agreed with fervency.

"You'd better thank your Aunt 'Titia then," from Miss Eliza.

"She did, Sister," interposed Miss Letitia hastily. "She already did!"

"I didn't hear her."

"Well, she gave me a lovely hug, and we both know what that means, don't we, 'Thusa dearie?"

"Hum . . . ph!" from Miss Eliza.

Arethusa took the blue silk dress off very carefully

and handed it back to Miss Letitia for the finishing touches.

She stood straight and tall before them for just a moment, and tilted back her head and yawned, stretching her round arms high above her in a glorious relaxation.

Then she looked down at that exceedingly dark, blue silk dress with dissatisfaction. Then she looked at Miss Letitia bending her grey head far over it and putting in innumerable and almost invisible stitches very carefully, just for Arethusa; her round, cherubic little mouth puckering into happy smiles about something known only to herself as she worked.

Arethusa's warm heart smote her.

She swooped down upon Miss Letitia and hugged her with violence to make up for that moment of inward dissatisfaction with Miss Letitia's loving work. Miss Letitia's glasses were knocked off in the sudden swoop and fell into her lap. She looked most surprised at this unexpected proceeding, though highly gratified, as she retrieved the glasses. Had she asked Miss Asenath about it, Miss Asenath could probably have told her just what had been passing through Arethusa's mind. Miss Asenath had been watching Arethusa. She was never tired of watching her, in every smallest thing the girl did, with loving eyes that took keen delight in her youth and life and vivid coloring.

Arethusa gazed around at the many garments in various stages that were strewn about the room; every single one of them was hers. All the plain white cotton under-things, one or two of them with puffings or a bit of "thread" lace whipped around their edges, as a concession to the unusualness of this occasion; the few



simple shirtwaists, trimmed with neat tucking; the "medium lisle" stockings Miss Eliza was marking in pairs after a method of her own invention; the plain dark suit that Miss Letitia had completed only that morning, and which Miss Asenath's frail fingers were even at this moment engaged in further finishing with a braid-binding all around the skirt to save the hem; the new hat which Arethusa had tried on for them with the finished suit to see how well they went together, and which was lying now on top of the piano; and the silk dress in Miss Letitia's lap: it was all hers. But there was nothing frivolous in the array, nothing at all light in color, save perhaps the underclothes and the shirtwaists; there was not one purely decorative or "frilly" garment such as the heart of girlhood loves. It was a wardrobe, without doubt, entirely of Miss Eliza's choosing.

"Aunt 'Liza," Arethusa knelt down by that lady's chair and put her glowing face very close to her aunt's; her tone was most wheedling. "Aunt 'Liza, is there any of my money left?"

"There is," declared Miss Eliza, with satisfaction. "There is. I've saved your step-mother quite a tidy bit of what she sent. It's too bad if Ross has married a woman with extravagant tastes just like his own; too bad! But it would seem as if he had. All that money for just one girl! Put your dress on again, child, you oughtn't to sit around that way. Yes, you're going to have quite a sum to take back to your step-mother."

Arethusa wished that Miss Eliza would not say "step-mother" with just such an emphasis. It made her seem so undesirable a relative to have acquired, Miss Eliza's way of saying the name. And Arethusa did not choose to think of Elinor as anything undesir-

able. She was nothing that was not perfect. She was certainly nothing that deserved to be distinguished by such a term of reproach as that "step-mother." Practising saying "Mother" very softly to herself, Arethusa had come to regard Elinor that way, without the sign of a "step."

She ignored the injunction to put on her dress and leaned coaxingly nearer to Miss Eliza, whose habitually stern expression softened involuntarily. But how could she help it, with that glowing face wheedling so close to her own? Miss Eliza, after all, was not wood or iron.

"Then please, Aunt 'Liza, let me have another dress?"

"What do you want with another dress, 'Thusa?" Miss Eliza sounded almost indulgent. "This silk one makes three new ones, counting your suit."

"I know," Arethusa said, a trifle apologetically, as if she knew it *was* a strange request. "I know, but I want a Party Dress. "I want," and she hurried on with the expression of her want in desperate haste lest she be stopped before she had finished, "I want a Green Dress?"

"A green dress! Mercy on us! With your hair! Why, Arethusa Worthington!" Miss Eliza was plainly horrified.

But Arethusa Worthington nodded, most hopefully.

"Nonsense! A person with hair as red as yours can't wear green! Of all wild ideas!"

"I think she might look lovely in a soft shade of green," put in Miss Asenath's sweet voice. "And so why can't she have a green party dress, Sister? If she wants one and there's plenty of money left?"

Then Arethusa looked still more hopefully at Miss

Eliza, for sometimes Miss Asenath's gentle vote prevailed; but this time it was not so to be. Miss Eliza bit off her thread with as much decision as ever Atropos dares use in cutting hers.

"You always did care a lot too much about color, 'Senath," she said, though not in the least unkindly; no one was ever unkind to Miss Asenath, "and Arethusa is just like you. But as for getting her a green dress to wear with that red head of hers, why it would be a waste, and a perfectly sinful waste, of money, because I know her step-mother wouldn't let her wear it. She would think *I* was crazy besides."

Both Arethusa and Miss Asenath were quite inclined to disagree with her. Miss Asenath was wise enough to know that she could say nothing further to change the decision; and she communicated to Arethusa, with a shake of her head, that she was not to attempt it, either . . . for the latter's mouth had plainly opened for speech. Be it said to her everlasting credit, that she struggled hard with this disappointment, and turned away to put on her dress without any other plea.

"Your Aunt 'Titia and I," continued Miss Eliza, (she had not seen this bit of by-play) "had about decided to get you a white dress. We thought that if it weren't of too sheer material, you might wear it to entertainments there in the city — because I suppose you'll be invited to some — even if it is cold weather, without having to take off your underwear, which is always dangerous in winter."

"I don't want an old, thick, white dress . . ." began Arethusa, rebelliously, but a chorus of "Arethusas" interrupted her.

It was very gentle from Miss Asenath; very plaintive from Miss Letitia, who was dreading another tilt; and

very, very stern from Miss Eliza, who added, "If your Aunt 'Titia is good enough to make you a white dress, you ought to be very grateful, instead of acting as you do! I doubt the wisdom of your having one at all, myself, I must say. A white dress in the winter-time! When I was a girl, I would have thought that a great deal to have!"

But Arethusa failed to be properly impressed. Her dislike of the idea of the white dress showed so plainly in her ever-changing face, that Miss Asenath silently held out her hand and Arethusa flew to that haven, her couch.

"I wouldn't worry, dear, about my dress," whispered Miss Asenath. She sometimes just could not help consoling the girl, even if it was in direct opposition to Miss Eliza, when things seemed to be too thoroughly disappointing. "You know your Aunt 'Titia will make it just as pretty as she possibly can. I think green is lovely with red hair, myself, even though Sister 'Liza doesn't seem to, but white is lovely with it also. And your mother may get you some other things, very probably; don't you remember that it said 'immediate needs' in the letter? And if that means what I imagine it does, you may find yourself with two party dresses when you thought you were only going to have one. And," ended Miss Asenath, smiling, "she may feel about colors just as you and I do. I think somehow she will!"

Arethusa smiled back. It was a pleasing prospect held out by Aunt 'Senath, so she took heart and hope immediately.

Miss Eliza bent her glasses upon the two conspirators on the sofa.

"Don't you be telling Arethusa she would look nice

in green, 'Senath, because you know very well she wouldn't. In *my* day," this severely directed at Arethusa herself, "so much wasn't done for girls that they forgot how to be grateful. Nowadays, they want the whole earth and a ring around it, into the bargain. The more you give 'em, the more they want. A green dress for Arethusa! Who on earth would have thought of such a thing but you! If your hair wasn't quite so red, you wouldn't be so limited in your choice of colors. A green dress! That's Ross Worthington all over again. Wild ideas; nothing like anybody sensible would think of ever having or doing! A green dress with your fiery red hair!"

Arethusa could not help but feel that this apostrophe to her hair was going rather far. Miss Letitia and Miss Asenath had much the same feeling. But Miss Letitia dared only look her sympathy, and Miss Asenath felt it best to express hers by one of her loving little pats.

Then Miss Eliza happened to glance at the tall marble clock. She immediately put her work down. "You may finish these stockings, Arethusa, if you think you can keep your mind on it long enough. But just as I was doing them though; mind! It's time for me to go show Blish about fixing that sore place on the black cow's back. He was to be up at four."

With Miss Eliza's departure harmony reigned supreme, and Arethusa's tongue loosened. Over the marking of her stockings, she chattered happily to Miss Asenath and Miss Letitia. Very often, when Miss Eliza was present, her rather dry reception of her niece's enthusiastic presentation of ideas had a somewhat quenching effect upon the real flow of conversation.

"Did you leave Timothy down at the Branch?" queried Miss Asenath, after awhile.

"Oh, I reckon he went on home," Arethusa answered carelessly.

She could be thus casual in her answers to Miss Asenath, for with her no subject had pursuit unto a bitter end.

Miss Letitia finished the hem of the blue dress and laid the garment carefully over the back of a chair. Then she reached over and took Arethusa's pile of stockings away from her.

"Suppose, dearie," she suggested, "you practise a bit now. You don't play that piece yet as well as you ought, and your father used to be a great lover of music. He will want to hear you play."

Arethusa rose obediently and went to the piano; twirled the squeaking stool to a lower height, and settled herself, elbows properly rigid and head upright. Miss Letitia was her music teacher.

In fact, all of her education, domestic and academic and purely ornamental, as Miss Eliza termed the music, had been gained at home. Instruction in the "principal branches," again Miss Eliza's name, had been received mostly from Miss Asenath. Geography she had taught her niece with the aid of the same faded globe that had fixed the shape of the world and the location of its hemispheres and continents and principal countries in her own mind. If the boundaries of any of those countries had changed since the globe was made; if new land had been discovered; if any hitherto obscure cities had sprung into size and prominence during the sixty years or more that the globe had stood in the corner of the square hall: it had made no sort of difference in the geography lessons. Arethusa

had learned history, from ancient history books with almost obliterated names on the fly-leaves. But it had been rather a biased version of the period connected with the Civil War which she had learned, for Miss Eliza was very bitter about those years of her country's existence. Her only brother, and her twin, had been killed fighting for the Confederacy. Miss Eliza seemed to be unable to believe that he had been killed in battle, however, for she always spoke of him as "murdered" by the Yankees. So Arethusa's ideas of events connected with this time was hardly very favorably inclined towards the Northern side. Miss Asenath was very shaky in arithmetic; therefore, her pupil had not got into higher mathematics. She had paused in her figuring somewhere about the beginning of long division, but even where she had paused she could not be said to be very steadily fixed.

The musical part of this education belonged to just about the same date as the part which Miss Asenath had supervised. For all the pieces Arethusa had learned "by heart," which was the only way to learn music properly so as to be able to give pleasure to others, were pieces which Miss Letitia herself had practised with painstaking care for expression over fifty years ago. Both musicians were quite proficient in mazurkas and polkas and old-fashioned reels and ballads, and let us not forget to mention variations of every conceivable variety, for Miss Letitia possessed a whole book of variations, and it was quite a thick book.

Just at present, Arethusa was busily engaged in committing to memory "The Babbling Brook."

But her brook did not babble just precisely as Miss Letitia's did. There was something far more fantastic and wild about the runs the younger musician

made on the tinkling square piano; runs which Miss Letitia considered were not at all in keeping with the character of the music she was playing. Effort had been expended by both to bring Arethusa's brook to the state of really flowing as a brook should flow; but it seemed so far to be hopeless.

Arethusa played it through once and Miss Letitia kept time for her with a threaded needle.

"No, dearie," she shook her head, "you don't get it at all. You play just a bit too fast sometimes, and not quite fast enough others."

So it was played all over again from the beginning by the pupil; but still it was no better. Miss Letitia looked troubled.

"I just don't see how I can make you do it differently."

Miss Asenath liked Arethusa's way of playing this particular piece and she did not want it changed.

"Perhaps," she suggested gently, "the child is tired. It's been a very hot day, and it's very hard to do anything just right on such a day. It seems to take all the life out of one."

Miss Letitia agreed. "It does so. Well, she can learn it the right way before she leaves. There's plenty of time still."

"Play something else for us, dear," said Miss Asenath. "Play some of the ballads."

Arethusa turned again to the piano and filled the room with the soft sounds of "Auld Robin Gray" and "The Low-backed Car" and "Annie Laurie."

Under cover of the music Timothy slipped in and found a chair close to Miss Asenath. He had been spending a very miserable time down by the Branch. And he would never have come near the house had he



not heard the piano, for Timothy loved music intensely and he could never resist following its sound. If Arethusa was still angry with him, he had no intention of bothering her again; he only wanted to be allowed to listen.

Miss Eliza came back to the sitting-room and settled once more to her sewing. Miss Asenath closed her eyes and gave herself over to dreaming. It was her book of ballads, and she had used to, long ago, play them softly in just such twilights for another Timothy. Miss Letitia's busy fingers worked away and her head nodded time.

The late summer evening with its myriads of sounds and that feeling of restless settling down for the night that it always seems to have in the country, slowly deepened into darkness and Arethusa still played on. Perhaps her execution was not of the best and her fingering may have been questionable; but she seemed to feel some of the real spirit of the quaint old tunes she played and she put a soft expression into them that was far more to her circle of listeners than brilliant execution or perfect fingering. None of them could have found the smallest fault: the music spoke to each one of them in that way each one most wanted.

So she played on softly until Mandy came, announcing supper.

Timothy must stay, Miss Eliza insisted. But Timothy declined, even though Arethusa, with rather strange cordiality considering what she had said at the Branch, joined her voice to Miss Eliza's. The music had spoken to Arethusa herself, to soften. Timothy's mood, however, was not inclined for conversation on general topics, and at Miss Eliza's supper-table one nearly always conversed on general topics.

## CHAPTER X

The only persons at the Farm who did not go to the station to see Arethusa off for her Trip were Miss Asenath and Nathan. Even Mandy went, on the front seat of the surrey with Blish.

Nathan was Mandy's better half, a darkey of a deeply religious nature. He considered a town, everything in it, and everything connected with it, snares of the Evil One to lead men astray. Although in his youth, and up almost until early middle age, he had been the terror of the county seat the Saturday nights he had been paid off, he had "gotten religion" along about the time of his marriage to Mandy, and now nothing on earth could take him anywhere near any of his former haunts. He had even refused to drive Miss Eliza to town when on one or two occasions his services had been required. And he was the only human being on record who had ever opposed her thus successfully.

But it happened most fortunately in this case, this feeling of his about town, for he could remain with Miss Asenath and Mandy could go to the station with Arethusa. Otherwise, she might have had to stay at home, and this would almost have broken her heart.

Timothy and Timothy's mother and his aunt, who made her home with them, also drove the six miles 'cross country to the little town of Vandalia where Arethusa was to take the train, to bid her good-bye. They were already present when the Farm delegation ar-

rived, as early as it was when they came, for Timothy wanted as many as possible of these last moments with Arethusa. His mother had been sure it was far too soon to start when Timothy called her, but she suffered from a chronic inability to oppose any of his wishes, even by suggestion, so she had left her housewifely counting of preserves and pickles without a word of complaint to go with him.

Miss Letitia became a little tearful in her leave-taking.

“Letting the dear child go off all alone by herself this way for the very first time!”

For in spite of Miss Eliza’s decided and oft loudly expressed disinclination to have her do so, to Arethusa’s unbounded delight, she was actually going alone.

Thanks to that flight of Elinor and Ross to the seashore, the State Fair had been only a memory for more than a month. But diligent search by Miss Eliza, in the way of inquiries at church and when in town, had discovered a friend who was going to Lewisburg later in the Fall to shop, and who would be more than glad to take the girl under her wing. Then almost at the very last moment this promised company was forced to abandon her trip and Arethusa was left high and dry. The fate of her Visit trembled in the balance for a few days. Miss Eliza was strongly inclined to postpone the whole affair until she could arrange things to go with her niece herself, but she finally gave in to the pleading that Arethusa was entirely ready. Why should she wear the first freshness off her outfit before she made this Visit?

But if she was going alone, she was going fully equipped so far as advice was concerned. Miss Eliza had spent several conscientious hours of instruction and

counsel. Arethusa had been told a dozen times over just what she was to do, and that she was to leave the train only when it stopped for the very last time to stay, without going on. The terminus of the line was Lewisburg.

"And if you sit there a half an hour, you make sure," said Miss Eliza, firmly.

A great many people, added she, especially young people, get lost by leaving trains at wrong stations.

Miss Letitia contributed her quota also, though it was more in actual preparation for contingencies that might arise than advice. Arethusa's name and address had been sewed in everything she had on, "in case of accident." Miss Letitia had had a dream one night of an unidentified body lying by a railroad track after a wreck. She dreamed the body to be Arethusa's. Then she had read, very often, of folks whose sense of their own identity had been taken from them most completely by a blow on the head; this also had happened in wrecks. Should there be a wreck and the dream come true, or the other horrible thing happen, in either case they would never know what became of Arethusa. The thought harrowed Miss Letitia. Fortunately, she had only dreamed the dream the one time, so there was not quite so much danger of it being fulfilled. Had she dreamed it three nights, Arethusa should never have gone a step on this trip. But even had the other dreadful thing occurred, it would have been the most careless searcher who would have failed to discover just who Arethusa was and where she belonged, after Miss Letitia had finished her labeling, in slanting, old-fashioned letters on neatly bound-down squares of white linen.

The traveller carried a small packet of baking-soda,

tucked into a corner of her satchel by the long-sighted Miss Letitia, "in case of car-sickness." There was nothing so good for nausea as soda.

Arethusa wore the dark blue suit Miss Letitia had made her, with its plain, full gathered skirt, all lined for better warmth, and its double-breasted coat, trimmed with the buttons from one of her great-grandfather's broadcloth suits. Her traveling waist was pongee.

"Pongee is the best material to travel in that I know of," said Miss Eliza. "It never shows the least bit of soil."

It was buttoned modestly to her throat, ending in a straight line, neither high nor low which would have been most trying to nearly everyone, but above which Arethusa's flower face rose as lovely as ever. Her hat was a plain round felt trimmed with two really beautiful turkey feathers that Miss Eliza had been saving carefully since the winter previous. Arethusa had never had a feather on a hat before (only ribbons, the year round), and she considered these feathers the height of elegance. Her hair was fixed on the top of her head for the very first time in her life, a graduation from the long red plait just for this glorious Visit. Her feeling about that heavy, unbecomingly arranged roll, and the hairpins which held it in place, was an indescribable mixture of pride and elation and satisfaction.

Clutched tightly in one white, cotton-gloved hand was Mandy's contribution, a small, neatly tied-up box of lunch. Her extra money was in a little bag on a string around her neck, where Miss Eliza had also deposited the trunk check. There was only the tiniest possible amount of change in her purse. She carried a hand-

satchel so ancient in appearance that it might have been the forerunner of all hand-satchels, and her trunk was a wee round-topped affair of red leather with a canvas cover. It was a trunk which had been last viewed by the public when Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia attended the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Miss Eliza was not one to expend money for anything, when what she already had was still perfectly good, albeit a trifle out of date.

Miss Eliza scorned to show her feelings as did Miss Letitia when she told Arethusa good-bye. Consequently, she was even gruffer than usual as she adjured the departing one not to make a fool of herself.

Mandy wept openly. Putting her head into a lion's mouth held no more unknown terrors for Mandy than the making of a journey.

And Timothy prepared to wring Arethusa's hand almost off when it was his turn to say farewell; he thought it was the most expression of his affectionate unhappiness at seeing her leave them that would be permitted him. But she held her face up to him in the most natural manner to be kissed, just as she had held it up to Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia and his mother; so Timothy, after a brief moment of hesitation and remembrance of what Arethusa had said so emphatically about kissing, took what the gods were offering and imprinted a very modest salute on the sweet, upturned face.

Arethusa was so excited that she scarcely heard all of Miss Eliza's last instructions, and she bade some of her party adieu more than once. Timothy claimed the privilege of helping her on the train and escorting her into the coach, and he deposited her satchel on a seat he turned over to face her so she would be sure to have plenty of room.

She chattered away, these last few precious moments, as merrily as if Timothy were companionship the adventure of this trip to Lewisburg, but he found no tongue to reply. It is true that he was not allowed very much chance, but even if he had been, there was no heart in him for talk. Timothy was finding the actual reality of parting with Arethusa for heaven-only-knew-how-long-a-time, far worse than its anticipation, as bad as that had been.

The conductor called, "All a — bo-ard!"

And in sudden, desperate utterance of a wild little wish, Timothy leaned close to Arethusa.

"Kiss me good-bye again, Arethusa," he coaxed, all his young heart in his blue eyes. "Please!"

Arethusa stared at him, frankly amazed at such a remarkable request.

"What's the matter with you, Timothy Jarvis? Kiss you good-bye? Why, the very idea! And what on earth do you mean by 'again'?"

For she was completely unaware that in her excitement she had given Timothy that kiss.

His spirits went clear to zero, but fortune spared him the necessity of a reply, for the conductor called another raucous signal, and the train began to move. Timothy had barely time to save himself from being carried off.

Arethusa stuck her head out of the car window, regardless of one of Miss Eliza's very last and most positive instructions, and waved and waved to the ones she had left behind on the Vandalia platform, and she kept on waving long after they had become mere indistinguishable specks as the train gathered speed.

Then she settled back against the luxury of her dusty red-plush seat with a soft little sigh.

The swift motion of the train was most exhilarating, for every single click of the car-wheels meant a turn which brought her just that much nearer to her father and Elinor and the wonderful Visit.

After a while, when her agitation had begun to subside a trifle, Arethusa began to remember a few of the multitude of directions Miss Eliza had given that were most important to be carried out without fail. She removed her hat with care and reached down into the ancient travelling bag and brought forth a piece of manila paper in which she wrapped it, to save its newness from flying cinders. She took off her coat and folded it, lining outside, and hung it over the arm of the opposite seat and rolled her white cotton gloves into a neat little ball and put them and her purse down into her bag.

Then she drew "The Dove in the Eagles' Nest" out of that capacious receptacle (Miss Asenath had advised bringing something to read and Arethusa had not read this particular romance for a very long while), propped herself primly way over in the corner of her seat and prepared to do just as she had been told.

But she was far too excited to do much more than just open her book. The fortunes of Christina and her two sons in the free city of Ulm, as so graphically portrayed by Miss Charlotte Yonge, could generally transport Arethusa far from the everyday events of her own world into the actual Middle Ages that was the scene of their happening; but to-day . . . They seemed to have lost a lot of this power; she could hardly keep her eyes on the book.

The flying landscape outside the window fascinated her at first and after awhile her fellow travellers claimed her attention, and proved far more interesting



than even that. Miss Eliza could have no possible objection to her niece watching them if she sat very still.

There were not very many passengers when Arethusa got on; one or two men in the other end of the car, and several women and babies. But as the train rushed ever nearer to Lewisburg, the passengers increased in number.

A group climbed on at one of the way stations, and took a seat just opposite Arethusa across the aisle, and they particularly attracted her. It was composed of a woman who reminded her very strongly of Miss Letitia in the round chubbiness of her face and her comfortable untidiness, although she was undoubtedly much younger, and her two children. The sex of one of them Arethusa was unable to determine just at first, for it was so small that the cut of its blue raiment might have served for either boy or girl; but the other one was unmistakably of a feminine persuasion. This child had the lightest hair and eyebrows the watcher across the aisle had ever seen, and the very palest of blue eyes. So light were the eyebrows that only a close inspection later on convinced Arethusa that there were any there at all.

These travellers had a great deal of baggage, several boxes and a large telescope, as well as a huge satchel. The handle of the telescope had been broken off at some stage of its career, and this deficiency had been remedied by inserting under the leather straps still remaining, a coat hanger covered with bright red silk ribbon gathered on and tied at the hook with gay little bows.

The children were very restless; they did much moving about, climbing in and out of the seat. The mother seemed to find it necessary to admonish her offspring with frequency, and Arethusa discovered in this

way that the little girl's name was "Helen Louise" and the being in the straight up-and-down blue garment was a boy infant who answered to the name of Peter.

At a Junction farther down the line, a Man got on. And as the car was pretty full by this time, he took the seat just opposite Arethusa; that seat which Timothy had gallantly turned over for her.

He buried himself immediately in a paper he carried, but when his neighbor's liquid laugh rang out at some ridiculous antic of Peter's, he dropped his paper and regarded her mobile face with interest.

He was rather a nice looking man, quietly dressed in well cut clothes and he had an air of good living about him that was quite attractive. To any experienced traveller, the neat looking leather cases with the brass locks, which he carried, would have been quite sufficient to have immediately told his occupation. He travelled for a notions house, out of Cincinnati, with a territory covering most of the small towns in three states. It was a boring business, and offered very little as diversion on the side; but he hoped before very long to be much better placed. He liked girls, and the one before him was one of the prettiest he had ever seen.

They rode facing one another for about five miles, and he watched Arethusa, without her actually realizing she was being watched. Then she laughed gayly at Peter once more, as his mother all but saved his life when he pitched head first off the seat, and her eager grey eyes caught a glimpse of the brown eyes across from her, smiling in sympathy.

"Isn't he the funniest little boy!" exclaimed Arethusa, involuntarily, to the sympathy.

"He is," replied the Man kindly, then he added, after a bit, "Are you travelling alone, or do you belong with the funny little boy?"

"No, sir. . . . Yes, sir!" replied Arethusa, suddenly covered with a shy confusion.

"Which is which?" asked the Man, laughing, and he showed attractive white teeth.

The friendliness of his brown eyes and his laugh reassured Arethusa of her momentary feeling of alarm when he had spoken. Her exclamation had not really expected a reply, and she had been quite startled when the sympathetic eyes to which she had addressed herself had been discovered to have this voice belonging to them.

She blushed, and dropped her head. Then she raised it again, after a moment, and he was still smiling at her in the same friendly fashion, so Arethusa found courage to look at him. To her rose-colored view of the inmates of the best of all possible worlds, he seemed in that look to be a very nice man. It is true that Miss Eliza had warned her with emphasis against strange men, but the Man across from her could not be said to come anywhere near the descriptions of the Ogres against which Arethusa had been so warned. Arethusa had not had her Red-Riding-Hood Experience as yet, and it was her habit to trust.

They rode for a few moments silently, and then Peter did what had been inevitable for some time that he would do, he pitched head first out into the aisle.

"Oh!" exclaimed Arethusa, and she jumped clear out of her seat at the loud and high-pitched wail with which he made known his distress.

"That's too bad," said the Man. "But I've been afraid he was going to do that very thing."

"So have I," answered Arethusa confidentially.

And in a very short while, she was talking away as if she had known her new acquaintance all her life, with all the dimples and excitement and gestures that belonged to Arethusa. But what harm to talk to such a Nice, Kind Man? Miss Eliza had not known that she would meet this sort of Man, she was sure. She could not possibly object to a little Friendly Conversation with someone in the very same seat.

And he listened, truly interested, as Arethusa's enthusiasm began to make up for the while it had been pent, in all she told him of the coming Visit and the magnificent expectations she had of that Visit, and of Ross and Elinor.

But the motherly looking woman across the aisle had been watching Arethusa for some time also. And when Peter's sobs had ceased, and she looked up once more from her family cares to see Arethusa conversing so animatedly with her chance acquaintance, she decided at once to interfere. She had heart enough to — at least — attempt the management of any affairs coming under her notice which did not seem to her to be running just as they should.

She bustled over and loomed above Arethusa and her Friendly Man.

"Know this man, dearie?" she demanded peremptorily.

"Why . . . no . . . I . . ."

Arethusa almost added, "Aunt 'Titia." For the tone of voice and the little term of endearment and the woman herself were all rather bewilderingly like her aunt.

"Well, I don't reckon you ought to be talking to him then," and she turned to the man, a self-elected cham-

panion of a lone maiden, and stared at him as authoritatively as she had spoken to Arethusa. "You're plenty old enough to know better'n this. And you'd better get out of that seat mighty quick, or I'll call the conductor. And you a nice-looking man, too!"

The man turned as red as a well-cooked beet, clear down into his immaculate collar. He wasted no time in expostulation or protest that Arethusa's champion was interfering in something which was none of her immediate business, but he gathered up his neat leather cases and fled to the smoker for safety. He had meant no sort of harm, and he was so embarrassed that he was hours recovering from the experience.

After he had disappeared down the aisle, Arethusa's defender moved her family and most of her baggage across the way, depositing her remarkably decorated telescope in the space between the two seats which had faced each other for Arethusa's adventure, before the astonished Arethusa was thoroughly aware of just what was happening.

"You sit there, Helen Louise," admonished this substitute for the Nice Man to her daughter, indicating the end of the telescope, "and if our friend wants to come back, I reckon he'll have to fall over you. That was a horrid man," she added to Arethusa; "it's the likes of him makes it disagreeable for girls to be traveling by themselves."

"Oh, no," protested Arethusa.

"Yes, he were," replied Helen Louise's mother in a positive way that indicated superior wisdom on such matters.

Arethusa bowed to the superior wisdom and the positive tone, through long habit of her experience with Miss Eliza when she used such a tone.

"But he looked like a Nice Man," she said, though feebly.

"It's most always the nicest looking ones is the worst at heart. I'm raising up Helen Louise to steer clear of anything in pants she ain't been introduced to first by somebody she knows. It's safest."

This speech had a somewhat familiar sound, though perhaps couched differently. Arethusa had a moment of terrified remembrance of Certain Instructions. She looked down at the bulwark of Helen Louise and the telescope between her and the aisle, and she suddenly felt grateful to Helen Louise's mother.

"Thank you," she said, with fervent sincerity, "thank you, ma'am, just ever so much. I never do remember anything Aunt 'Liza tells me, she says."

"You ain't got no real call to thank me," was the placid reply. "I'd be doing the same for any girl as good-looking as you be; and I'd be hoping somebody'd do the same for my Helen Louise. It seems like it's always most easiest for young folks to keep right on forgetting just what they ought to be remembering."

"I know," said Arethusa apologetically. "But this is the first time I ever traveled anywhere, and . . ."

Mrs. Cherry (for such was the name of Arethusa's latest friend) rescued her small son from his repeated attempts to plunge through the glass in the car window, before she turned around to continue the conversation.

"I should have said you had. You don't look so awfully citified, now I come to think, but I should have certainly said you'd travelled. Who's your Aunt 'Liza, you spoke about awhile back? Ain't you got no Ma?"

Mrs. Cherry was genuinely friendly, and she was safely feminine, so Arethusa once more launched into a glowing description of what wonders the future held

in store, and to Mrs. Cherry's interested questioning, told what the past had been like, Timothy and all.

"You certainly have got lots of folks to care about you," was the comment, when the narrator finally paused for breath. "And you ain't never seen your Pa? Well! Well! Helen Louise and Peter and me we're going to the city to meet Helen Louise's Pa. He's got work there and we're going to live there now."

Helen Louise smiled all over herself at this mention of her father, a toothless smile, but of unmistakable joy, and Arethusa's heart went out to her immediately. Here, very evidently, was another girl-child whose affections were centered largely in a male parent.

"Helen Louise favors her Pa considerable. And they're the biggest geese together!"

Helen Louise's silvery treble piped up. "Papa and me just play and play!" She gave herself something like an anticipatory hug. "Gee, but I'm going to be glad to see him! I ain't seen him for a whole year now!"

"Helen Louise, don't you be telling Miss Worth-ton no story now!" warned her mother. Names had been exchanged. "She ain't seen him for more'n a month reely, but I reckon it does seem 'most a year to her."

Peter now joined his voice to the conversation for the first time, "Ma, I'm hungry."

"Bless us! But it might be dinner time, now, mightn't it. Have you got a watch, Miss Worth-ton?"

Arethusa reached down into her waistband and drew forth Miss Eliza's parting gift. Which was a watch that had seen Miss Eliza faithfully through more than

one decade, a large and handsomely chased affair of gold on a long ribbon of black gros-grain.

"The child will need a watch," said Miss Eliza.

Arethusa fully appreciated the parting gift, and she revered the old-fashioned timepiece fully as much as had its former owner.

What though it was a trifle heavy in her hand as she held it to read the dial! Was it not an actual watch and gold at that, and did not its tiny hands count off the moments of each one of the twenty-four hours for her to note as they flew by? And was not all of its wonder her very own now?

"A quarter to one," she announced proudly.

"Well, well, you don't say so! No wonder he's hungry! You'll be having some lunch with us, Miss Worth'ton, won't you now?"

But Arethusa refused this cordial invitation. She could not possibly eat a mouthful. Food would have stuck in her throat right on top of the big lump of excitement that was already there. And besides the drawback of this decided inability to swallow, she had not the slightest sensation of hunger that would have tempted her to try to eat.

"I had some lunch of my own," she shyly offered the neatly tied-up box; "Aunt 'Liza makes awfully nice jam and things and Mandy said she was going to fix me some fried chicken. But I don't want a bit of it. Wouldn't Helen Louise and Peter like to have it?"

Helen Louise's pale blue eyes glistened at this mention of fried chicken. Her own lunch contained no such appetizing delicacy. She had helped to tie it up, and she knew just what was in it. This was far



superior in every way. She pulled at her mother's dress in eagerness, and Mrs. Cherry reached down and slapped her.

"Don't you act like you never had nothing in your life to eat," she said sharply.

Then Helen Louise's eyes began to glisten with tears. Arethusa felt very sorry for her. She had seemed so like a kindred spirit in her plainly manifested father worship. So Arethusa opened the dainty little packet of chicken and sandwiches and spread it temptingly on Helen Louise's lap with her own hands.

"Here," she said, "you may have it, Helen Louise. But you'll give Peter some? Do," she added quickly.

For Peter's large round eyes were regarding with a greediness unmistakable the munificence of food that had been so generously bestowed upon his sister.

"Well, I will say this," remarked Mrs. Cherry, as she divided Arethusa's contribution into equal portions between her offspring, after the donor had succeeded in convincing her that she honestly wanted none of it. "I will say this for my children. They might be acting like hoodlums over this here food, but they ain't never seen none just like it before." She bit into one of Mandy's beaten biscuit sandwiches with the pink ham in between, herself, with relish. "Your aunt must have a mighty good cook. She cert'inly must!"

Watching the little Cherry's devour her lunch and the garrulity of their mother consumed so much time for Arethusa, that almost before she knew it the little wave of excitement denoting the nearing of a journey's end swept through the car. The conductor passed by and gathered the little slips of stiff paper from the men's hats; every passenger began his or her peculiar preparations for leaving the train.

Mrs. Cherry began gathering up her boxes and parcels. Helen Louise was sent to the water cooler to wet a handkerchief and then her face and Peter's were vigorously scrubbed. At any other time, Mrs. Cherry would have dragged both children to the cooler, but she was not taking any chances with pretty, unprotected Arethusa. No one else should have that seat of hers.

The baggageman came through the car; calling as he went, "Anybaggageyouwantdeliveredinthecity, carriage or omnibus."

It gave Arethusa a most delightful little thrill all down her spine to hear him. She was not exactly sure he was the person to give her check to, but decided it would be best to obey the letter of the law this time. Miss Eliza had mentioned no baggageman, but she had been most explicit in her directions to Arethusa that she give that check to no one but her father.

She rescued her hat from its paper protection and put it on her tumbled hair, from which some of the precious hairpins had fallen during the excitement of the journey; unfolded her coat and donned it; drew on the cotton gloves and clutched her purse and satchel once more as when she had started, and with the death grip Miss Eliza had adjured for fear of those pickpockets with which railway stations are always infested, and Arethusa was Ready. And she was ready with a palpitating heart, for the brakeman had accommodately called, "Lewisburg," right in her very own ear, as if he wished her to be quite sure this was the right place to leave her seat.

Mrs. Cherry had been very busy with her progeny and her paraphernalia and impedimenta of various sorts — it was marvelous how she managed to gather them all together with only two hands — and she was

ready also. But even in the midst of this sleight of hand performance, she did not forget her self-constituted guardianship of Arethusa.

"Sure you're going to know your Pa?" she enquired. "Don't you want me to be waiting and help you hunt for him?"

No, Arethusa was very, very sure she would know him. She did not need any help to find him.

And then with one last shrieking grind of the wheels, the train stopped in the shed at Lewisburg, and Arethusa, all injunctions to sit still for a half hour forgotten as if they had never been, immediately began with her fellow passengers a movement towards the door. But so slow was this movement that her impatient heart thought she would never, never be out of that car.

Helen Louise's quick eyes spied, through the car window, her father, among the crowd on the platform and she gave a joyful shout. But it was a shout, which although loud and very near, Arethusa never even heard. Her own eyes, star-like and intent, were busy searching that same crowd for her own father.

## CHAPTER XI

Just as the music room was primarily Elinor's retreat, so was the library the place which Ross loved best.

It was a long, narrow room; two square rooms had been thrown together to make it, and it was lined, on the longest walls to about half the distance from the ceiling, with low, deep, unglassed book-cases full of books on a bewildering variety of subjects, haphazardly arranged; some of them well worn as to bindings as if much read. A brick fireplace of generous proportions with a high, narrow mantel shelf of brownish red marble occupied most of one of the other, and narrower, walls. A log fire burned there fitfully now, throwing little dancing gleams on the brass andirons and the dark polished floor just in front. All the chairs in the room were broad and deep and enticingly comfortable. An enormous davenport stood at one side of the fireplace, and there was a long, heavy table of carved mahogany directly in front of the hearth. The few rugs in the room were all in dull, subdued tones that melted into the floor unobtrusively.

Here, in the library, Ross spent his days in the arduous labor with which he kept body and soul together; the translation of various bits of the literature of Southern Europe into English. Ross was quite a student in his way and a good deal of a linguist.

But he was not working just at this moment.

At the enormous desk between the two long windows at the end of the room opposite the fireplace, he was reading a detective story and playing with a bronze paper cutter at the same time, banging it up and down on the desk.

Ross loved detective stories as much as any boy who has ever thrilled over them, and Elinor loved to watch him read them. She stood still in the doorway for a moment and watched him now. She could tell by his changing expression just when the story he was reading was sad, just when it was merry, just when the meaning was hard to understand, and just when he began to dislike the way things were working out, almost as well as if he read it aloud to her.

The paper cutter poised in the air for just a second, and his eyebrows drew together in a little puzzled frown. Evidently, things were going badly. Then the paper cutter came down on the desk with a swoop, and his whole face lighted.

Elinor crossed the room with her swift, graceful movement, and kissed him lightly on the tiny bald spot on the very top of his head, which he insisted was being widened by "financial worries."

"Ross, Clay is waiting."

He gave her an absentminded squeezing of the hand nearest him by way of answer without lifting his eyes from his book.

She leaned over and covered the page with one hand.

"Oh, come now," he remonstrated, "that's not a bit fair! That's the most interesting place for pages and pages!"

"That may be, you infant, but you must stop right there. Clay is waiting for you."

"What for, please? I don't remember telling him I wanted him!"

"Ross Worthington! Have you actually forgotten Arethusa is coming this afternoon!"

Ross returned, with the most commendable suddenness, from the Long Island country place, scene of his sojourn for the last few hours where a most fearful and intricately involved crime had been committed, to things which were happening in Lewisburg.

"Ye gods! And I had!"

"You ought to be ashamed to admit it!"

"I don't see why you say that," his air was one of mild protest. "You remembered her, didn't you? And that's what a wife's for, anyway, one of the things, to remember what her husband ought to. What's the use of having one if . . ."

But Elinor hurried him into the hall without allowing him to finish this speech, thrust his coat and hat forcibly upon him, and propelled him on toward the open front door, and then on down the steps.

"Wait a minute here," Ross came back from half-way to the automobile, "Aren't you going?" For it had penetrated his consciousness that she had not come any farther than the top step.

"No."

"Why not?"

She blushed a trifle. "I . . . I thought I wouldn't."

All her shyness was up in arms.

It was very probably going to be hard enough at best, this first meeting with Arethusa, without staging it before a crowd of prying eyes in a railroad station. In spite of all her longing to see and know the girl, and her loving preparation, now that the moment was

actually come, Elinor's shyness intruded and kept her at home.

Ross understood (it was one of the very nicest things about him, his understanding) but as he was feeling a bit the same way himself, he would have liked the bulwark of her presence. Two shy folk to back each other up are in not nearly so bad a fix as the one who goes it alone. So he stood hesitatingly in the middle of the front walk, slowly drawing on his gloves. Perhaps Elinor would change her mind.

"You'll be late," she warned.

But still he hesitated. "How in the dickens am I going to know the child? I haven't the remotest idea what she's like. I may miss her altogether. I think I need you."

His statement of not knowing what Arethusa was like was perfectly true, for in none of her letters had Miss Eliza once mentioned Arethusa's personal appearance and Elinor had never thought to ask about it.

"You should have told her," he continued, almost reproachfully, "to wear a red carnation or something. I am quite sure I shan't be able to find her. And you're so much smarter than I am. Your woman's intuition is a great thing to have in a search. You better come go 'long."

Elinor came down the walk to where he was and gave him a push. "Do go on, Ross. You really will miss her altogether, if you don't. And I haven't time to dress now, so I can't possibly go. She probably looks like her mother or some member of the family."

"Now, I don't know about that," he answered, still lingering. "She may not at all. I don't look like my mother, and you . . ."

"Oh, please go on and stop fooling!" Though she laughed, his wife's patience was ebbing. It would be dreadful for Arethusa to come and find no one to meet her. "You always hurry so, Ross, when there's no real necessity for it and won't when there is!"

Ross decided that the moment for actual departure was certainly at hand, so he made haste to the automobile.

Arethusa, after descending from the train with her satchel and purse still clutched firmly, followed the crowd across the tracks under the shed, toward the iron gates she had to pass through to reach the station proper. Her busy grey eyes had failed to find anyone among those menfolks just around the train who at all resembled her mental picture of her father. And as she hurried after the crowd, still watching for him, it seemed to Arethusa that there were more people in this comparatively small space than she had ever seen in one company before, in all of her life. So many of them were men, she noted; so many of them were men with nice faces who might have been the fathers of travelling daughters they had come to meet.

She felt a sudden and most unexpected bewilderment sweep over her as she looked about. How would she ever find her father here, among all these hundreds and hundreds of people? She was carried along, unresisting in her panic, clear through the gates without being aware she had passed them, and pushed aside by the impatient throng against one of the iron pillars that supported the roof of the platform at one side of the station.

From this point, she could not help but watch all the glad meetings about her, of sisters and brothers and husbands and wives, and various other relationships



(there were some she was quite positive were fathers and daughters), and she watched them with something like envy; for so far as she could tell, everyone who had got off the train had been immediately seized by some person who seemed superlatively glad to see him or her. Yes, every human being but Arethusa Worthington seemed to have been met by somebody.

Then a cold little fear clutched at her heart; suppose . . . Suppose . . . she had made a mistake and this was not Lewisburg, after all!

But it must be! Had not the brakeman accommodatingly told her so right in her very own ear? And the Cherrys had been going to Lewisburg, and they had got off with Arethusa. She was surely in the right station.

The next most natural supposition was that no one had come to meet her. And then the wildest and most unreasoning terror of this situation, directly grown from some of those travellers' tales of her aunts' weaving, overwhelmed Arethusa. She stood closer to the pillar as a sort of protection.

Such an Ending to the Joyfully Begun Journey!

The Cherry family had been so long in their greetings that they were among the last to pass by the unmet traveller and her pillar. Mrs. Cherry, seeing that the girl was alone, crossed the platform to her, the whole collection of Cherrys trailing in her rear.

"Found your Pa yet, dearie?" she asked cheerfully. "This is the pretty Miss Worth'ton I was telling you about we saw on the train, Cherry," to her husband, and "This is Helen Louise's Pa," to Arethusa.

Arethusa managed to acknowledge this introduction, but being in such a state of mind as she was, she

could not make her acknowledgment very cordial.

Helen Louise was dancing up and down and hanging on to one hand of a man who could have been nothing else but a close relation to the little girl, pale blue eyes and pale eyebrows and all. The daughter certainly favored "her Pa considerable" as her mother had said.

"My Papa," Helen Louise announced happily.

Mrs. Cherry sensed something wrong. She looked at Arethusia more closely. "You ain't found him? Here, Cherry, you take the children and the bundles and put them in the waitin'-room and then come straight back here and we'll help Miss Worth'ton hunt her father."

"I don't want to be put in the waitin'-room!" wailed Helen Louise in protest, "I want to stay with Papa!"

Mrs. Cherry was reproving her and starting her off in the direction of the designated depository, when Arethusia interrupted the proceedings. She did not want Mrs. Cherry, kind as she had been and kind as her intentions still were to continue being, with her just now. If this was a fiasco to her Beautiful Dream she needed a few moments to face it alone. A funny sort of little pride gave her this feeling. She had talked to Mrs. Cherry so glowingly and at such length about her father and her Visit.

But Mr. Cherry, till just now silent, had a suggestion to make. "S'pose," he drawled, "if Miss Worth'ton wants to wait by herself here, Maria, me and you set inside awhile, and then if she finds she reely has missed him somehow, I might help her to look him up, mebbe."

Arethusia considered this a decidedly brilliant idea.

It relieved her of present society, which though friendly was irksome, and promised future comfort.

She rewarded the tall, thin father of Helen Louise with a misty smile.

Mrs. Cherry thought it very good, also. Miss Worth'ton wasn't to worry a mite now, not a mite. If her father didn't come for her, the Cherry family would escort her right up to his front door.

So the little procession trailed away and left Arethusa once more alone, and most disconsolate, against her kindly iron pillar.

The station had gradually become deserted, until there were only a few employees pottering about here and there, and one lone man standing talking to the blue-capped man at the gate.

Arethusa's mental picture of her father had been very clear. All this while she had been looking for the handsome youth of the wavy dark hair, eccentrically long, and the graceful Italian military cape. And she had been looking for him without adding a single year to his age, perfectly confident she would know him anywhere.

Ross had really been on time, despite his "fooling." He had arrived before the first passenger left Arethusa's train. And he had waited until every human being had gone before starting to leave himself, so he was the lone man Arethusa saw questioning the gate-keeper.

Elinor's last suggestion that the daughter might resemble her mother had been taken literally, and all these moments Ross's search had been for a tiny, dainty bit of a girl with cornflower eyes. When the crowd had somewhat thinned, he had noticed Arethusa and her prettiness and her height, standing so

forlornly by herself, had mentally labeled Miss Letitia's costuming, "a Godey's Ladies' Book relic," and had turned away again to his search for the Dresden china daughter, who did not seem to be anywhere about. Ross was vexed to have been snatched from his book for this fruitless trip to the station. If Miss Eliza had postponed Arethusa's coming once more, she should have written them about it, or telegraphed; for they should surely have been notified.

As he passed Arethusa on his way out he saw that her grey eyes under their long black lashes (he noticed them first because they were such unusually beautiful eyes) were full of shining tears, some of which were beginning to roll, unashamed, down the girl's cheek. A damsel in distress always appealed to Ross, for no knight of the time of tournaments had no more real chivalry in his composition, and so he stopped.

"Could I help you in any way?" he asked courteously. "Are you in trouble?"

Arethusa was just on the point of seeking Mr. Cherry and his promised assistance, when out of the bleak expanse of that awful and lonely platform Providence had sent this other help: a Man with reassuring grey hairs and a smile which she could not possibly mistake for anything but kindness. She seized it gratefully: and there would be no embarrassment of a Mrs. Cherry connected with it. This new Man knew nothing of any Dream that had been shattered. And if he lived in Lewisburg, he most probably knew her father. Her experience with municipalities was that everybody in a town knew everybody else and all their affairs into the bargain. And she was far past remembering Certain Instructions in such a Crisis.

She turned to Ross, a tear-stained face on which

her gratitude at his offer struggled with her woes and the Horror of the Situation.

"My . . . my fa-ther . . ." she began brokenly, and then gulped, and stopped.

It sounded very much like a greeting of the man before her, but it was only that her unruly voice refused entirely to respond to her efforts to use it.

Ross's look searched her quickly, up and down. She was as unlike the child he had expected to find as he could have found in a day's long journey; but there could hardly be two sets of fathers and daughters in so similar a predicament in the same station.

"I think you've found him, right here," he said lightly, to down a curious little feeling that suddenly surged through his heart, "if you're Miss Arethusa Worthington, that is. I'm . . ."

Arethusa waited not for him to finish with a definite announcement of his identity; she needed no further words to convince her of just who he was. And although this was far, far from being what she had always visioned the wonder of their Meeting, she put her whole soul into her side of it.

She flung both arms tight around his neck as if she never intended to let him go; and sobbed violently, salty tears that soaked clear through the expensive tweed of his new suit. But these were not the tears of unhappiness which he had noticed and which had caused him to stop and make his offer of help; they were tears of joy for the sheer relief that his bodily presence gave to his volatile daughter. With the impulsive suddenness of her embrace her hat had flown clear off, but Arethusa recked not, in such a moment, of hats with precious and beautiful turkey feathers, and she

lost, of necessity, her careful grip of her purse and satchel.

Ross, for a moment or two, was entirely bereft of coherent thought by the suddenness of her movement. He was nearly strangled by the clinging arms, and a trifle embarrassed besides; for it was not every day that a strange young lady precipitated herself into his arms and sobbed so violently. That it was a daughter whose acquaintance he was making for the very first time, did not altogether deprive the situation of its strangeness.

"Here," he said, when he began to recover somewhat, "here, buck up, child! Buck up. This won't do at all, you know. Let's go home and finish this!"

Arethusa "bucked up."

She drew away from him as suddenly as she had grabbed him and blushed hotly all over with a most unusual accession of sudden shyness. And Ross made straight for the waiting automobile without further parley. She followed behind him in silence, but about halfway she stopped and clapped her hand to her head.

"Oh, my hat!" she exclaimed. "And I've lost my purse and satchel!"

Ross turned around and went back to find them.

But the purse was gone beyond any power of their finding it, though hat and satchel were safely retrieved and progress once more resumed.

## CHAPTER XII

"This is Miss Arethusa, Clay," said Ross, when the chauffeur jumped down to open the door of the machine and took charge of the ancient handbag.

Clay touched his cap respectfully.

But to the surprise of both men Arethusa's acknowledgement of this introduction was a shy and old-fashioned courtesy Miss Letitia had taught her. She murmured politely, "I'm very glad to meet you," and extended her hand.

Clay very nearly dropped the handbag.

But something in the friendly smiling of the grey eyes that regarded him made Clay himself to smile warmly in return, and Arethusa had made a friend. He grasped the out-stretched fingers lightly, in the spirit in which they had been offered, and said with unmistakable cordiality, "I'm awfully glad you've come, Miss Arethusa. Home, Mr. Worthington?"

"Home," replied Ross, smiling at him for his kind quickness.

And then Clay slammed the door upon Ross and Arethusa and climbed up in front. Arethusa was just a bit puzzled at first, and then she decided it was the City.

She had had no previous dealings of intimacy with automobiles, the nearest she had ever been to one was to watch them fly past down the Pike. The word "chauffeur" would have conveyed no meaning to her mind, nor have given her any idea of his place in the

general scheme of things connected with machines. She had thought the good-looking, well-dressed youth in his natty Norfolk suit and cap was some friend of her father's out for a ride with him, and so it was quite in order that he should be introduced. People often took their friends driving in the country. It was just a bit strange that he should do the driving and not her father, but it did not bother her long; and after a while, she was rather glad that the friend did sit in front.

She abandoned herself to Complete Happiness against those marvelously soft cushions in the limousine. She dearly loved to ride, and she did not get near enough of it at the Farm. In fact, motion of any sort had a charm for Arethusa. But she had never felt motion so superlative as this. It was even more exhilarating than the train had been, so swiftly they moved forward, and so silently.

Her momentary shyness with her father began to disappear under the influence of her enjoyment. She glanced around at him from under her long lashes and found him watching her.

His daughter's appearance was proving interestingly mystifying to Ross. Where in the world had she got that red hair and those wonderful Irish eyes? She had not a single feature like her mother. Her tallness, he thought, could be said to have come straight from him. And that ever-changing play of expression across her face,—it was quite fascinating.

Though thus watching her, from the moment they had sat down, Ross was rather at a loss how to begin conversation; he had not entirely recovered from that first embrace. But he could not help, however, replying to her smile, the friendliest possible smile, with



which she conveyed to him her delight in the machine.

"So you like to ride?"

"I *love* it!" she answered, enthusiastically. "This . . . It's just like flying!"

Ross liked this unbridled ecstasy; it was decidedly refreshing.

"Ever ridden in one before?"

Arethusa shook her head vigorously.

"But I should certainly have thought automobiles had penetrated to Barnett County!"

"Some people in town have them," Arethusa came quickly to the defence of her county, "but it's nobody I really know. Timothy was going to get one, but his silo blew down and he couldn't this summer; because he put up a concrete one in its place and it cost so much."

"Who is Timothy?"

"Why, Timothy is . . . Why, Timothy . . . He's just Timothy Jarvis. . . . Father." She added the "Father" a trifle shyly, it being the very first time she had ever addressed that title to him in person. "Aunt 'Liza wants me to marry him," she continued, as if that ought to explain matters perfectly.

Ross remembered the Jarvises. "I see, but how about you?" He found that shy little "Father" most attractive. He wished she would say it again.

Arethusa laughed. "Why, he's my very best friend and I've known him always and always. Of course I'm not going to marry him! I couldn't marry Timothy. . . . Father. You have to fall in love with the person you marry!"

"Then it seems I may gather from your remarks," and Ross was most highly entertained by those same

remarks, "that you can't possibly fall in love with a person you've known always!"

"It doesn't ever happen in books," said Arethusa, seriously, "and they're supposed to be just like things really are, aren't they? I've read just oceans of love-stories. I just adore them!" she added, with emphasis.

Ross's smile broadened. "But truth, they say, is stranger than fiction," and he was about to add something to Arethusa's further mystification, when the automobile stopped.

It had stopped in front of a huge, brick house, painted grey, with tall, narrow windows indicative of the high ceilings within, and a high, pointed roof of grey and red slate. It was a house which had originally been much smaller, but it had been added to until it was spread out, all over a lot which was unusually wide for a city lot, with huge excrescences of wings on each side.

It was not a handsome house, and the most kindly intentioned critic could never have called it so. Elinor had never been able to do much towards the improvement of the outward appearance, however much she had beautified the interior. But it had been her home since she was too small to remember any other, and she loved it dearly despite its deficiencies from an artistic standpoint outwardly. Ross thought it a hideous pile. He said its only redeeming feature was that it so undoubtedly looked respectable.

But Arethusa could find no fault with it. She admired it unaffectedly as they went up the walk toward it.

"Do you *live* here, Father?" she asked, breath-

lessly. She had considered at first the possibility that it might be a hotel. "It's so awfully big! Why, Father, it's every bit as big as our County Court House!" Which was till now the largest building she had ever seen.

She regarded the stately proportions of the façade with awe. Had she not been with her father, she would never have found the courage to lift that shining knocker in the center of the broad paneled door. She would have gone on past this place, she was sure; it seemed so much too large for the family of two she had come to visit.

Elinor's loving impatience had taken her to the library windows more than once to watch for their coming. It seemed so long that Ross had been gone. When the automobile was heard to stop, she rushed to the front door to open it herself, flinging it wide as a hospitable indication of how glad she was to welcome Arethusa. But with her hand still on the door knob, she paused and drew back. This tall, slim child, every bit as tall as she was herself, with her ardent grey eyes, and that mass of tumbled red hair down her back, for Arethusa's various exciting experiences had been hard for the coiffure with which she had started from home, was not the girl Elinor had led herself to expect as Ross's daughter. Arethusa, furthermore, was bare-headed, having forgotten all about her hat and left it in the machine. This, as well as the quaint costume of Miss Letitia's designing, added to Elinor's little feeling of surprise.

And Arethusa stopped short also, just inside the door, and shyness descended upon her once more with this, her first glimpse of the "new wife."

But whatever Elinor's expression might be said

to resemble, Arethusa's in return after that first look was one of absolute and unalloyed admiration. In her wildest flights of anticipatory imaginings as to the appearance of her father's wife, founded on that Letter of his that had so positively indicated her beauty, Arethusa had never been able to paint such a picture as she actually saw. For Elinor's young brown eyes, under her white hair, the lovely glow of her skin, and her slender gracefulness clothed in that clinging, fascinatingly smoky-colored gown she wore (a color she much affected), seemed to the beauty worshipper who regarded her to make her the most Altogether Beautiful Human Being that she, Arethusa, had ever gazed upon.

"Well," remarked Ross; he thought the funny little silence had lasted quite long enough, "I hope you two will know each other the next time you happen to meet anywhere!"

Then was Elinor given one of those same disarming smiles with which Arethusa had won her father in the automobile, and anything else but immediate and complete friendship was impossible after such a Smile, however unlike the girl expected the one who had come might be.

Clay had brought in the forgotten hat when he came with the satchel, and he hovered about in the background of the hall until he could communicate to Ross that Miss Arethusa's trunk had not been attended to. Should he go right straight back for it? Clay was somewhat used to the remembering of things which Ross had not remembered; rarely a day passed that he did not have to do something of this kind.

"My trunk!" Arethusa's mind made a complete somersault at this intrusion of so commonplace an arti-

cle into the happy family greetings and the joy of finding Elinor as dear as she looked. "I . . . I forgot all about it!" she faltered.

"It doesn't matter," comforted Elinor, "there's no harm done at all. Just give Clay the check and he'll go see about it!"

*The check!*

A wild search for it followed immediately. Arethusa had entirely forgotten where it had been put. Down into the very depths of the satchel she dived, to emerge unrewarded. Was it by any chance in that lost purse?

Visions of Miss Eliza rose before her, making more frantic the efforts to locate it. How many times had she said, "Whatever you do, Arethusa, don't you dare lose that trunk check!"

She sank weakly to the floor to lean her head despairingly against the heavy newel post of the stairway.

"What will Aunt 'Liza say?" she cried, with the hopelessness of one already condemned. "Oh, what will she say?"

"It does not need even a clever mind like mine to deduce from my daughter's behaviour that Miss Eliza remains unchanged through the changing years," murmured Ross in Elinor's ear. "Tempus may fugit, but Miss Eliza's disposition stands perfectly still."

Suddenly, Arethusa's hand flew to clasp her throat. She looked up at them with a little laugh, her face clearing as if by magic.

"How awfully stupid of me! I remember now where it is!" She drew the tiny bag on its cord out of the neck of her blouse. "She put it in here, so I wouldn't lose it." Her relief was great and thoroughly

genuine. "Whee," she sighed, "just suppose I had lost it!"

It was all too much for Ross. He could scarcely manage to untie that bag for the check, he was so hilarious.

"You needn't laugh that way," said Arethusa defensively. "You don't know what Aunt 'Liza can be like when she's mad! If you did, you wouldn't laugh!"

"But I do," he replied, "I do. That's the reason I laugh. It brings her back to me so plainly."

It had brought her back to Arethusa very plainly also. She remembered some Instructions Miss Eliza had given, which the time had come to carry out.

"I must lie down and rest now," she said to Elinor.

"Are you very tired, dear? We'll go right up to your room."

"No, I'm really not a bit tired," explained Arethusa, as she scrambled to her feet to start upstairs, "not the very weeniest bit. But Aunt 'Liza said I must lie down and rest just as soon as I got here."

Elinor looked a trifle puzzled. "But if you're really not tired . . ."

"But I must rest. Aunt 'Liza said so."

Arethusa was sure that she had disobeyed Miss Eliza enough for one day, in the forgetting what she had said about strange men and the attitude to be adopted towards them, and she had gone on from that to lose her purse. There was no telling how long Miss Eliza's arm might be, how far her wrath might reach. It was best not to tempt Providence.

*She would rest.*

“Wait,” said Ross as an answer to his wife’s bewilderment, “just wait until you know Miss Eliza and all of this will be fully explained.”

## CHAPTER XIII

A reward of some description was surely due Miss Eliza's niece for her behaviour on this occasion, for no creature ever felt less like even the outward semblance of "resting" than did Arethusa. While regard for the strictest truth will not permit it to be stated that much rest was obtained from her method of carrying out Miss Eliza's command; still, she remained in her room with every appearance of obedience and intervals were spent on the "squishy" green sofa, when she could have talked and talked to Ross and Elinor the entire afternoon without the slightest hint of fatigue.

Arethusa's delight in her room more than repaid Elinor for any trouble which the fixing of it might have been. Her little gasping "Oh!" when the door was first opened, and the silent, shining-eyed gaze around afterwards were the most genuine and appreciated tribute of admiration she could have given.

She would never have dreamed that the mere gathering together of furniture and pictures and other objects of familiar names which were the commonplaces of everyday life at the Farm could present an appearance so beautiful. When once on the sofa, tucked under a fluffy green coverlid by Elinor's kind hands, she could not stay for long. A hundred times did she bob up to examine various fascinating objects that attracted her attention as her eager regard explored while she lay there, "resting."



The bathroom delighted her beyond any power of her expression. It was a far more wonderful piece of work as a bathroom than the one at Timothy's house which she had deeply envied him ever since it had been put in. That hot and cold water should run together for one's cleansing without the trouble of fetching them in heavy buckets from a far-away kitchen, had seemed to Arethusa the acme of luxury when she had first glimpsed the new bathroom at Timothy's.

There was but one faucet at the Farm, and that was in the kitchen, by the sink. Miss Eliza had made this one concession to modernity because she could not help but see that it saved a lot of bother in very cold weather. The plumbing arrangements, however, were of the most primitive. She scorned the suggestion that a bathroom be added; an effete idea.

Arethusa made up her mind immediately to write Timothy of the glories of her washing paraphernalia as being far superior to his. It was so far superior, in fact, that there were things in that region of white tile and flashing nickel whose specific use she failed to see. There was nothing just like it at Timothy's.

She decided also, after a rather longer interval than usual spent on the sofa, to take a bath this very afternoon; now, before supper time. But the dainty little silver clock on her mantel was chiming half-past six before she had finished her toilet; she had spent so long and luxurious a time in that wonderful porcelain tub. And there was so much to be admired all around her.

Her hair, to her great sorrow, she could not make stay up on top of her head at all, and she was forced to leave it plaited down her back as of old. She was vaguely dissatisfied with the youthful look it gave her,

so arranged, but it could not be helped. She had lost most of her hairpins when it had tumbled down, and Miss Eliza had provided but the one set.

She wondered why there had been no call of "Arethusa!" as when she was late to supper at the Farm; for she must be late, very late. Six o'clock was the supper hour at home. She hastily slipped on the skirt to the blue suit and the pongee waist, without stopping to bother with anything in her trunk, which had been opened and placed in her room for her. How dreadful to be so late to her first meal!

Arethusa fairly plunged down the front stairs, but once at the bottom, she paused uncertainly. She had no idea where the dining-room was. Then she heard voices not far away and she followed the sound into the library, where she found Ross and Elinor in front of a gloriously burning wood fire. But they were both garbed in what to her inexperienced eyes seemed the most pronounced party garments. Ross had donned a Tuxedo and pinned a tiny, pink rose in his button-hole. Elinor wore a black gown that was very low in the neck to Arethusa, although in reality it was the most modest of décolletage, and a few of the same pink roses were clustered at her belt.

"I was so afraid I was late," began Arethusa breathlessly, then she stopped short, halfway across the room, when she fully realized the costuming of the pair before the fire.

"Oh, you all are giving a Party and I didn't know anything about it!" she exclaimed.

Ross raised himself just a trifle from the comfortable depths of his chair. "Are you quite rested?" he enquired gravely.

But she scarcely heard that he spoke. "Oh, I just

wish I'd known it was a Party!" she repeated. "I wish I'd known!" She glanced down at the plainness of her own attire and then at Elinor's simple evening frock.

Her face clouded. And then a truly dreadful thought intruded itself. Perhaps she was not even expected at this Party; that may have been why she had not been called.

Her troubled grey eyes spelled something of this to Elinor, so she pulled a plump chair a little nearer to her own and patted it invitingly, just as Miss Asenath patted the couch for Arethusa to join her.

"It isn't a party, Arethusa dear," said Elinor. "Come over by us and be sociable and I'll tell you all about it."

She explained to Arethusa that it was just three years ago on the twenty-fifth of October (this very night) that she and Ross had first met each other, at a dinner at the Baronne de Braunecker's in Paris when she had been visiting the Baronne and Ross had come as a guest to the dinner given in her honor.

"I fell in love with her on the spot," interrupted Ross, "and I could hardly wait for morning so I could go back to call on her."

Arethusa flashed her father a brief smile of appreciation for this bit of information and proceeded to grow more and more enraptured with the whole affair as Elinor added to the narrative. They were celebrating the occasion of that meeting this evening, she continued. Ross had sent her the flowers, touching the cluster at her belt, for she had worn pink roses at the Baronne's dinner; and they were to have for this anniversary meal as many things as Elinor had been

able to remember they had eaten together at the first one.

Arethusa's eyes sparkled.

What a darling idea! This keeping of the Anniversary of so Memorable an Occasion! Her romantic heart thought it came very near being more thrilling than a Real Party! It was a way of living after her own conception of life!

"But if I had known about it I could have dressed up, too. *I have a Party Dress!*"

"You have plenty of time to go put it on, if you wish." Elinor smiled for the little air of pride with which the girl had announced her possession. "There's oceans of time for you to change. Dinner isn't until seven."

Arethusa bounded from her chair. "Oh, really . . . may I?"

Elinor nodded. "Would you like me to help you?" she added.

But Arethusa was already halfway up the front stairs by the time she had finished her friendly offer.

She dived down into her trunk, recklessly pitching out and aside all those garments Miss Eliza had folded so carefully and placed into it as she had considered Arethusa would be needing them. For the one white dress Miss Letitia had made for parties was far down towards the very bottom of the trunk. It is well that Miss Eliza did not see this unpacking!

Still further down, Arethusa lifted up a box she had put there herself, tucking it in when Miss Eliza had not been present to observe, and from it she drew that length of green ribbon which she loved. Unknown to

her aunt, it had travelled all the way from the hollow tree to Lewisburg for Arethusa's adorning.

"I will *not!*" she said aloud, defiantly, as though Miss Eliza were actually present in person forbidding the tying-on of that decoration, "I will *not* wear a blue ribbon! I will wear This!"

Then Arethusa, thus arrayed in her best, descended the stairs once more.

She crossed the library towards the two by the fire, this time stepping proudly in a consciousness of clothes, holding her head high. Her cheeks were adorably flushed, and her eyes were almost black under her long dark lashes.

The dress was very becoming, even if it were not of the accepted standards for formal evening wear. Miss Letitia had "spre'd herse'f," so Mandy said, on that dress. It was a trifle sheerer than Miss Eliza had at first intended it to be, thanks to Miss Asenath's gentle persuasion; round in the neck and even a bit low, for with fingers that trembled in their excited daring Miss Letitia had cut it down farther than the line Miss Eliza had indicated as modest and becoming. And then there was no way to fill it in.

But "'Thusa had such a pretty neck," said the guilty seamstress to herself; and what did an inch or so matter in the end?

In Arethusa's simple soul, even with her "love of gew-gaws," as Miss Eliza phrased it, there was no smallest room for envy. This white garment of hers had been bought and made for a party dress, and it was the most party "party dress" she had ever possessed; her mother's black gown was plainly a party dress also: therefore, to Arethusa's mind, they were similarly arrayed for an Occasion. She could admire whole-

heartedly the soft sweep of the folds of Elinor's gown without one iota of unhappiness because her own frock hung in straight thick gathers with but a ruffle edged with lace at the bottom of the skirt for its trimming.

"I put on my Best Dress," she said happily, "because it was your Anniversary. I know Aunt 'Liza would say I should have put on my blue silk, but it's so dark, and it's not dress-up a bit."

Elinor and Ross exchanged glances, but forebore to smile at the "best dress." Somehow she appealed to them both more at this very moment than she had in any mood shown before.

Ross sprang from his chair and recklessly denuded a large bowl on the big mahogany table of most of its burden of pink roses, and gallantly presented them to his daughter to put in her green belt, so that she might also be wearing the Anniversary Flowers.

"For the Queen Rose in the rosebud garden of girls," he said, with a low, sweeping bow as he presented them, which enraptured Arethusa. And the words had a vaguely familiar sound, as of poetry. Arethusa adored poetry.

Yet the warm-hearted blossoms themselves, thought Ross, were really no more fresh and glowing than the girl whose fluttering fingers strove to tuck them in the ribbon around her waist just as Elinor had her cluster arranged.

"Bless her heart!" said Elinor to herself, as she noted Arethusa's little glance at the flowers she wore and the little effort at imitation. "And she shall have a real party frock to-morrow. The very prettiest I can find!"

When George, the African Butler, an imposing per-

sonage of almost unnatural blandness, a few moments later announced dinner as served, to Arethusa's view he appeared to be dressed for the Party also. She was gladder then than ever that she had gone up and changed her dress.

The round dining-table with its gleaming silver and glass, the tall, ivory-colored candles, burning without shades in silver candlesticks, and the huge centerpiece (of the Flowers of the Occasion) was far more of a picture than Arethusa had ever known such an ordinary thing as a dining-table to present. And all around the room were more roses, in bowls and tall vases, until it seemed a veritable bower of them, dimly lighted away from the candle glow by shaded sconces against the walls.

Arethusa drew a deep, sharp breath of ecstasy at all this loveliness. She did not want to sit down in the chair George held for her at first, but just to stand and look, and look. At home, they ate at night under an oil lamp hanging by chains from the ceiling, and the supper table at the Farm had never, in all its existence as a supper table, been a fairy scene such as this. But Ross and Elinor were sitting down, and so almost unconsciously Arethusa slid into her own chair, still admiring.

She examined the silver articles at her place with interest. There seemed to be so many for only one person. Why did they put all their silver on the table this way at once? For it surely looked to Arethusa as if that was what had been done. It was very pretty, she admitted, but seemed curious. She made no audible comment, however, remembering that Miss Eliza had said that it was most ill-bred audibly to remark anything as curious seen in another person's house.

Their ways might be strangely different, but it was never the part of a lady to allude to the fact.

Arethusa's bouillon gave her no real trouble. It had a familiar appearance and one ate soup with a spoon, even at the Farm. She selected the spoon among that brave array that invited selection spread so accommodately before her, which seemed to her to best fit the cup in size; and conscious now of the lack of that lunch she could not eat, for she was very hungry, she ate every bit of this first course with relish, even lifting the cup as she noticed Elinor do once very daintily, to drain it of its last drop. She longed for more, but it is never polite to ask for a second helping, when a guest.

The bouillon drunk, and the gold and white cups removed, came George bearing a large silver platter whereon reposed what Arethusa at first thought to be flowers of some description. But it seemed queer to cook flowers and serve them for food, as they seemed to be intended.

Arethusa did not like the appearance of those strange, spiky, dark-green things, and it made it very easy to remember one of Miss Eliza's earliest lessons that something must be left for the servants in the kitchen, and never to take everything on a dish, there being only three of these unknown objects on that platter, so she refused with unforced politeness when they came her way.

"Oh, come now," remonstrated Ross, "surely you want an artichoke!"

"Artichoke!" The name made Arethusa giggle.

"Try one," suggested Elinor, "for this is one of the things I happened to remember we had at our first dinner together."



Whereupon she changed her mind, servants or no servants in the kitchen, for Arethusa was Celebrating.

There was no spoon on the platter. There was nothing in the shape of implements to assist this thing over to her plate save a large, wide fork and a pancake turner. At least, it resembled a pancake turner. It was strange to see such use for one, and to help herself to food such as this and in this manner. It proved a bit awkward in the attempt. The artichoke, too, made it more awkward. It behaved like something alive, and hesitated for a second on the tip of the pancake turner, balanced uncertainly; then plunged to ignominy and darkness, under the table. And Arethusa had made the noblest of efforts to manage it!

She looked up quickly in Elinor's direction, braced for the reprimand. Such an occasion would have proved the finest of grist for Miss Eliza's mill; but Elinor merely smiled kindly at the embarrassed guest, and requested George to fetch Miss Arethusa another artichoke.

This one was retrieved in triumph.

But once on her plate, Arethusa eyed it distrustfully. How did she eat it, now that she had it? Did she cut it up before hand, or what? Which one of her many knives and forks did she use for it? Then her quick glance noted how Elinor peeled off a leaf, so she did the same.

"Like it?" from Ross, after her first mouthful.

Arethusa looked doubtfully at the artichoke. Recollections of Miss Eliza as to the criticism of food put before one, made her temporize.

"I know other things I've eaten that I like much better." She was perfectly courteous in manner, but her tone decidedly lacked in enthusiasm. Then she

added, hastily, fearing that she might have offended by even this statement, "I may get used to it, if I eat enough of them. Aunt 'Liza says you can acquire tastes." She smiled at Ross apologetically. "I never saw one before, you know."

"You'll do, Arethusa," laughed Ross.

And Elinor smilingly told her that its eating was not at all compulsory, but Arethusa was game. When she celebrated, she celebrated with no half measure, so she finished her artichoke to the last bitter leaf, though she did not like that last leaf any better than she had the first.

But it would be most unfair to chronicle all of Arethusa's vicissitudes and mistakes during the course of that long dinner; her struggles with her strange multitude of table-ware, which had a propensity for disappearing decidedly odd, but to which Ross's own augmented supply might have given her a clue, had she looked more sharply near his plate, and the eating of dishes new to her and not always liked. For, new dishes or not, Arethusa partook with heartiness of everything that came her way; even to the tiny cup of coffee at the very end, with its baby spoon which had so enraptured her as like a doll's, and which had vanished mysteriously before she could use it so that George had had to bring another.

She sighed the sigh of the well-fed when it was all over.

"I feel just like I would burst," she announced, as she pushed back from the table. "We don't have half this much to eat at night at home!"

"Would you," asked Ross, most amused, "like to go to bed and sleep it off? The instinct for which the lower animals are so commended leads them to some

such sensible proceeding after over-feeding, I believe.”

“Go to bed!” exclaimed Arethusa, indignant at the bare suggestion. “Why, we never think of going to bed at the Farm before nine or half-past; and sometimes, even ten!”

“Ye gods! What hours! I’m surprised at Miss Eliza’s permitting it!”

And Arethusa could not possibly tell, from his expression, whether he was joking or not.

He strolled slowly across the hall to the music room, his daughter following, the idea stirring within her brain that this new-found father was inclined to be as much of a tease as Timothy, and that his teasing was a trifle hard to understand. Elinor was going to play for them. She played every night to Ross unless they went out somewhere.

“I can plainly see, Arethusa, my child,” Ross added, “plainly see where we’re going to prove a most demoralizing influence for Miss Eliza’s careful rearing.”

## CHAPTER XIV

In the morning, Arethusa wrote the letter to Miss Eliza she had been bidden to write as soon as possible after arrival in Lewisburg, giving a sketchy description of her trip and the information that it had been accomplished in safety, without mentioning a single one of the friends made on the train; or that she had almost missed her father; or that she was now minus a purse.

But immediately after this duty was done she wrote another letter; to Miss Asenath this one, and it was overflowing with spirits and exuberant retrospect of all that had happened to her since she left the Farm. Into this effort she put her encounter with the strange man, Mrs. Cherry and Helen Louise and Peter and Mr. Cherry; how nearly she and Ross had missed connection and how terribly she had felt; the loss of her purse, and her fear that the check had been gone also; just how exciting this glorious Visit had already proved.

It was a long letter and a breathless one, with many missing words all down the pages, for Arethusa's mind was working so much faster than she could move her pen that it was quite impossible to get in every syllable. But Miss Asenath would understand.

Arethusa described at length the wonders of this big house where she was a guest, and the superlative Beauty of the room she had been given for her very own. She told of that Anniversary Dinner, and the Artichoke; of all her troubles with the strange food and the bewildering number of knives and forks and spoons. She also told Miss Asenath of Elinor's music.

Elinor made sounds to issue from a piano that Arethusa had never dreamed that instrument was capable of accomplishing. With her slender fingers on those black and ivory keys, the big, black box had sobbed and laughed, and even talked ordinarily at her bidding.

Arethusa left her chair, and crept nearer and nearer to the musician until she was almost on top of the piano bench herself, in her absorbed interest. Her hands clasped over her heart to still the curious little ache the music made her to feel there, with her lips parted slightly and her eyes like big stars; she had scarcely dared breathe. She wished suddenly for Timothy, for Timothy worshipped music. He loved even to hear her, Arethusa, play. And she was sure he had never heard any music such as this.

It was not what Miss Letitia would have called playing "with expression"; it was not as she had tried to teach Arethusa. Elinor's long, white hands just seemed to wander over the keys, as softly aimless as if she had no slightest idea what the next note was to be; they strayed from themes which aroused to an ecstasy into simple melodies that left a haunting sense that they had not been finished. Sometimes the piano scarcely seemed to sound; sometimes it crashed in grand chords, as if the musician's playing had changed with her mood.

And Arethusa had listened, full of vague longings she did not understand, feeling when it ended that it was ended far too soon; and Ross had smoked silently, blowing great, blue wreaths about his head, one after another. There had been no single word from either to break the spell of the music.

Arethusa wrote away, the wrinkles of composition between her brows and her writing becoming more and more ragged as the letter proceeded. Her feet were

twined in the rounds of her chair, her arms were spread out all over the top of the big desk with a great display of elbows, and she was ungracefully humped as to back; for when Arethusa wrote, her whole body responded to the effort.

Close beside her lay Boris, Ross's Great Dane, a dignified animal of unusual beauty. Ordinarily, he was so indifferent and sometimes so disagreeable to strangers that he was rarely allowed where they were, yet he had adopted Arethusa at sight when first introduced just after breakfast, and he had not left her side since. Most people were frightened nearly speechless when Boris merely opened his mouth to yawn; but he had not frightened Arethusa. She had voted him the most wonderful dog she had ever seen, and pleased Ross immensely by her lack of fear.

Every now and then when she stopped in her writing to open her cramped fingers for a moment and gaze admiringly around the room, she would stoop and pat Boris. And she would stroke him wherever her hand happened to fall, and he did not seem to resent it in the least, which was something most unusual.

Ross was in the library, sprawled on the big davenport, and watching the girl and the dog with keen delight in the picture they made. He had never known Boris to make friends thus suddenly, in all the six years he had owned him; even Elinor was a bit afraid of the splendid creature.

Elinor had been in the library also most of the morning, talking to Ross while Arethusa performed a Duty; but she had been called out to the telephone. When she came back, her first words were for Arethusa.

"I have an invitation for you."

"For *me!*" Arethusa's pen dropped abruptly in

the middle of her page to make a large and sprawling splash of ink.

"Yes, for you. That was Mrs. Chestnut on the telephone. I had told her you were coming to visit us, and so she called up to invite you to the dinner-dance she is giving Friday night, if you were here."

"Oh, would that be a Party, a Real Party?" The excited scribe abandoned her letter altogether, and followed Elinor over by the fire-place, nearer to Ross and the davenport. "Isn't that a Party?"

"I should say it was!"

"I've never been to a Party," apologetically explained Arethusa, "and I've wanted to go to one ever since I can remember. Aunt 'Senath said there would be parties in the City, and that I might be invited! But . . ." some of the glow began to fade, "I don't know Mrs. Chestnut, Mother."

"That doesn't make any difference this time, Arethusa dear, because she's one of my best friends. And all her parties are wonderful, so if you've really never been to any at all, you're starting in in the right way to enjoy them," said Elinor, and Arethusa glowed once more. "I had hardly dared hope she would invite you," she continued, "because I supposed her list was made up long ago. It's for Emily, her daughter. You'll like Emily; she's just about your age, and she's coming out this winter. It's to be at the Boden Hotel, I think she said. But she's going to send an escort for you."

What richness of prospect!

Yet with her joy, Arethusa puzzled for a moment over some of the obscurer items of her mother's speech.

"Why doesn't she have her party at home instead

of a hotel," she enquired, "and what is Emily coming out of?"

"Your mother used the wrong words, Arethusa," volunteered Ross from the davenport; "she means to say that Mrs. Chestnut's daughter is on exhibition after some years of careful preparation by her mother for just this event and will be gladly presented to the man offering to take her off her mother's weary hands. Said mother will be fearfully disappointed, if, after all this trouble and expense, no man should offer. And as to her not having the party at her home, she thinks far too much of her furniture and Persian rugs and pale pink walls to allow her daughter's callow young friends to romp around among them for a whole evening."

Arethusa looked at him uncertainly, but his expression was one of perfect seriousness. It was even a trifle sad.

"Is she really like that, Father?"

"Really like that," replied Ross sorrowfully.

"Then," announced Arethusa with decision, and her red mouth pursed disapprovingly, "I don't believe that I want to go to her party!"

Elinor struggled between exasperation and a desire to laugh.

"Mrs. Chestnut is lovely, Arethusa, and so is her daughter. They only have the dance at the hotel because their own house is too small for so many people at once. Everyone has their large parties there nowadays. If you are going to believe everything your father says, you'll be having a very hard time. And if he keeps on talking this way, I'll have to send him out. You mustn't pay so much attention to him."

"Nice, wifely speech, that," observed Ross.



But Arethusa had glimpsed the laughter in his quizzical dark eyes. She realized now he had been teasing, so she turned clear away from him to give all her attention to Elinor, who could be more trusted.

"Do you know how to dance, dear?" asked Elinor.

"Some," replied Arethusa. "Timothy taught me down in the barn. Aunt 'Liza says dancing is very wicked," (Miss Eliza had a truly deep and honest horror of round dances). "But Timothy says it isn't a bit wrong, and I just *love* it! She doesn't know," added almost confidentially, "that Timothy ever showed me how."

"'Tis just as well, I suppose," murmured Ross.

Arethusa had proved an apt pupil to Timothy's friendly instructions when he had come home from college and passed on his acquirements in the art terpsichorean. The lessons had taken place in the central, biggest space in the barn, as she had said, with Timothy humming an accompaniment until breathless, and then she taking up the tune in her turn. This little taste of the joys of dancing had made her long for more. She failed to see how anything that made for such pure and unadulterated delight could be so wicked as Miss Eliza insisted that it was.

"I'm glad you know something about it," said Elinor, really relieved. "I was afraid perhaps you didn't, and you would hardly have the time to learn. And, Arethusa dearest," tactfully feeling her way, fearing to spoil the girl's innocent happiness in the garment, "was that white dress you wore last night your very best?"

"Yes, ma'am." The eager face lighted still more. "And it's the lowest necked dress I ever did have, and it has the shortest sleeves! They're nearly up to my

elbow. Aunt 'Liza didn't want it made that way, so low, nor so thin, either; because she said I wouldn't be able to wear my underwear with it, and she's afraid it's dangerous for me to take it off. But I rolled it up last night and in at the neck, and it didn't show very much. Did it?"

Elinor and Ross were almost equally affected by this speech.

"Shades of the summer of seventy-six!" was his rather inappropriate exclamation.

And Elinor's expression seemed to Arethusa to be one of incredulity, so she turned back her shirtwaist cuff to prove her statement, and showed the end of a long, knit sleeve.

"I don't like to wear it a single bit," she said, "but Aunt 'Liza makes me. I have to put it on when we have the first heavy frost and I can't take it off until the tenth of May."

"I am becoming more and more convinced that Miss Eliza's peculiar talents are entirely lost in the place she occupies," replied Ross, with sincerity.

But the white dress, low as its proud owner seemed to consider it, and as thin, and in spite of Miss Letitia's loving effort expended on it for just such occasions as parties, would hardly serve for the Chestnuts' dinner-dance, thought Elinor.

And so, ere very much time were sped, Arethusa discovered Miss Asenath to have been a true prophet. She was to have another Party Frock. She and Elinor started off immediately to get It; but they had to get It ready-made, for there was not near enough time before the Party for a dressmaker's services to have accomplished the sort of Frock that Elinor wanted Arethusa to have.

They went in the automobile, to Arethusa's great delight, and the palatial establishment where it stopped, and which Elinor told her had the prettiest dresses in town to offer in just such emergencies as this, was so enormous a place and so filled to overflowing with scurrying people, that Arethusa wondered if every human being in Lewisburg had not come a-buying this morning, and right in this particular shop. She was not used to stores where she bumped into somebody at every other step. She apologized several times from the front door to the elevator, for such collisions; because her delighted eyes would insist in wandering to the bewilderment of riches displayed on every side, instead of finding her a passage through the crowd. She could not understand how Elinor could pass them all so calmly by, looking so straight ahead. Had she not been afraid of losing her, Arethusa would have stopped, more than once, for a little closer view.

They went up in the elevator to the third floor, and the elevator was another new sensation for Arethusa. There were no elevators within miles of the Farm.

The whole third floor was entirely given over to ready-made garments of every description; cloaks and suits and dresses of every conceivable variety of cloth and color, hanging carelessly over tables and chairs, and neatly displayed inside lighted glass cases, and girls were rushing about carrying still more piled in their arms. There were more clothes than Arethusa had imagined could ever have been made, right here on the one floor of this huge shop.

To the floor-walker who stepped up to greet them, Elinor conveyed her desire to buy a dress for Arethusa; "And I should like Miss Rosa, Mr. Wells, if she's not too busy."

Mr. Wells, bowing grandly from the waist, ushered them into a small room hung all around with mirrors, and disappeared. Then he reappeared in a few moments to announce that Miss Rosa would be with them very shortly, if Mrs. Worthington would be so kind as to wait.

Arethusa was simply overcome by the rapidity with which events moved forward, to carry her with them. Speech was an impossibility. She could only follow Elinor silently.

She sat and gazed about her in the little mirrored room. Her quaint figure was repeated again and again on all sides in a very bewildering way; and she noted that the hat of each Arethusa had somehow got crooked far down over one ear. She straightened it immediately. There were many Elinors in the mirrors also, and Arethusa admired the grace of those reflections with unaffected showing of her admiration. She especially admired the soft sweep of Elinor's long stole of moleskin. There was no more envy in her regard of the difference of their appearance in these many unmistakable evidences of it than there had been when they had both been dressed for the Anniversary the night before. Arethusa rejoiced that Elinor was such a Beautiful Creature; and it was Perfect Bliss to be with her and watch her lovely clothes, without worrying about herself in any way.

Miss Rosa did not keep them waiting long, and at Elinor's request when she did come, she flitted away in a business-like manner that spelled a knowledge of what was wanted, to return bearing an armful of color; pale blues and pinks and lavenders and whites and deeper creams, in the softest of satins and silks and chiffons

and lace. Among all this loveliness was glimpsed by Arethusa a fleck of green.

"Mother," this whispered to Elinor, as Miss Rosa in her modish and well-fitting black crepe de chine and her air of knowing what she was about, was just a trifle awe-inspiring, "do you suppose that would be a Green Dress?"

But Miss Rosa heard the whisper. She smiled in a friendly way at Arethusa, for Miss Rosa was a kindly soul, and produced from the very bottom of her pile of beautiful things a Green Frock of the identical shade so beloved by Arethusa.

Arethusa drew in her breath with a sharp, little sound. "Oh, that is the One I want! Oh, Mother, may I have . . ."

But she had had too long a training by Miss Eliza for it to desert her with too great a suddenness. The dress looked neither sensible nor durable when Miss Rosa held it spread out to plainer view; in fact, it had every possible appearance of being neither. And it was so wonderful a mass of chiffon and silk and lace that Arethusa began to remember sundry lessons in economy also; she feared its cost would prove terrific. She had never seen anything nearly so Wonderful in the shape of a Gown before. Then too, those caustic remarks of so positive a nature concerning green with her red hair, which Miss Eliza had spoken so often in her hearing, began to worm themselves into her consciousness.

The happy expression, roused by the first sight of this creation, faded quite noticeably.

"What's the matter?" inquired Elinor. "I think that's the dress of all dresses for you, dear. If you like it. Don't you, Miss Rosa?"

Miss Rosa nodded. "Yes, indeed, Miss Worthington has the very hair and eyes for this, and the skin as well."

Then did Arethusa's spirits soar to touch heaven once more. She turned such an illumined face to Elinor as Elinor had never seen; she was all aquiver in her sudden joy.

"Aunt 'Senath was right! Darling Aunt 'Senath was right! She said not everybody would be like Aunt 'Liza; that some people would be sure to think green was all right with my hair! Aunt 'Liza never has let me have anything but blue, and I've wanted a green dress for a thousand years. But this one looks so . . ." she paused uncertainly, and reddened. She did not like to mention its cost, since Elinor was making her a gift, but Miss Eliza was a good teacher.

"Expensive?" finished Elinor, laughing. "I don't imagine it is. But I'll do the worrying about that. If you want it, you may have it. It rests with you to say."

Arethusa blushed more deeply, but it was a radiant blush, even if embarrassed, for Elinor's words, if intended as words of correction, were not spoken in the tone Arethusa associated with corrections. She fingered at the Green Dress, almost caressingly. To own this Gorgeous Thing for her very own!

"Suppose we try it on," suggested Miss Rosa, amused at Arethusa's naïve joy.

Arethusa's coat was off before the kindly suggestion was quite finished, then she looked at Miss Rosa.

Elinor read the hesitating thought. "It's all right," she said. "Miss Rosa must fit it for you, you know."

So Miss Rosa whisked off Arethusa's shirtwaist for her, and her skirt, and even manipulated that uncom-

promisingly unbeautiful protection which Miss Eliza insisted was all that kept the healthy Arethusa from dying of pneumonia in the winter season, in such a very capable way that it could not possibly show; and slipped the dainty gown over the girl's ruddy head. And it fitted her as if it had been made especially to her measurement.

Arethusa stared into the mirror directly before her, and into the ones all around her, twisting and turning to see every inch of her back, lost in ecstasy at the contemplation of her glorified self in these Wonderful Reflections. Even the heavy black lace shoes, ugly shoes from a country store, which showed so plainly below her green skirt, had no sort of power to spoil for Arethusa the general effect of loveliness.

It was the most Beautiful Dress in the world, she was sure.

The skirt billowed and flowed around her in soft generous folds of pale green chiffon and lace draped over an underskirt of green silk, and caught to it here and there with bunches of tiny flowers in odd, bright colors. The waist had a high, soft girdle of the green silk, and some of the little flowers were sewed around one side of it against the gathers of the skirt; and a tight little bunch of them was right in the middle of her back at the very top of the girdle, from which hung narrow, flowing sash-ends that were tied into the fulness of the skirt with other wee bunches of the flowers. Some of these flowers were nestled about in the lace on the upper part of the waist as if they had grown there, and some caught up the short lace sleeves.

"How do you like it?" asked Elinor. It was really rather a superfluous question.

"I love it!" burst from Arethusa. "I think it is

Perfectly Beautiful!" Then she turned around. "But I just know, Mother, that Aunt 'Liza won't like it at all."

"Why, what on earth has Miss Eliza to do with it?"

"You see," seriously, "she has always said just what I should wear, and she tells Aunt 'Titia just how to make them."

"I understand, dear, but you're in Lewisburg now; and . . . I can't see possibly how Miss Eliza could have a single objection to make."

But Arethusa knew only too well.

"Couldn't I have a guimpe with it?" she suggested hopefully; "if I had a guimpe, it would look different."

It would indeed!

"A guimpe!" echoed both Elinor and Miss Rosa.

Arethusa nodded, and turned once more to the mirror. "It's the sleeves she wouldn't like," she lifted one to show its lack as a sleeve from Miss Eliza's point of view, "and the neck, besides. It's ever so much lower than my white dress. I always used to wear guimpes with dresses like this. I don't mean just like this," added hastily, for a blunder had been committed, "but when it had sleeves as short, and didn't come up any higher."

"I never heard of such a thing," declared Elinor. "And, Arethusa, I can't believe that even Miss Eliza would make you wear a guimpe with an evening dress!"

But then Elinor did not know Miss Eliza.

And, "Anything on earth that you would do to that dress, Mrs. Worthington, would spoil it," said Miss Rosa, warmly. "It's absolutely perfect just as it is. And I'm almost sure, Miss Arethusa, that your aunt would say so herself if she could see it."

But neither did Miss Rosa know Miss Eliza.



And Arethusa did.

She stepped slowly down from the little platform where she had been standing for the better view all around, and her grey eyes filled rapidly with the bitter tears of disappointment. It was Tragedy to give it up! But if there was to be no guimpe. . . .

Her fumbling fingers were reaching under the flowers at the girdle for the hooks which had fastened her into it, when Elinor stopped her.

Elinor had set her heart on Arethusa having that Green Dress from the first moment of seeing her in it. It seemed to Elinor to suit the girl as if, as Miss Rosa had enthusiastically declared, somebody had sat down before her and studied her "style." Her namesake nymph might have worn the gown just as it was without a single change to make it more airy, or more like captured sea-foam in its fluttering draperies. It belonged with Arethusa's hair and her greenish eyes. She would never find another frock, if they looked all day, which would be half so becoming. But there was no slightest use in buying it if this bugbear of Miss Eliza's disapproval would continue to rear its serpent head to Arethusa's further unhappiness.

"Arethusa," she demanded, "don't you think I know every bit as much about clothes as Miss Eliza?"

Arethusa could but smile through the tears she was winking back at the utter ridiculousness of this question. She looked at Elinor's wonderfully made suit and her furs and the dark purple velvet hat she wore that was so attractive against her white hair, and then memory showed her Miss Eliza, trotting about in the sensible and comfortably cut garments she affected the year round.

"More," she declared, with honesty and emphasis.

"And do you imagine for a single instant that I would be letting you wear anything that was not at all right for you to wear?"

Arethusa shook her head decidedly. That was not exactly the point. "But if I only had . . ." she began, uncertainly.

"Miss Rosa," asked Elinor desperately, "have you such a thing as a guimpe?"

Miss Rosa had, she was sure, somewhere about.

"Would you mind bringing it?"

So the guimpe was brought, a lace guimpe with long, lace sleeves, and a high collared neck of lace.

Arethusa could have cried at the way it made her look. It ruined her Wonderful Frock; even she, inexperienced in such frocks, could tell that with ease. It was a real relief to get it off, and view herself once more as she had been at first arrayed, without it.

"Now don't you see?"

Yes, Arethusa saw.

"And do you suppose," pursued Elinor, "that Miss Eliza, as sensible as you say she is, would want to spoil an already beautiful dress that way?"

No, Arethusa could not believe that even Miss Eliza would want to be so unfeeling to beautiful dresses such as this. She could not help but think, she who had seen it and worn it, both ways, that Miss Eliza would be forced to select, as the prettier, the dress without the guimpe. There was really no choice, thought Arethusa, between them.

She smiled at her many reflections once more, and strutted a bit, back and forth, to watch her draperies float about her.

"I'm rather sorry," remarked Elinor, "that you

needed so much convincing that I had any idea what was best."

Arethusa stopped short, and turned in alarm. "Why, Mother . . ."

But Elinor's merry brown eyes were smiling at her, and Arethusa understood. She swooped upon her joyously, with the danger of damage to the Green Gown in her sudden movement, and hugged her mother swiftly.

"It's just," she exclaimed, "it's just that if you knew Aunt 'Liza you would understand!"

Ross had also said something of the kind, only the day before. So Elinor was beginning to feel a rather respectful interest in Miss Eliza.

Then Arethusa and Elinor, the dress carefully removed and folded into a box that they might take it with them, while Arethusa's jealous eyes watched until the last knot was fast in the string which tied that box, departed happily to a lower floor in search of slippers and stockings to match and complete the costume.

These purchased, and deposited with the dress-box in the automobile, Elinor directed Clay to drive to "Parnell's."

"We'll go get a soda water," she said, "after this trying morning."

"But I don't feel the least bit sick," remonstrated Arethusa, with memories of Miss Letitia's packet of soda tucked into the corner of her satchel.

Elinor explained.

Later, she told Arethusa she was very likely to be needing Miss Letitia's sort, when after her second glass of a beverage of a most seductive taste, she expressed a desire for a third drink of this new and altogether charming "soda water."

## CHAPTER XV

Arethusa had not the faintest idea what a "dinner-dance" might be. She knew very well what a dinner was, and she could conceive of the glories of a dance, but as a combination they eluded her. The only picture she could form for herself of such an entertainment was a strange conglomeration of eating and dancing; eating for awhile, and then dancing; and so on, first one and then the other, until time to go home. But whatever the exact nature of it, it would be her Very First Party.

Hitherto, her expeditions into the social world had compassed nothing more shattering to her nervous system than church entertainments and occasional spend-the-days. Miss Eliza was no very great believer in Parties as an influence for good in Arethusa's development.

Arethusa, had she been permitted, would have gone straight to bed and slept soundly and dreamlessly until Friday night, asking only to be waked when it was time that she dress before seeking the scene of festivity. But her preparation for the Event helped to pass the two days that she must wait.

She had once, long ago, found in the garret at the Farm, when poking about there on a rainy day that had kept her housed, a little book with her grandmother's name in faded writing on the fly-leaf.

Its title, almost indistinguishable outside on the worn board covers, but plainly enough visible within, read:

“ Advice to Young Ladies  
of  
Good Family  
on  
Entering Society  
for the  
*First Time*  
By  
A Former Belle ”

This little volume she had brought with her to Lewisburg, packed in the box with her green ribbon, the box that had been slipped into the canvas-covered trunk unknown to Miss Eliza. Arethusa had been very sure there would be Parties for her to attend; had not Miss Asenath told her so? Had not a dress for them been provided? And the book would clear up her ignorance of the line of conduct recognized as to be followed at these entertainments.

The first time she had read it, it had seemed to her to cover every contingency that might arise in the most varied and active of social careers. But there was absolutely nothing in it, she was sorry to see, when she fished it out of the trunk and climbed into her window-seat to study it this day before the Party, relating at all directly to dinner-dances; although two whole chapters were devoted to a full discussion of the subject of dinners.

She went through the pages again and again, but not once did the magic word she hunted greet her eyes. Then she went back to a paragraph in one of those chapters headed “Dinners,” which had particularly attracted her attention.

“A Young Lady,” so it ran, “should be thoroughly

conversant with the affairs of the day and able to take part in an intelligent and lively way in conversation regarding the same with her fellow guests, most especially that member of the other sex next whom she may be seated at the festive board. In a manner of the proper reserve and deference to masculine opinion, she should endeavor to introduce topics that would promote animated and interested discussion among those nearest her, thus adding to the enjoyment of the party and assisting the efforts of her hostess to make the occasion prove an auspicious Event, which is one of the very first requirements of the true guest. It is well, also, before attending a dinner-party, where most of the evening's entertainment inevitably consists of conversation over the delicious viands, to be ready with thoughts formed for expression as opinions in regard to the polite arts; to be well-read in the current novels such as are proper for young females of good family to have read: for talk and discussion may often be led adroitly in such directions with pleasure and profit."

Here, Arethusa dropped the little book, bitterly disappointed, to look out of her window for awhile at the automobiles whirling past her down Lenox Avenue. She leaned her head against the window-casing and reviewed what she had read.

After all, there was nothing to help her very much. She knew scarcely anything about the affairs of the day. Miss Eliza had never allowed her to touch the only newspaper that came to the Farm, not considering her old enough. She had not the vaguest idea what the "polite arts" were, and as to the books she had read, she was very uncertain whether they might be called "current novels."

She picked up her book to read further and discovered that . . .

“Poetry may often be introduced with charm and effect. A few lines of verse, judiciously interspersed with the conversation; pearls of the thought of our great masters of the world of rhyme falling from the ruby lips of the young and fair daughters of Eve, have often caused a masculine heart to beat faster and to be thrown around the lovely borrower of words an atmosphere of gentle and refined erudition that nothing else could so well impart.”

Arethusa brightened up. Here, she felt more at home.

She could certainly learn Poetry! In fact, she had no need to learn it, for she already knew quite a lot. She had read *The Family Poetry Book* through from cover to cover, a hundred times at least. It contained a great deal of Scott and Burns, and many long delightful ballads such as “Lord Ullin’s Daughter,” and “The Cruel Sister,” as well as Irish melodies that charmed with their plaintive atmosphere. England, however, had not been neglected, for the work of the Lake Poets held a prominent place, and there was much of Tennyson, his “May Queen” cycle, and “Sir Galahad.” “The Prisoner of Chillon” was Arethusa’s favorite of Byron’s representation; she knew it from end to end. And she knew all of those specifically named off by heart, for the swinging lines of a ballad form were Arethusa’s idea of what real poetry should be. But the compilers of the big brown book, which was sacred to the marble-topped center table in the parlor at the Farm, had not stayed entirely on the other side of the ocean; and so Arethusa could recite many of the verses of our own sweetest singers of that day; as well as many that were scattered throughout the book that were signed “Anonymous”; and many that had

been written by dead and gone men and women whose very existence would have been forgotten by a fickle world, had not *The Family Poetry Book* preserved an imperishable record of their achievements.

"Yes," exulted Arethusa, "I know some Poetry!"

She read on, greatly cheered.

"Conversation," continued the quaint little pamphlet of advice, "is best carried on if some definite topic is introduced. This, however, must be accomplished with ease and grace, lest a feeling of awkwardness be aroused."

Arethusa descended to the library and hunted up a dictionary, to look for "topic."

She discovered it to be:

"The subject of any distinct portion of a discourse; a theme or subject as of talk or thought."

This was fairly clear. "I might find a Topic," she thought, for she surely could not quote poetry all through the evening. "I might read about something I could talk about."

Her eyes roved restlessly down the same row of the bookcase where she had got the dictionary. It was nearly all Encyclopedia, stretching away in a formidable array of volumes exactly alike, except for the tiny gold lettering across the center of the back. She lifted out one at random, the "L's," and it opened accommodatingly of its own accord, when its heaviness slid out of her grasp, to "Lepidoptera." Which was a strange and almost unpronounceable word; but the pictures which accompanied this text were somewhat explanatory of its meaning, being all of familiar looking butterflies and moths.



Arethusa grew interested. She spread herself comfortably out on the floor, there in the corner, and began to read; and she gleaned as she read several facts that might "with profit" be introduced into a conversation.

For instance; she learned that there were over fifty different families of these Lepidoptera, and that all of these family divisions were divided also, so many times that they have never all been counted or classified; that all common moths and butterflies belonged under this big head, as well as some "cousins," so aristocratic and so wonderful in their colorings that Arethusa exclaimed aloud over their beauty in the large plate on the page just opposite; and that every single, solitary member of every family, whether of high or low degree, came from some sort of caterpillar. She discovered that these Lepidoptera had traits of character which still further differentiated them. They were exceedingly finicky about their food, she read; the meat of one variety seemed to be the deadly poison of another. And some of them could live under the water; some drowned in a drop of rain.

She committed to memory some of the most interesting and peculiar of the names of the families, so as to be ready when the "member of the other sex next whom she was seated at the festive board" should become so interested in her Topic of Conversation as to inquire.

One of these names was "Nymphalidae," which the writer of the article declared was the largest family of all; and included the commonest of the gaily colored butterflies one saw flying about every day. Arethusa took a deep personal interest in this family, because of its name. She was well acquainted with nymphs, and knew exactly where her own pretty name had been found. This was all sure to prove interesting to her

fellow diners-out. It was most fascinating to read.

Elinor and Nettie, Elinor's maid, helped Arethusa to dress for the Party.

It was well that she had their assistance, for she could never have got into that Green Frock alone and unaided. There was an intricacy and invisibility of fastening about it that her trembling, excited fingers could never have managed. Nettie, with the air of an artist loving her work, piled Arethusa's hair up high to show the sweep of the line of her neck and head which Elinor, watching critically from the green sofa, decided was particularly good. And Nettie poked and pulled and fussed with Arethusa as one who dressed a beloved doll, and the result was altogether good.

Ross had hied himself to the florist and his daughter was the recipient of her first flowers, an anonymous bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley which caused much excitement, largely compounded of pleasure, when they arrived; and which looked just as if they had grown with the other wee blossoms out of the green of the frock when Elinor pinned them at its waist.

Arethusa found it hard to believe that the reflection she gazed at in her own long mirror was herself, even after seeing that other so glorified Arethusa in the mirrors of the shop the other day; for this was still more Wonderful. It was metamorphosis from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. The new arrangement of her hair imparted an air of quaint dignity that was immensely becoming and that made her appear a trifle older. Its piled masses shown like burnished copper under the bright glare of numerous electric lights; and under the same brilliance her arms and neck seemed more like creamy satin than ever. She noted with deep satisfaction that the tiny bridge of freckles which she

considered absolutely spoiled her nose, was almost invisible when viewed by this artificial illumination. She struck one satin slipper from under the edge of her dress and lifted her skirts high to see her feet. They looked Perfectly Wonderful also. She did not know them as her own feet.

Elinor had gone to find Ross to show him the completed debutante, so Arethusa had time alone in which to admire to her heart's content.

She curtsied to the figure in the mirror, a long, sweeping, old-fashioned curtsey that ended with a "cheese," and the billowy gown spread itself out around her shimmeringly like the party frock of some belle of long ago; the "Former Belle" of her little book might have curtsied and looked just so. This charmed her utterly, and she did it again and again.

Then Arethusa suddenly leaned close to the mirrored figure and kissed its face fleetingly.

"Oh, but you are beautiful! Beautiful! I'm so glad you're beautiful!"

And Ross and Elinor, arriving at the door just in time to hear the exclamation, slipped away again lest they should spoil her rapture in this impersonal admiration of her own fair self, by letting her know that they had heard.

Mrs. Chestnut was sending a youth by name of Harrison to escort Arethusa to the Party, a youth who did not want to come. He had fully intended to go alone to the festivities since his own particular inamorata was already provided with company, and thus he would have the best of chances to show this lady a "real time."

But Mrs. Chestnut, being his own blood aunt, felt perfectly privileged to call upon him in emergencies,

and so his carefully laid plans were all upset with the "country jane" shoved upon him for the evening.

He was one of the few beaux of Lewisburg who possessed an automobile — entirely his own — in which to carry ladies to Parties. When he appeared with it, he handed the cocoon that was introduced to him as Arethusa into the back seat and climbed, ungraciously, in front all by himself. Conversation on the road to the Party was clearly an impossibility, so Arethusa reviewed her knowledge of the article on "Lepidoptera," and recited under her breath a few selections of the Poetry she had deemed most appropriate for use on this occasion. She was as ready for eventualities as she knew how to be.

Mr. Harrison dumped his cocoon in the dressing-room and departed, in search of a little refreshing man-talk before taking up his arduous duties in connection with Arethusa.

As Elinor had instructed her to wait until he should return for her, Arethusa waited. But they had been so late in their coming that the few girls who had been in the room when she arrived, were soon gone with their liveliness and laughter, and the tardiest guest was left alone. She sat on the extreme edge of a chair quite near the door as she waited, and tapped her feet impatiently.

The Party seemed already to be in full swing; music was playing, and she caught a glimpse of dancers in the large ball room at the other end of the hall. It was maddening to be so near It and not a part of It. She went to the door and peered out. She considered that Mr. Harrison was entirely too long in returning. But he was amusing himself in the hall, and was not in the least hurry to take up the burden of his evening.

One of the men in the little group where he stood, whose eyes were towards that dressing-room door, noticed Arethusa.

"Who's the stranger?" he enquired, "And she's some looker, too, believe me."

The whole group turned as one man to stare in Arethusa's direction. Mr. Harrison was unpleasantly reminded of what was before him.

"I've got a skirt in there," he muttered, "and I might as well go get her, I reckon."

"This one yours? Confide in us, Harry, and introduce us, immediately if not sooner. The idea of your keeping anything like that all to yourself!"

"No." Mr. Harrison was admiring Arethusa's lovely, eager face. "I haven't any idea who she is! Wish I did know! But mine's a hayseed, daughter of a friend of Aunt Nell's up from the country for the very first time in her life! That's what I drew for being in the family! Well, pray for me, fellows, for here goes!"

He made straight for Arethusa.

With each step he took towards her, the greater his admiration grew. Mr. Harrison's affections fluttered from girl to girl like a moth in a room full of candles, unable to settle down steadily to one particular flame. He did not recognize Arethusa as his lady for the evening. He had been so late in going for her that she had been all muffled and waiting for him when he arrived. And he had not cared to look very closely at the figure in those wrappings. Mr. Harrison asked very little of the damsels he honored with his attention, save that they be pretty. He decided, without the slightest hesitancy, that Arethusa was the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

She did not see him coming, or even hear his approach, with all her thought for the gay scene before her, until he asked her if she would mind telling Miss Worthington that Mr. Harrison was waiting for her.

Then she turned and smiled such a welcome of him from her shining eyes, that the weather-vane of Mr. Harrison's volatile affections veered to point straight Arethusa-ward.

"Oh, it's you! I'm so glad! I've been wishing you'd come! I thought maybe you'd forgotten!"

And the weather-vane became firmly fixed.

But Mr. Harrison felt as if some audible apology were surely due this dream of a girl for all those unkind things he had thought (and uttered), earlier in the evening, that her entertainment should have devolved upon himself. He considered himself now the very luckiest of mortals.

Arethusa laughed at his attempt at vindication of his first greeting of her, that ripply soft laugh of hers, and the susceptible Mr. Harrison named it the most musical, and the prettiest, laugh he had ever heard.

"You didn't know me, did you? I don't wonder, because I was so wrapped up when you came for me, and it was Mother's cloak! She thought I might take cold, because I'm not used to going out at night, and my own cloak wasn't near warm enough, she said; and so she . . ."

Then Arethusa paused, and flushed prettily with embarrassment. One did not confide such intimate personalities to strange gentlemen at Parties, she was quite sure, from that close study of the little book. She must be more careful of her tongue.

But Mr. Harrison cared not a bit what she said, or whether she ever said anything at all. She was a joy

for him to behold if she never opened her mouth. He escorted her, with the pride of a personal possession, to Mrs. Chestnut and introduced her. Mrs. Chestnut held her hand kindly for a moment and spoke of Elinor, and expressed a Hope that Arethusa would have a Good Time; then passed her on to Emily, who was almost hidden behind a mass of roses she carried, and so excited at the Whole Affair, she could pay no real attention to Arethusa; but she managed to transfer her to her older sister just next; and the older sister to a cousin or so next to her, and a bosom friend or two thrown in for good measure.

It was a long receiving line and Arethusa was so utterly bewildered long before she had ever reached the end of it, by this way she was shoved, so to speak, from person to person, without ever really finding out who half of them were, for it would seem as if there had been a conspiracy to mumble the names spoken to Arethusa, that she could almost have fled the Party. "The Advice to Young Ladies" had said nothing of such a proceeding as being part of the Routine of Parties, nor had Elinor made any mention of it. Arethusa was totally unprepared. And it was, as an experience, well calculated to dampen even the exuberance of spirits with which Arethusa had fared forth to this new adventure. Everyone about her seemed to know everyone else intimately; she had no part in the gay greetings of old friends. It made her feel herself, as she watched, the only stranger at the Dinner Dance.

So she clung to Mr. Harrison for an old acquaintance, as to a rock in a weary land of unfamiliar surroundings. But such clinging was really unnecessary; for he wanted not to leave her side. Arethusa's little confusion only made her prettier.

“Am I going to sit by you at the dinner-table?” she asked him, when she had summoned sufficient courage to add this bit to the general uproar of pleasant conversation. It would help matters mightily, if she was.

“I don’t know,” he began slowly, but then he added, very briskly indeed, “but I can go find out and change the cards around if you’re not.”

“Oh, don’t leave me! Don’t leave me!” Arethusa fairly shrieked this request, and she grabbed at his coat-tails as he started away. “Please don’t go off and leave me!”

Consequently, he was forced to leave her when they finally sought the dining-room, and he was miles away on the other side of the huge apartment at another table. Arethusa found herself next to a perfectly strange youth, a rotund, almost moon-faced individual with eyes that danced good-humoredly behind glasses.

This person addressed himself strictly to business, weeding out from the silver by his plate with such a reassuring air of knowing that he did the right thing, a small article shaped like a tiny pitchfork, that Arethusa followed suit immediately.

But she had a very decided dislike of eating blindly ahead without knowing what it was she ate, and although the objects before her presented a rather familiar appearance, she wanted to be quite positive. Having somewhat recovered her spirits by this time, it was not so hard to ask her neighbor the question. He did not look at all formidable, and one talked to one’s partner at dinners, so the “Advice” had said, and it had not specified any condition of previously knowing that partner.



## CHAPTER XVI

"Would you mind telling me," inquired Arethusa, as courteously as possible, "what these are?"

But her neighbor paid no attention.

She repeated her request, raising her voice a trifle. "Maybe he's deaf," she thought.

And this time he turned. "I beg your pardon . . . But did you speak to me?"

"Yes," she replied, "I asked you to tell me what these were."

He stared at her, surprised into a direct reply, "Why, they're oysters!"

"Oysters!"

Arethusa examined them critically. No wonder they had looked so familiar! "But they're raw!" she exclaimed.

"It's an oyster cocktail! Of course they're raw!"

"But I never saw them this way before! I didn't know people ate raw fish at Parties! I . . . This is the Very First Party I ever went to," she explained. It was surely extenuation enough for any ignorance of the customs of such gatherings!

His glance searched her, up and down. He struggled visibly with amusement. It was all he could do not to laugh outright.

"I suppose you're visiting here?" he remarked, after awhile, when speech was once more somewhat of a possibility.

Arethusa thought it was most polite of him to show this interest. She nodded.

"I'm Arethusa Worthington."

"Arethusa Worthington!" The youth was all real interest and animation at once. "Not Mr. Ross Worthington's daughter! Why, I . . . I'm proud to call him one of my best friends! I'm just crazy about that man! I met him abroad. And so you're really his daughter! I certainly am glad to meet you! Now, that I think of it, I believe he did tell me the other day that you were coming!"

Arethusa smiled all over, showing every dimple; she felt at home immediately with any friend of her father's, self-announced though he might be.

"My name's Watts, Miss Worthington," he continued, "William Watts. But most people call me 'Billy.'"

"I don't know you quite well enough yet to call you 'Billy,'" she replied, seriously reproofing. "But wasn't it just dear that we happened to sit next to each other?"

Mr. Watts enthusiastically agreed. And acquaintanceship established on this firm foundation, he turned his attention once more to food.

"Don't you like oysters?"

"Yes, but they look so horrid! Ugh!" Arethusa shivered. "Generally, I love 'em, but these are raw! I never ate any raw ones before!"

"Go ahead and try them," he urged in all friendliness. "If you like them at all, you'll like them this way, too, I'll bet."

But she still hung back, "I don't know how."

"It's perfectly easy. Just like this." He speared one and lifted it to show her.

Arethusa watched the operation, fascinated at his skill, but she shook her head with decision when he suggested that she do likewise.

"I couldn't possibly. I believe I'd drop it. That little pitchfork thing doesn't look near big enough to hold such an enormous oyster."

"Oh, you won't drop any," he encouraged; "nobody ever has that I have heard of. Go on and try."

"No," she shook her head again, "no, I don't believe I will. I think I'd much rather practice at home first."

For it looked far too difficult to attempt thus offhand, even though reassured that none had ever been dropped. And should one really miss its way to her mouth and fall off the pitchfork thing to land in her lap? Well, the Dress was far too beautiful and too precious to be risked so foolishly. Those oysters had a most slimy appearance.

There was a little silence while the epicurean Mr. Watts consumed his oysters unaccompanied.

Arethusa wondered if the time was ripe for her to introduce into the Conversation the Subject of Lepidoptera, but if it was, she was quite at a loss how to do so with "ease and grace." Perhaps a little Poetry would be appreciated, but there was nothing as yet with which it could be "interspersed." None of the verses she knew had any remotest application to what had been said so far.

Mr. Watts finished his oysters to the very last one, and then turned her way with a little sigh of satisfaction.

"You certainly did make a mistake this time, Miss Worthington, for those were perfectly bully. This

hotel is rather famous for its sea food, you know, especially for oysters."

Now Arethusa was getting somewhat tired of hearing of these bivalves and their extremely succulent taste; she did not want the entire evening to be given over to a discussion of oysters. There were other things. The Subject she had been at such pains to prepare, for instance, would make a much more interesting Conversation. So she plunged right in.

"Do you know anything about Lep—lep-e-e-top-dera?" she asked, with a charming and social smile.

He looked frankly puzzled.

"Moths and butterflies," she added, in explanation to that questioning expression.

"No, I bite. What about 'em?"

"I thought they would be nice for us to talk about. I read about them in the Encyclopedia so I could. The 'Advice to Young Ladies' said at a dinner you must always have something to talk about."

But this "member of the other sex next whom she was seated at the festive board" was not at all affected by her attempt to make the evening pleasant as Arethusa had been led by the little book to believe he would be; for after a momentary stare, he began to laugh.

He went through all the gamut of mirth. He gurgled. He giggled. He shrieked. He roared. And he even pounded on the table.

"Oh, but this is rich!" he gasped. "My word! But this is rich! It's the very richest thing I ever heard!"

His unseemly merriment attracted the attention of nearly everybody around them.

Arethusa was rather startled by his laughter at first, and then she was infuriated; for she realized that it was laughter directed straight at her. Timothy could have told Mr. Watts that it was very unsafe to laugh at Arethusa; that she hated nothing in the world so much as to be laughed at. Her eyes darkened with anger, and the mirthful one was given the full battery of their wrathful blazing.

But he did not even pause. He laughed on and on, uncontrollably.

So she reached over and pinched him with all the power of strong young fingers on the very fleshiest part of his arm.

His laughter stopped abruptly. "Say," he exclaimed, "that hurt like fury!"

"I meant it to hurt!" breathed Arethusa, and she turned as far away from him as was possible, owing to the fact that their chairs were so close together.

She was trembling all over with her rage, and he mistook it for weeping.

"I didn't mean to make you cry, Miss Worthington," he began.

Her angry dark eyes flashed around at him for a moment. "I'm not crying!" she announced with emphasis, and then turned away from him again.

But that one brief glance had shown him how far she was from tears. "Well, I most certainly didn't mean to make you mad," he had only to change the words of his apology. "But . . . that was funny!"

"Why?" she demanded, peremptorily, half turning back to face him.

"It just was! You ask your father!" Arethusa's expression remained most unrelenting. "But I really do beg your pardon, in all humbleness, for laughing at

you. It was horribly rude of me, I'll have to admit, and I'm certainly sorry that I did it. So do forgive me this time, and let's go on being friends. Please . . ." he coaxed.

Arethusa softened, just the least bit. "But why was it so funny, what I said? You didn't tell me. Oughtn't I to have said it?"

"It wasn't what you said. There wasn't anything so dead wrong in that. You could talk about such creatures all you wanted, I suppose, and still not commit anything that wasn't right according to Hoyle. It was the way you handed it out that got my goat so completely!" He gurgled reminiscently. "But listen here, Miss Arethusa, you do just what I'm telling you and you let the natural history alone for the rest of this party, no matter what your book said about it. You can the high-brow stuff from now on, and you'll get along better."

She could plainly tell that every word of this was meant as advice between friends. It was impossible to construe Mr. Watts' manner as anything but eagerness to help. And it sounded delightfully like Timothy in their happier moments.

Her face broke into a forgiving smile.

She informed her repentant neighbor of how he had pleasantly reminded her of Timothy; just who Timothy was, and all about him. Mr. Watts was the personification of absorbed interest. Timothy sounded to him as if he might be a "human being," he declared, and quite worth while.

Arethusa and her adjacent "member of the other sex" managed to get along famously for the rest of the dinner, oblivious to the fact that each had another person on the other side, Mr. Watts because he did not

like the girl in blue at his left, and Arethusa because she was almost unconscious that there was anybody else at this table beside their two selves. Mr. Watts was quite sufficient for her entertainment.

As the courses proceeded and Arethusa ate and laughed and chattered away, from time to time her glance roved around the huge dining-room, so gorgeously decorated for this occasion, admiring everything she saw, the diners themselves, as well as the decorations. There were some very pretty girls at this Party, as well as some passably handsome men; and Arethusa liked the contrast of the sombre black and white of the men's attiring silhouetted against the gay dresses of the girls near them. And she liked to watch them as they laughed and talked together.

Among the faces which most interested her was one, a man's face, to which she returned again and again to steal a look. Finally, she asked Mr. Watts to tell her who he was.

"The one next to the girl with the feather fan, at that second table by the pillar."

"Oh, that? That's Gridley Bennet."

There was something in the way he said the name that made Arethusa ask if there was anything wrong with Mr. Bennet.

"Nothing I know of. He's just our prize debutante's delight."

"Why . . . What?"

"Lady-killer," he amplified. "All the girls are crazy about him."

"I don't wonder!" Arethusa's own admiration was wholly undisguised by now. "He's the handsomest man I ever saw!" she added recklessly.

"He's handsome enough, I reckon, but he knows

it almost too well. And he just hates himself!"

"That's a horrid thing to say about anybody; I don't believe it at all! And how on earth could he help knowing he's good-looking if he ever looks in the mirror! There's no harm in knowing you're good-looking if you are!"

The subject of this discussion looked far more as those charming gentlemen pictured in the advertising sections of our various current magazines to show the superiority of certain brands of collars and other necessary articles of manly garb were intended to look than the artists have ever been able to make the pictures. He was superbly tall and broad of shoulder; in every way he fulfilled the most exacting requirements of what a Hero should be. No dream of a Prince Charming could have formed a being half so well-fitted for the rôle as this living Reality.

He wore his faultless dress clothes as if they had been a veritable part of him, not something donned for the few hours of this evening. And he had gold-tipped eyelashes every bit as long as Arethusa's own (she could tell that they were even so far away as she sat from him), and the most irresistible of smiles. He smiled with commendable frequency. Perhaps he knew that his rows of teeth were as perfect as ordinary human teeth could very well be, and that this superlative smile was in consequence no trifling addition to his other attractions of person. He had a little trick of flinging his head back when he laughed aloud, that showed to still greater advantage all of these wonderful teeth, and his eyelashes, and even called attention to the perfect straightness of his handsome nose.

He laughed for Arethusa's benefit as she watched him, and she smiled in sympathy for such a charming



laugh, although she was so far across the room from him she could have no idea why he laughed.

And then she gazed and gazed at him, unashamed; a tiny sigh fluttered through her parted red lips.

"I wish I could meet Him!"

"That's perfectly simple," remarked Mr. Watts. "Introductions haven't gone out yet, as I have heard." His tone was scornful, but it was all lost on Arethusa.

"Could you introduce me?" eagerly.

"I might, if really urged." Then he added, half to himself, "It's a regular slaughter of the innocents whenever Grid Bennet goes to a debutante party. He ought to be barred from 'em by law."

"I think you're jealous of him," said Arethusa reprovingly.

"I haven't a thing to be jealous of him about, and just to prove it, here goes."

And as the Party was all beginning to rise from the tables, Mr. Watts headed straight for Mr. Bennet. He was a trifle disgusted with Arethusa for this display of enthusiasm over Gridley Bennet. His type did not appeal to Mr. Watts very much.

But it certainly did to Arethusa.

A nearer view of Mr. Bennet showed him to her as even handsomer than she had thought at a distance. The Introduction was a Momentous Affair, far more of a Real Event than any introduction in which Arethusa had ever participated. Mr. Bennet's manner of bending over her hand in his acknowledgment of it called loudly for satin knee breeches and lace ruffles, silver buckled shoon and a decorative sword, as the most appropriate accompaniments. It was delightfully suggestive, to the thrilled Arethusa, of the pages

of her favorite novels of those days when ladies' hands were kissed in public.

"Grid's squishy manner would get him anywhere he wanted with the skirts, even if he didn't have the looks to back it up," commented Mr. Watts, with inward dryness, of the meeting.

"I've been watching you for some time, Miss Worthington," was Mr. Bennet's flattering opening to the conversation, "and I was planning an introduction to you just as soon as dinner was over."

Now he very probably had not noticed her at all until Billy Watts had him face to face with her, but he could no more help saying such things than he could help his breathing. He was built just that way.

But Arethusa found no reason to doubt the sincerity of these charming words. And his little way of looking at her and of leaning toward her as he talked, were a perfect corollary, seeming to single her out from among all these hundred or more feminine beings in the vast room as the one whose company he most ardently desired. "These other stupid folks do not exist for me at present," proclaimed his manner, "and I am just where I most want to be."

Her heart fluttered painfully. She could only stand there at first, silently flushing and paling by turns, at a loss for the words of a reply that should suitably acknowledge such a marvelous greeting of her insignificant self. Then the music started up in the ball room at the other end of the hall, and she moved away with all the rest of the Party toward the sound, at Mr. Bennet's side, still quite unable to find her generally so-ready tongue.

"Shall we dance?" asked Mr. Bennet courteously,

as they walked. His voice was another of his distinct attractions, rather deep and with the slightest possible drawl.

Arethusa paused just under the broad arch of the ballroom doorway, and so Mr. Bennet paused also, to watch the dancers for a moment, all of them bending and turning and twisting to a tune of such impelling rhythm that it would have made a wooden-legged man almost to attempt the impossible, and then to curse his fate; then she lifted troubled eyes to Mr. Bennet.

"But I don't dance what they're dancing."

"Oh, yes, you do, I'm sure," with the intimation in his tone that she was sure to be the very best dancer on the floor. "It's only the one-step."

Arethusa could not help but laugh.

"Well, it certainly doesn't look anything like the one-step that *I* know! You see, Mr. Bennet, I've never been to any Parties. Timothy just taught me some down in our barn." She was beginning to feel a little less awed by his magnificence as a Man, for he was, after all, human, and quite inclined to be kind.

"Then let me give you another lesson, now . . . Do, please. You won't really need it as a lesson though, I know."

Still she hesitated. Yet her feet unconsciously kept time to the gay music as she stood, just watching.

"Surely you won't confer a favor on this Timothy person you'd deny to me," and Arethusa was quite convinced there was a wee tinge of reproachful jealousy in Mr. Bennet's attractive voice. "I may not prove to be so good a teacher as he is, but I shall certainly do my best."

Arethusa laughed again; with real merriment this time.

The very idea of Timothy as a better teacher of anything than this Wonderful Mr. Bennet!

The picture of herself in those blue print dresses she wore around the Farm and Timothy in khaki trousers and blue flannel shirt, hopping about on the barn floor (which, though clean-swept and smooth, was hardly meant for dancing) to tunes which were hummed and whistled by each alternately, rose before her; and she compared it in its utter inferiority with this picture of herself in this Heavenly Green Frock and Mr. Bennet in his Perfect Evening Clothes, the shining floor which stretched away from them, and the lilt of the band music which went to her head like wine.

She shook her head. "But suppose I should fall down or something. This floor looks so dreadfully slick and hard to stand up on. I wouldn't mind a bit if I was awkward with Timothy. But . . ."

"I'm getting rather jealous of Timothy, I'm afraid," said Mr. Bennet. "Miss Worthington, you couldn't be awkward if you tried. And you won't fall down, I can promise to take care of that. Please give me this great pleasure."

So Arethusa allowed herself to be thus charmingly persuaded.

But it must be confessed that their start was a bit awkward.

Arethusa was horribly self-conscious, and not at all sure, despite his reassurance, that she was going to manage this new venture. After a few moments, however, and his low-spoken command to let herself be guided, her natural-born instinct to dance asserted itself, the self-consciousness wore away, and she was one-stepping with the best of any on that floor.

She was more certainly meant for a dancer. She

was as light as a feather, for all her height, and like a piece of thistledown she swayed and circled about the room in perfect time to the music. She seemed to feel instinctively the beat of the measures, and her flying feet obeyed Mr. Bennet's guidance, as if he and she had danced together all of their lives. Mr. Bennet himself was a truly wonderful exponent of the art. He danced with a grace and ease that few men ever attain, and he had an arm of sureness at his partner's back that took her safely through that crowded room without a single bump or mishap. Had Arethusa but known it, there was no one at the Party who could so well have conducted her in her first real effort of this kind as Mr. Bennet.

It was over much too soon to please her. She could have gone on for hours, just like that without a pause, and without once tiring.

"Why, you dance beautifully!" exclaimed Mr. Bennet, when the music stopped. "I verily believe," very softly, "that you were fibbing when you said you had danced so little!"

She looked up at him shyly, from under her long lashes, and blushed just a bit. "That was you. I couldn't have danced with anyone else that way. Timothy doesn't dance at all like that!"

Now this was the rankest ingratitude on Arethusa's part. For had it not been for Timothy's surreptitious lessons, so kindly and willingly given, she would never have experienced the intense pleasure of this one-step with Mr. Bennet. But Arethusa was honestly surprised at her own swallow-like ability to keep time to music that was played instead of whistled.

Then Mr. Harrison caught sight of her and rushed

across the room to claim her. He had been hunting everywhere for her, he declared.

Then Mr. Watts came in his turn, and inquired saucily, as he "broke in," if she had found Mr. Bennet as charming as he looked. But she laughed at him merrily, for his friendly teasing. She was too happy to be offended at anything.

And she laughed and chatted away with these two oldest acquaintances her most enthusiastic and Arethusa-like self; with every one introduced to her she had just as Wonderful a Time. There were a great many who asked to be introduced to her, for her shining eyes and her very evident enjoyment of everything she did made her an object of interest to nearly everybody who observed her. Arethusa was really one of the belles of the evening; such unreserved happiness as hers is bound to attract. Consequently, the Party fulfilled her most sanguine expectations as to what a Party should be, although she did not know how large was her own personal share in this fulfillment.

She entirely forgot that she had ever prepared a Topic of Conversation for the Occasion; she made no other mention of moths and butterflies; not once did she quote a line of Poetry. Her words poured forth in as mad a rush, as gaily inconsequential, as the words of the most hardened Party-goer who has ever been an assistance to her hostess in adding to the enjoyment of her fellow guests. Without making any conscious effort to do so, Arethusa followed Mr. Watts' kindly advice, and his words as to the result proved delightfully true.

The terpsichorean attempts which she made during the evening without Mr. Bennet's able guidance, might

have been managed with a little more gratifying success, had not her eyes been so prone to follow him in his whirling about the room, wherever she could, as he honored other ladies with his attentions. But when she did miss step, or stumbled, her apologies were so pretty, and she was so sincere in her confused regrets, that it could make no difference to any one with his heart in the right place.

Yet Mr. Bennet came back to Arethusa herself quite often to ask for dances — a truly flattering number of times — for it was a kindly fate that had given her that lightness of foot and her undeniable grace. Then too, Mr. Bennet, like Mr. Watts, knew Ross rather well, and he wanted to be nice to Ross's daughter for various reasons. And last, but not least, her ingenuous admiration of his own attractive person amused Mr. Bennet more than he had been amused for a long while.

There was one last wild romp of a dance as an encore from the more good-natured members of the orchestra, while the other musicians packed their instruments, and then the First Real Party was only a thing to be remembered.

Mr. Bennet made a special point of telling Arethusa good-night, and he bent lingeringly over her hand as he did so, in his own inimitable way of making it seem the very hardest parting he had ever had to make.

"I'm coming to see you some time, if I may," he said.

Her heart almost stopped beating at this. Then it raced on again to beat in quick, little jumps. She lifted young, frankly adoring eyes to the handsome man before her, and quite suddenly, without a word of real warning, Arethusa knew . . .

*She had fallen in love!*

But it was not as she had fallen in love with Elinor, and it was not such love as she gave Ross or Miss Asenath or even Timothy; for this was without doubt the Miracle she had read about so many times under the hollow tree in Miss Asenath's Woods. And it had come just as she had always dreamed it would come, with a Hand-clasp and a Glance.

The hand in Mr. Bennet's holding trembled and grew cold before Arethusa could withdraw it. Her misbehaving heart almost interfered with her breathing. But the world around them went on as casually unaware of the Miracle as if neither Arethusa nor Mr. Bennet existed, when it should surely have been hushed into a Startled Silence by What had happened.

All through that night, Arethusa wandered with a tall man of long-lashed hazel eyes of marvelous beauty, through a country which was a Country of Rare Delight, even if only a Country of Dreaming. And as they wandered, he bent his head again and again to whisper, in a deep drawling voice, Words which bore a remarkable resemblance to some of the lyrics of the early nineteenth-century poets, and the pages of conversation in Arethusa's much read romances.

What though the Gentleman of the Dream wore a modern suit of commonplace evening clothes, instead of Ruffles and a Velvet Coat and Satin Small-clothes? It did not prevent, in the Dream, his pressing his Hand to his Heart at moments when it was logical that he should have done so, nor did it rob his Voice of the Proper Passionate Inflection. Nor did it keep the cardiac region of the Arethusa of the Dream from fluttering in an altogether delightful way.



## CHAPTER XVII

Ross took Arethusa out to the Country Club for a round of golf the next afternoon, and as it was the first and only time she had ever spied a golf club, it is not at all difficult to imagine what sort of game she played. It deserved a name all of its own; and her method of holding her club would have brought tears to the eyes of any true devotee of the sport. But from the standpoint of pure enjoyment for the two most intimately concerned, the occasion was a great success.

"I don't believe I care very much for golf," she remarked decidedly, after she had almost dug a trench around her ball on the second tee, "and I believe you move that ball, Father, when I'm not looking with my stick up over my head."

Ross protested his innocence, and insisted that she try once more. So she did. But when she missed it this time also, she was firm in her resolve to quit.

"You do move it, Father!" she repeated. "I just know you do! To tease me! Because, why shouldn't my stick come down in the right place when I know exactly where it is when I start to hit it, if you don't push it away?"

"Because of one of the cardinal rules of the game, my dear, 'Keep your eye on the ball.' You are demonstrating its truth of that aphorism every time you take your eye off."

"But how can I?" retorted Arethusa. "I've only got two eyes. How can I watch my ball and my stick and where I'm going to knock it, and everything, when they won't look but one way at once? I'm not cross-eyed!"

Ross gave it up as beyond his powers of reasoning.

So Arethusa put her driver back in the bag and announced that she would do the caddying. But as conversation is one of the things most unnecessary to a caddy, she could hardly be said to approach perfection in this rôle, either, though as Ross, very fortunately, did not take his golf with any too much seriousness, they got along in fine shape. Arethusa was outspoken in her loyal admiration of each one of his shots, and when he made one drive of two hundred yards and over, her proud delight was manifest all over the course.

She had not even begun to exhaust the dinner-dance and the Wonderful Mr. Bennet as congenial topics of conversation, although the breakfast-table and the luncheon-table had heard much of both, so she continued to find a great deal to say about them as they walked,—especially about Mr. Bennet, upon which subject she enlarged to Ross's amusement. But Arethusa did not consider that his replies to her raptures were suitably enthusiastic.

"Now don't you really think he's good-looking, Father?"

"Undoubtedly so, my dear."

"I think," Arethusa's expression was dreamy, and her eyes were far away, apparently on the hazy skyline, "I think that he looks just like a Prince!"

It spoiled Ross's drive from the seventh tee completely. He sliced far over into the tall grass, and

as she had not been watching as a caddy should, they had to go on without ever finding the ball.

While they were on the fourteenth fairway it began to rain in hard pelting drops, a fulfillment of the morning's promise of a heavy gray sky. Arethusa was in her element then, and as there was no Miss Eliza to drag her in by the power of her will, to all of Ross's entreaties that they seek shelter with more haste, she turned a deaf and unheeding ear. He was far more of a hot-house plant than his daughter, so he caught a violent cold from his drenching in the chilly fall rain, which made itself promptly known with much sneezing before he had gone to bed that night.

Arethusa was thoroughly conscience-stricken when he was unable to get up the next morning. She felt personally responsible for his aches and pains and his fever. It was her duty, she decided, as the contributing cause of it all, to nurse and amuse him. She refused to budge from his side for the next several days, indefatigable in her attentions. She read aloud to him, jumping up from her chair with almost every turning of a page to plump up his pillows with zeal, and to demand if he wanted anything. Arethusa was hardly a gentle nurse, even if a conscientious one. She fetched him veritable gallons of ice-water, and carried up his meals with her own fair hands. And while he dozed, at intervals through the days, she stayed near him, dreaming of Mr. Bennet. Ross accepted all of this solicitude with a lazy nonchalance, not in the least averse to being fussed over.

All of Sunday afternoon, Arethusa watched anxiously for Mr. Bennet. Had he not said that he was coming to call?

But he did not come, although Mr. Harrison and

Billy Watts and several other acquaintances made at the Party did. She denied herself to all of these visitors. How could she leave her sick father for such as they?

By Wednesday afternoon, however, Ross was undeniably better. Even Arethusa could see that he was, in spite of the fact that he continued to complain. But it was such complaining as only too plainly indicated that he was loth to relinquish any of this delightful attention he was receiving. So when George announced a caller who had asked for "Miss Worthington," Elinor, who had just that moment come back from down-town with those two new and widely advertised detective stories for Ross's amusement which he had earlier in the day expressed a desire to see, said that she would begin the reading aloud in Arethusa's place, and that Arethusa must receive the visitor.

"And you'll like Candace Warren, I think. She's rather a dear girl. I suppose she came to see you because I know her mother so well. It was very kind of her." To Elinor's rose-colored view of youth, all young girls were attractive because of what they were.

"I think it was perfectly lovely!" chanted Arethusa happily.

She would certainly see Miss Warren, come to call on a stranger in her city, just because of her mother's friendship for Elinor! There was a warm little glow in her heart at the thought of the kindness shown her by so many people for the sake of Ross and Elinor; the Chestnuts, and Mr. Watts, innumerable others at the dinner-dance, and now Miss Warren!

"I'll send George in with tea a little later on," said Elinor, "if you would like to have it."

Then Arethusa's face clouded somewhat. "But I wanted to have supper up here again!"

"Not supper, Arethusa, it's just afternoon tea. I thought perhaps it might help you to get acquainted."

That was very different. It might be great fun to have afternoon tea. She had read about it, and it had always sounded most delightful in the reading.

"But Aunt 'Liza says I can't pour anything," she added doubtfully. "She never lets me at home. She says my fingers are all thumbs."

George could pour it for her, if she wished.

And so with these trifling details arranged, and the tea a settled prospect, Arethusa went in search of Miss Warren.

She ran gaily down the wide front steps, humming a little tune, and skipped into the small reception room at the side of the hall, both hands cordially outstretched.

"I think it was *perfectly dear* of you to come to see me!" she exclaimed.

Miss Warren rose politely from the spindle-legged sofa where she had been sitting, and touched one of the outstretched hands with rather extraordinary limpness. She murmured something altogether indistinguishable.

Arethusa's cordiality felt somewhat thrown back upon herself. She sat down abruptly in the nearest chair. Miss Warren resumed her place on the sofa. There was a long silence, while the visitor covertly studied her hostess, and the hostess openly observed the details of her visitor's appearance with the frankest interest.

Arethusa thought Miss Warren was very pretty. She had coal black hair, although very little of it showed from under her hat, bright black eyes, and a

wonderfully white skin with a great deal of color in her lips and cheeks.

But it was her clothes that really most intensely interested the clothes-loving Arethusa.

For Miss Warren was exceedingly well-dressed in garments that could but excite admiration. She wore silky furs as black as her hair, soft and long and smoothly shining. Arethusa had a childish longing to stroke them. Miss Warren's suit was made of a marvelous sort of stuff unlike any material Arethusa had ever seen, dark wine in color, and it spelled "Paris" in every well-cut line. The blouse she wore was a superlative affair of lace and delicacy and tracings of fine embroidery. It could never have been called a "shirt-waist," as Arethusa's plain garments of the same shape with their simple rows of tucking were named. From one daintily gloved hand she dangled a gold purse, and several other small articles of the same metal of an unknown variety.

Arethusa's glance traveled downward, still admiring, and there it paused. For it was hard in the first glimpse to determine just where Miss Warren's feet could be, in those long narrow shoes, with the ends just like pointed pencils. It did not seem possible that human toes, of the number of five, could fit into one of those shoes. Arethusa looked suddenly at her own feet, and as Miss Warren's eyes were at that moment upon them also, they seemed to Arethusa to appear very large, and very awkward to have as feet, in her comfortable house slippers with the broad, round toes. She tucked them as far under her chair as she could, and felt a little hot. Miss Eliza had selected those slippers, as a special privilege of an extra pair of shoes

for the Visit. But they were a half-size larger than Arethusa ordinarily wore, because they had been the only pair obtainable at Tobin's, in Blue Spring. She had never minded this fact before, but by contrast with Miss Warren's so slim foot-covering they looked really dreadful.

Arethusa found it quite impossible to admire Miss Warren's hat, although liking everything else she wore so much. It was much too small to conform to Arethusa's ideas of beauty in a hat, and it came so close down over the visitor's delicate eyebrows, that it seemed impossible that she could have much of that black hair tucked underneath it. Arethusa began to feel a trifle better, minding the difference in feet and the house-slippers a little less, as she remembered her own glorious mop of redness; which, although so undesirable in color, could never have been squeezed into so small a space as that hat represented.

"I think it was perfectly dear of you to come to see me," said Arethusa for the second time.

But the words elicited very little more response than they had when first spoken.

Miss Warren seemed to be glad that Arethusa should feel as she did about her coming to call, but there was no real animation in her gladness.

The hostess cast around for sentiments, which if uttered, might loosen her visitor's tongue, but the visitor fortunately loosened it of her own accord.

"Do you like Lewisburg, Miss Worthington? Is this your first visit here?"

"Yes, and I just love it!" declared Arethusa, "Everybody is perfectly darling to me! I went to a dinner-dance the other night and had the Most Heav-

enly Time! Mrs. Chestnut's it was, at the Hotel. Were you there?"

Miss Warren had not been invited, she was sorry to say. She volunteered the information that she was a second-year girl, and that she believed that very few of them had been asked.

While her information as to the cause of it shed very little light, Arethusa was exceedingly regretful that her visitor had missed such a Wonderful Party. She described it in detail for the one so unfortunately deprived of first-hand enjoyment of the Heavenly Affair, bringing Mr. Bennet into the narrative.

Did Miss Warren, by any chance, know Mr. Bennet?

Miss Warren did.

Arethusa waxed more eloquent upon so moving a theme.

But Miss Warren had not added that Mr. Bennet had recently been devoting quite a little of his valuable time and attention to herself, and that there was very little of Mr. Bennet's charm that Arethusa could mention which she did not already know. One of the reasons she had called so promptly when her mother suggested a visit to Mr. Worthington's daughter was because she had been informed that Mr. Bennet had "rushed" the visiting lady at the Chestnut's dinner-dance, and so a very natural curiosity as to the personality of the visiting lady craved gratification as soon as possible.

Mr. Bennet as a subject was exhausted before very long, for Miss Warren was so very unresponsive that it was hard to continue the discussion of him in just the way it had started. Arethusa felt a shyness de-



scending upon her at the cold reception of her enthusiasm for the Wonderful Being who had so recently come into her life. Rhapsodies are well-nigh impossible unless the mood of the listener answers in some small degree.

So the conversation languished once more.

Miss Warren languidly dangled her gold purse and stared through the lace curtains of the window nearest her. It was gloriously autumnal as to weather this afternoon, and the world was gay to the vision. The trees were bright with their rapidly turning Joseph's coat of foliage, and the sunlight streamed like liquid gold. Overhead, the sky was the very clearest of bright blues. Lenox Avenue was unusually full of those who had been tempted out to revel in it; babies and nurses strolled past on the sidewalk, and loaded automobiles sped by in a sort of procession in the street.

Arethusa's regard was largely for the outside also. It was such a day as she adored. Then, feeling it was quite beyond her power to sit so unsociably so close to anyone in the same room, when it was so glorious a world they were both viewing, she turned back to Miss Warren with a friendly little smile.

"It's a perfectly beautiful day, isn't it?"

Miss Warren seemed to thaw a trifle. "It's just gorgeous outside!"

"I like fall better than spring, always," replied Arethusa, "and especially when it's like this."

"Yes," agreed Miss Warren.

The silence descended once more, to be first broken by Miss Warren with the polite inquiry, "Do you play bridge, Miss Worthington?"

Arethusa's surprised gray eyes were removed from

the window to which they had returned with the silence, to be fixed on Miss Warren.

"Do I what?" she exclaimed.

"Play bridge."

Miss Warren made this contribution to conversation for no other reason than that it had a strong personal appeal. And from her point of view, it had more possibilities as a theme for development than had the weather; the silence had grown almost oppressive.

Arethusa laughed gaily. She had played a game called "London Bridge" when she was quite small, she and Timothy and the little darkies from the washer-woman's cabin, and they had all liked it very much as a game; but they had never thought of calling it just "bridge."

"I used to play London Bridge when I was little, but of course I don't now."

"I meant cards," explained the visitor with a well-bred smile. "I'm perfectly mad about it. Though some people do like auction better, I never have."

Her smile had nettled her hostess. It had a calm superiority about it that was rather trying. "No," she replied, shortly. "No, I don't know anything about it, or that other thing either. Aunt 'Liza says playing cards are wicked."

The delicate black eyebrows of the visitor lifted a little.

"It's too bad if you don't play. There're so many bridge parties given here. And," she added, "Mr. Bennet plays a beautiful game."

Arethusa decided that Miss Warren was not nearly so pretty as she had at first considered her.

At this critical juncture, George made his entrance

with the tea-tray. Arethusa remembered she was a hostess and had a guest. She enquired if the guest would care for some tea.

The guest would be delighted to have some tea. She was famished, she added.

But Arethusa made no reply to this sally. She had not yet forgiven that last remark about Mr. Bennet's ability as a bridge-player.

While the tea and its attendant sandwiches were consumed almost in silence, Arethusa did some thinking. When in Rome do as the Romans do is an excellent old saw, and although Miss Eliza's views on the subject of games played with a deck of cards were firm and had been expressed so as not to be mistaken, Arethusa was meditating open defiance. If the Wonderful Mr. Bennet played bridge, then she, Arethusa, would learn the game, Miss Eliza or no Miss Eliza.

Over her last sandwich, she eyed Miss Warren.

"Is it very hard to learn?"

"What?"

"That . . . That card game you called 'bridge'?"

Miss Warren laughed with softness. Arethusa was really rather amusing.

"Why, not at all, I think, for some people. Would you care to learn? I'd be delighted to teach you myself, sometime. Mr. Bennet says I play a very good game."

Arethusa choked on her sandwich.

"I don't think I shall bother *you*," she said, pointedly; "Mr. Bennet would show me, if I asked him, I reckon."

Once more Miss Warren's well-bred and superior smile shone forth to arouse resentment. "I think if

I were you, Miss Worthington, that I would ask some one else first, because," very kindly, "Gridley Bennet is a perfect old maid about his game. It bores him almost to tears to play with a poor player or a beginner. I've heard him say so more than once. And men just simply hate that sort of thing when they do hate it, you know."

The air with which Miss Warren called the Wonderful Mr. Bennet by his Christian name was galling. It bespoke a degree of intimacy with his charming self from which Arethusa felt herself far removed. And her manner of stating his likes and dislikes was that of one who knew. Arethusa boiled over.

"I didn't ask your advice!" she exploded. "And when I want any of it, I'll let you know!"

Miss Warren looked surprised.

"Why, I . . ." she began, and then she decided that it was time to leave. She could not quarrel with Arethusa, and Arethusa looked very ready to quarrel.

As Miss Warren made her way gracefully homeward along the avenue, she decided that she really had nothing to fear from Mr. Bennet's casual attentions to the visiting lady at parties. She was countrified and queer, and her clothes were awful. Miss Warren knew Mr. Bennet to be a gentleman of taste. Yet she was glad she had made the call, for she had rather enjoyed it. It would be fun to tell Gladys, friend nearest her heart, all about it.

Arethusa went up the stairs about three at a time, and burst into Ross's room like a small whirlwind, cheeks glowing and hands still clenched in righteous anger at Miss Warren.

"Well, well," exclaimed Ross, "what has happened?"

Did not the fair Candace come up to expectations?"

"I thought you said she was a dear girl!" Arethusa looked accusingly at Elinor.

"And isn't she?" asked Ross mischievously.

"She's . . . she's a cat!" said Arethusa with emphasis. "She said perfectly awful things to me, and she was as nasty as could be to me about Mr. Bennet!"

"So that is where the shoe pinches! Elinor, dearest, methinks there is one of your friends' daughters who has no sort of attraction for our daughter. But Arethusa, my child, I told you, when you first mentioned his name, that he was in a class apart. I told you that he was no lonely floweret wasting his sweetness on the desert air, and that the competition where you would compete was keen. I told you . . ."

"Ross, for heaven's sake!" laughed Elinor.

"Arethusa is only finding out the truth of my words," replied Ross seriously. "She will learn to depend on her father with one or two more experiences of this kind."

Arethusa perched herself on the arm of Ross's big chair, and Ross tweaked at her ear affectionately. "Is that not so, mine own daughter?"

Arethusa disregarded this question, and asked one of her own.

"Could I learn bridge, do you reckon?"

Ross jumped. "Shades of Miss Eliza!"

"But could I?" recklessly; "Miss Warren said Mr. Bennet played a beautiful game and she said it was cards and that he was fond of it."

"I see. I've heard that he did. Well, something will have to be done about this. Myself, being the sort of player from whom the bridge world runs as one man cannot help you much. But Elinor might. She is said

to be somewhat proficient at it. We'll give Arethusa a bridge-party, how about it, Belovedest?"

Elinor agreed, and so Ross suggested a lesson right away.

And Arethusa was just starting off to fetch some cards and have George bring what Elinor spoke of a "card-table," when George himself knocked at the door to announce that Miss Arethusa was wanted on the telephone.

"Mr. Bennet wishes to speak to her."

Bridge lessons were forgotten as if they had never been heard of. Every vestige of color left Arethusa's face. Her hands clasped tightly over her suddenly tumultuous heart.

"To . . . To me, George? To me," she stammered; "are you real sure he said to *me*?"

George nodded, smiling. "He said, '*Miss Worthington*,' very plain, Miss Arethusa."

Then the deepest of red flamed back into her cheeks and she scuttled off down the hall so fast that she upset every single rug in her path.

Mr. Bennett was Waiting at the telephone!

## CHAPTER XVIII

Arethusa's trembling fingers could hardly find the telephone receiver at first, and even when once located, they could scarcely keep it to her ear.

"Hello!" her greeting was soft and almost breathless.

"Hello!" And she recognized the deep drawl immediately. "Is this Miss Worthington at the 'phone?"

"Yes, it's me, all right!" Arethusa was too excited to be quite grammatical. "But I've been running to get here, and I've lost my breath!"

At the other end of the line, Mr. Bennet smiled rather broadly, and his stenographer, just then depositing a pile of letters to be signed on his desk, could not help wondering what the young lady had said that was so funny. Mr. Bennet did not often smile so into a mere telephone.

"Well, this is Gridley Bennet talking."

"I knew it was!" happily.

"And I should like to know if you have any engagement for to-morrow night?"

"Oh, Mr. Bennet!"

"Have you?"

"Of course, I haven't!" Arethusa considered it a foregone conclusion that if he wanted her for anything, she was free.

"Then will you go to see the 'Earl and His Girl' with me?"

"What is that?"

"A musical comedy, and quite a good one, I've heard them say."

"Is . . . Is it the Theater?"

"Why . . . Yes! Certainly!" This surprised him just a bit.

"Oh, Mr. Bennet!" exclaimed Arethusa once more.

"I take it, then, you'll go with me?"

"You just bet! I should just love it! Why, I've never been to the Theater in all my life! Not even to the Opera House in Hawesville!" Hawesville was the county-seat.

Mr. Bennet laughed outright then. He had been smiling right straight through this conversation, to the deep interest of his blonde stenographer, who smiled herself in sympathy for the laugh. She took a frank pride in Mr. Bennet's popularity, his many invitations and his telephone calls. It was something to be stenographer to the very handsomest man in the fourteen-story building without his being one of the very nicest to work for, as well.

"That surely makes it all the better," said Mr. Bennet, "and I'll call for you about eight." Then he added, being what he was, "I was rather afraid I wasn't going to be allowed this great pleasure; I was sure one of those many youths that surrounded you the other evening had been before me."

"Well, they haven't. And I'm awfully glad they weren't, because I would so much rather go with you."

It was only the truth which Arethusa spoke, just as she had been taught it was best to do on every occasion.

Mr. Bennet was still smiling when he hung up the receiver and turned to the blonde stenographer. "Please get me two seats for to-morrow night at the



Masonic, Miss Ford. You'd better telephone first to see what they have, and then you can go after them." He looked up at the tall clock between the office windows. "And you needn't come back any more to-night, unless you yourself have something to do," he added kindly, "because these letters were all, and I can mail them. Just bring the tickets with you to-morrow."

Miss Ford, with a beaming face, sat down to telephone for the seats which were to introduce Arethusa to the world of the theater, while Mr. Bennet busied himself with the signing of his letters.

It was a kindly Providence that spared Arethusa the loss of life or limb on her way back to impart this marvelous piece of news, for such a plunge across slippery floors was never made before. Ross and Elinor seemed quite as excited over it as she could have wished, and had a very proper appreciation of the Signal Honor paid their daughter by the Princely-looking Mr. Bennet, although Ross was rather regretful that he had not realized before that she had never attended the theater. He would have taken her himself.

Elinor's most immediate concern was for the costume, and after due deliberation of Arethusa's slender wardrobe, it was decided a purchase must be made for this Occasion.

The next day was the longest that Arethusa had ever spent, in spite of all that had to be done toward getting ready for the theater expedition. The hands of the little silver clock on her mantel seemed to Arethusa to be afflicted with a sort of palsy, during the last hours of that day. She consulted them with frequency, but they never seemed to move forward enough to be noticeable. And deeming something to have happened

to the clock, for surely time could not creep so slowly by, she was ready and waiting for Mr. Bennet long before the stroke of eight.

On this visit to Miss Rosa, she had produced a Dress of the soft colors of the tinted autumn leaves, shading into almost the color of the bronzy hair of the girl who was to wear it. It was made with soft skirt on top of soft skirt, in these tones, of shimmering chiffon. It was as Wonderful a Frock in its way as the Green Frock itself. Arethusa fairly held her breath with delight when she saw it. And as it was such a very Momentous Occasion, far too momentous for anything borrowed to be worn, Elinor purchased her daughter, to wear with this dress, a cloak of soft velvet in deep olive green with a collar of fluffy brown fur that framed her glowing face in the most fascinating way possible.

So Mr. Bennet could not help but approve her appearance as he handed her into the automobile. He liked those ladies he escorted to festivities to do him credit. He was as much addicted to a liking for feminine loveliness as was ever Mr. Harrison. For Mr. Bennet had looked in the mirror often, and being a person of discernment, had liked what he had seen there; and he had a deep and abiding sense of the fitness of things. Had the gods been less kind to Arethusa in the matter of looks, undoubtedly her adoration of Mr. Bennet must have remained of a distance. But even a more carping critic than her escort could have found no fault with her this evening; from the crown of her ruddy head to the soles of her satin slippared feet, she was joy to the eye.

The theater lobby was full when they arrived, of a good-natured crowd that laughed and chatted and greeted its acquaintances gayly as it moved slowly to-

ward the inside entrance; where the women whose bare necks gleamed white in their settings of silks and velvets and furs, with their dress-suited men folks, were separated, like the sheep from the goats, for the downstairs of the theater, from the more plainly attired who climbed balconyward. Mr. Bennet and his lady belonged unmistakably with the sheep.

It would be a good house, judging from this number waiting to get inside. It was the first night of a much heralded show, "with the original New York company," its advance notices had said; and it had called forth what the morning newspapers of Lewisburg delighted to call a "representative audience."

Arethusa recognized, among the many, one or two faces she had seen to know at the dinner-dance, and so she could nod and smile a greeting or so, as she and Mr. Bennet pushed forward, with the rest of that crowd. But the people around her pressed against her so closely, that all unknown to Mr. Bennet, she timidly grasped the skirt of his overcoat and gripped it tightly for an anchor should they be forced apart. It was a fearful thought. What on earth *would* she do, if she lost him in that swarm of folks?

But once in the more open space inside, she breathed more easily, and could lose her hold, for separation was no longer to be really feared.

She looked about her then, as Mr. Bennet divested himself of that anchoring overcoat, and they waited for an usher, and, Arethusa-like, was deeply impressed with all that her eyes rested upon; the glittering crystal chandeliers that gleamed like hundreds of diamonds high above her, the distorted pair of cupids, unnaturally fat, who swayed from garlands of stiff flowers over the proscenium arch, the badly anatomized ladies on

the ceiling, riding impossible blue clouds; the gorgeousness of many gilded columns, and even the bright red plush of the seats. Arethusa's tastes were ever slightly rococo.

They were barely seated when the curtain rose, to a fanfare of sound more deafening than musical, and she gave a long drawn out and delighted, "O . . . Oh!" for a really pleasing riot of color was before her.

The advertising of this musical show had not so very far falsified its attractions. There was plenty of action in the piece, much trotting on and off the stage; a great many songs with an exceedingly active chorus doing its best, and the dancing was unusually good. It had a big company of principals, well costumed; and such music as was offered was almost music.

But Mr. Bennet gave up all pretense of watching the performance after a little while and devoted his attention entirely to Arethusa, for he had never seen anyone before who so personified enjoyment. Her eyes, great, deep pools of darkness, were glued immovably to the scene before her. A soft flush came and went in her cheeks. She clutched the programme that had been given her at the door tightly in one hand. She had made no move to open it. She had no time to waste on programmes. Once, at a very exciting moment, when the villain was eavesdropping within a hand's distance of the handsome Earl of the piece, she grabbed Mr. Bennet's arm and squeezed it painfully, almost totally unaware whose arm it was.

Then the curtain went down with a grand flourish to a long roll from the snare drum. It went up again, an encore to much applause, then down; then up and down swiftly several times. Arethusa clapped a great split right through the middle of her brand new gloves.

The curtain descended once more, and this time . . . It stayed. The lights in the theater flashed on.

It had seemed all too short a period of pleasure. Arethusa sighed as she rose and reached behind her for her Green Cloak.

"I wish," she said, regretfully, "I wish it had lasted longer!"

"Lasted longer!" exclaimed Mr. Bennet, "Why!"

"Isn't it over?" she almost shrieked.

"Over! Good gracious, child! That was only the first act! I believe there are two more, before it's over."

"Two more! Oh! Goody!" Arethusa plumped herself down again with such solid decision to stay where she was, that had her seat not been strongly made, she might have gone clear through it. "But I saw men going out! And I thought of course that was all! It did seem awfully short, though!"

That there should be two whole more acts; such richness of prospect!

The curtain rose for the second act, and Arethusa's smile began to widen in glad anticipation. Then it faded, and her expression changed to that of one rather bewildered. She looked all about her, but no one else seemed at all affected as she was herself. Everybody in the audience was gazing intently, and with pleasure, at the stage.

"What's the matter?" inquired Mr. Bennet.

Arethusa nodded towards the frolicking chorus girls who were just immediately back of the foot-lights, all with arms out-stretched to their responsive audience, singing vociferously of unintelligible words.

"It's . . . It's the girls."

"Yes . . ."

"They . . . They have on pa . . . pajamas." She stumbled a little over the word.

"Yes . . ." encouraged Mr. Bennet once more.

"They must have been resting," replied Arethusa.

"Resting?"

"Pa . . . pajamas are bedclothes," she explained, blushing just a bit.

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Bennet kindly, "but I don't just see . . ." He glanced back at the stage.

"I reckon they put them on to rest between the acts," continued Arethusa, "because they must have been tired, after dancing so hard, and the curtain must have gone up so quick they didn't have time to change. They must be awfully embarrassed to come out before us like that. I think it's mean to laugh at them. I wouldn't laugh for anything myself."

The picture conjured up by this speech of Arethusa's, of the chorus girls changing wildly to pajamas and reclining after the arduous labors of the first act, tickled Mr. Bennet more than anything that had happened on the stage, even the best efforts of the expensive comedian. And the effect upon him of the idea was the very same effect that the idea of moths and butterflies as a Topic of Conversation for Parties had had upon Mr. Watts, when Arethusa had presented it to him at the dinner-dance.

Mr. Bennet laughed.

His laughter was much more refined and less boisterous than that of Mr. William Watts, but Arethusa realized, nevertheless, that he was laughing at her. He was not laughing at the chorus girls who had been caught unawares by a rising curtain, in garments in which they had not intended that they should be seen;

but he was laughing at her, Arethusa. Whatever it was she had said this time that was wrong, she had made herself ridiculous enough for the Wonderful Mr. Bennet to laugh at her!

Her throat filled suddenly with a perfectly solid lump. Something back of her eyes began to smart unbearably, and they filled also, filled quickly with tears that so blinded her that she could not see even her own shimmering lap. Her hands trembled unmanageably, until the programme dropped from their uncertain grasp, and she fumbled about to find that handkerchief which was so badly needed. She dabbed at her eyes with it, and winked back those tears as best she could, biting her lips fiercely to keep from sobbing outright. But there were so many tears and they came so fast that they brimmed clear over, and some fell, great shining drops, on the yellow chiffon of her dress. Her tiny handkerchief was all unavailing to quench this flow, and in a very short while it was only a small lump of wet. Her head drooped lower and lower.

It was absolute and overwhelming humiliation.

Mr. Bennet heard a queer little sound at his side, a little sound that she was quite unable to control, and he turned to see this weeping Arethusa.

"Why, my dear little girl!" he exclaimed, bending over. "What on earth!"

She managed to swallow a small portion of the lump that filled her throat. "You . . . You laughed at me!" she said brokenly. "You laughed at me!"

So he had. But Mr. Bennet was very sure that this was not the time to acknowledge it.

He was genuinely distressed to see her cry, but his interest was more acute that something be done to stop it before too much attention was accorded them. Mr.

Bennet disliked very much to be made at all conspicuous.

He slid one arm gently along the back of her seat. Arethusa was conscious of this movement through her unhappiness, and she could not help being thrilled at the thought of that Wonderful Arm being where it was. Mr. Bennet, however, knew very well just how far it might go. Miss Eliza herself thought no more of the proprieties than did Mr. Bennet. Then he leaned protectingly close. Arethusa thrilled some more.

"Did you imagine for a moment that I was laughing at you!" And his rich drawling voice was so convincing that she believed him immediately. "Indeed, I was not! There was something very funny just then that you missed. *Why*, I wouldn't laugh at *you* for all the world!"

Arethusa smiled through her tears at him like a veritable bit of April.

"I didn't like to think you would. But . . . But . . . It seemed just exactly like you were!"

"You misjudged me dreadfully!"

And this time he sounded so reproachful that she was just as ashamed of herself for so misjudging him, as she had been humiliated the moment before because she had thought herself the object of his mirth.

"I . . . I'm sorry," she faltered. Would Mr. Bennet ever be able to forgive such a misinterpretation of his charming laugh?

But Mr. Bennet was a truly magnanimous soul, and it seemed that he would.

So an atmosphere of enjoyment once more restored, Arethusa turned her attention back to the chorus ladies, who had in the meantime clothed themselves in gar-



ments belonging less to the hours of rest and more to those of activity, and responded to their antics to amuse as she had before that most unfortunate episode.

She sighed a gusty sigh of real forlornness when the curtain had descended in such a way that it could not possibly be construed by even inexperienced theatergoers to mean anything but that it was all over.

"It doesn't last near long enough, not near!" she said, regretfully, as she was being helped into the Green Cloak.

Mr. Bennet produced his watch. "I don't know just how long you expected it to last," he replied, "but right this moment it happens to be ten minutes past eleven; which means that we have been here almost three hours!"

Arethusa regarded him open-eyed and open-mouthed.

"*Honest!*"

"Honest."

"Why, it hasn't seemed like any time at all!"

"Well, it seems to me that if you enjoyed it so much, we'll have to come again some time very soon. Shall we?"

Arethusa accepted this invitation with undoubted pleasure.

"I'll be a little more careful, though, in my selection of our next play, so there will be nothing in it you could misunderstand that might possibly spoil a few moments for us. I don't want any spoiled moments with you," tenderly.

Arethusa blushed deeply and her head drooped.

*She* had spoiled it, all by herself; those moments of unhappiness had been all her own fault, because she

was such a goose. This play had been as near perfection as a play could be, thought she, who knew so little of plays. At the next one, she herself would see that nothing of the kind occurred. She had learned her lesson, and there would be no more misinterpretation of Mr. Bennet's charming little ways.

Mr. Bennet was just a bit conscience-stricken in the morning by the way he had turned that episode, when reviewing it at his office. She was a dear child. The Worthington interest was a solid one. There were dollars galore that stood to that name in various financial institutions, and when one is a dealer in the commodities known as stocks and bonds, one must not let the smallest chance slip by to cement a friendship outside which might prove to extend itself into the business world. There was no telling how quickly bread cast upon the waters might return. At least, it could do no sort of harm. She was a dear child!

Which explains why Arethusa received a long green box, brought to her by George as she ate her luncheon. It was a box of American Beauties with stems a yard long, roses that were far too beautiful as roses to be real, and that seemed to Arethusa to have gathered all the perfume of heaven within their deep, red centers. She sniffed and smelled them in ecstasy; and stroked the glossy green leaves that spread out from their stems, so marvelous as leaves. She could hardly part with them that they might be put in the tallest vase on the library table, which would display their beauty to the greatest advantage.

Inside the box was a tiny note . . .

"Would Miss Worthington do Mr. Bennet the honor of reserving the date of the January Cotillion for him?"

"But that's so awfully far off," objected Arethusa, as she read this communication aloud to her interested parents. "It's only the first of November right now!"

It was entirely too lovely of Mr. Bennet to send her roses; it heaped coals of fire with effective vengeance. She was almost ashamed to accept them. But she did wish that he had made that engagement for something a trifle closer at hand.

"You little goose!" exclaimed Ross. "Why, that is *the* event of the whole Lewisburg season! And not one debutante in ten out of a winter ever gets to go! As superlative as I'll have to admit Mr. Bennet's taste in flowers, I believe most girls would care far more about that invitation than they would about the roses!"

"Really!" Arethusa brightened up considerably.

"I'd let a man laugh at me every day from now till Christmas if he'd ask me to go to the January Cotillion with him," continued Ross, "that is, if I was a young lady with any hope of being a social success."

"But he wasn't laughing at me," protested his daughter. She had narrated the affair in detail. "I told you that, Father. He said very positively he wasn't laughing at me!"

"Well," replied Ross, "it makes no difference what caused his mirth, it seems to me that I'd assuredly welcome it, with such effect!"

## CHAPTER XIX

Arethusa was going shopping, and going shopping for the very first time in her life, alone.

And thereby hangs a tale.

Wednesday coming was Miss Asenath's birthday, and Arethusa had completely lost track of that important fact to forget it until this Monday morning. She, who had given Miss Asenath something, if only a tight bouquet of flowers from the plants brought into the house for the winter, every birthday anniversary since she was old enough to lisp "birfday" and comprehend its significance, had forgotten that this event was so near. She could have made her a gift as she generally did had there been time to finish it and send it so it would reach the Farm on the twentieth; but it would not be a birthday gift if Miss Asenath did not get it on her birthday (this was logic to Arethusa); so in her distress she had appealed to Elinor.

And Elinor, after asking if Miss Asenath ever wore shawls and learning that she did all the winter through, suggested that Arethusa purchase her a rose-colored shoulder shawl of silk and several yards of rose-colored ribbon to match for the locket. If it was started to-day, it would reach there in time.

Charming Idea!

So Arethusa was to take the automobile, as Elinor had a Board meeting of importance this morning and could not go with her; seek the magnificent establishment where she had accompanied her mother so many times to shop; inquire of a floor-walker the location of

the department of shawls; purchase one of the same, and charge it to Elinor's name and address; and return home in the machine. Such were the directions given by Elinor.

They seemed to cover every detail for the buying of Miss Asenath's birthday gift; and, moreover, sounded very simple. As viewed by Arethusa, although Miss Eliza would have been horrified at the bare suggestion, she could surely buy one rose-colored silk shawl without assistance.

She loved her reflection in the mirror when she was dressed for this adventure; a jaunty new hat with a fly-away feather, a new suit, and even gloves and shoes as slim as Miss Warren's. And besides, pride of her heart, her costume was enhanced with furs of rich, dark brown, as silky smooth in appearance as those she had envied that visitor who had been so trying a visitor. There was also, a half-formed Hope within that when she looked so well as she did this morning she would meet the Wonderful Mr. Bennet somewhere downtown that made her eyes shine, which added to the attractiveness of the reflection.

She left the car in front of the big shop and bade Clay wait for her with an air of dignity that was an almost ludicrous imitation of Elinor's manner of uttering the same words. Clay smiled broadly as he touched his cap, recognizing her model.

Arethusa tripped gayly into the store and a polite and obsequious gentleman escorted her to that counter where she might find shawls, and directed that she be waited upon, immediately.

The very prettiest girl among those in this department stepped forward. She was the one which Arethusa might have chosen to wait upon her, had she been

choosing. But she was a dreadfully tired-looking girl, even more tired looking than pretty, Arethusa noticed when she was closer. She had great dark circles under her eyes and a pathetic sort of droop to the corners of her mouth. Her black dress made her look still more forlorn, for she was very pale and it accentuated the pallor.

But the girl smiled at Arethusa; she could not help it, tired as she looked and really was, for Arethusa's eagerness to purchase was so amusingly apparent.

"I want to see silk shawls," announced Arethusa, "rose-colored silk shawls."

A bewildering variety of shawls was immediately spread before her, in every conceivable shade of the color she had requested. How Miss Asenath would have loved that heap of gayety! Arethusa found it terribly difficult to make a choice. She picked out three as the prettiest of the collection, after much deliberation and selection and rejection; but each one was so lovely that she wanted every one of them for Miss Asenath. Then she made an appeal to the girl.

"Which of these do *you* think is the very prettiest? It's for an old lady; the dearest old lady!"

The girl bent her dark head over the shawls Arethusa was holding.

"Is it for your grandmother?"

"No," replied Arethusa. "It's for my Aunt 'Senath. She's an invalid."

Then, of necessity almost, she must tell Miss Asenath's interesting story, beginning way back at the very beginning, with the Romance before the Fall. Her sympathetic telling of her Tale, her gestures and her earnest voice, attracted every other girl at that counter, for it was not a very busy morning, so that long before

she had finished, four or five other heads were bent in solemn consultation above the three shawls from which final choice was to be made. They could not all agree as to the one most desirable; tastes were different as to which shade of rose would really be most becoming and best for Miss Asenath. Finally, Arethusa and Jessie (for so the first girl's name had been discovered to be) decided that majority must rule as always, and selected as Miss Asenath's birthday gift what they themselves and two of the other girls liked best, the one that was in between in tone.

"I can get ribbon just this color, can't I?" asked the shopper anxiously, once her choice was actually made.

"For the locket?" inquired Jessie.

"Yes."

"Sure you can. Suppose you just take this over to the ribbon counter and match it right now, it's just in the next aisle, and then you can bring it back to me."

Arethusa went away joyfully, bearing the shawl.

"Ain't you afraid, Jess, to let her go off like that?" asked one of Jessie's contemporaries, of a more distrustful turn of mind. "'Sposin' she don't come back with it? It ain't paid for, and she never told you who she was."

"Oh, she'll come back," replied Jessie, confidently. "She'll come back, all right. I ain't the least bit afraid. 'Specially when she looks as much like an angel as she talks! I wish there was more like her to wait on, and then it wouldn't be so hard to be standing here all day long. Yes, ma'am, these shawls are all silk," to a personage who had paused to examine the wares which Jessie had not yet put away.

It would be impossible to mention her in any way save as a "personage." She exuded superiority and a

consciousness of a high station in life from every aristocratic pore.

"I doubt it. They look rather cheap." She tossed the whole heap aside, contemptuously. "Have you nothing any better?"

"No, ma'am, these are the best."

"That's old Mrs. Bixby," whispered one of the clerks in a tone of heartfelt awe to the girl next her, as the lady seated herself before the counter. "And she is some swell, too, believe me, Molly Davis! Money! Just buckets of it!"

Mrs. Bixby seemed rather disdainful of what Jessie had to offer her in the way of shawls. She continued to toss them to right and left, scattering them so carelessly about that one or two fell to the floor of the aisle and were retrieved by a near-by floor-walker, who glanced at poor Jessie, as much as to say, "Don't you let that happen again!"

"I see nothing here I'd really have," remarked Mrs. Bixby, at last.

Then as she turned, she caught sight of an acquaintance across the aisle, who had loitered there hoping for the sun of her smile, to whom she beckoned imperiously; and who came swiftly for whatever was desired of her, at this nod, much as a menial runs in answer to the nod of a master.

"I've got it!"

Arethusa came back with the shawl and several yards of rose-colored ribbon that matched it as perfectly as if woven especially to be worn with it to hold the Locket.

Jessie's face broke into welcoming smiles. Most of the other clerks smiled also. Arethusa's honest joy in her purchases was truly refreshing after Mrs. Bixby.



"Isn't that a perfectly beautiful match?" Arethusa asked of them all impartially, with enthusiasm. "And yet Aunt 'Liza always says I have no sort of taste! Can't you just see darling Aunt 'Senath in all her white clothes with this lovely rose color next to her?"

It was not at all hard for Jessie to imagine the picture after the vivid description she had received of Miss Asenath. "I'll bet she'll look just lovely," she declared warmly, "and it certainly is a splendid match! No one could have matched it better!"

The other girls made a smiling affirmation to this verdict.

Mrs. Bixby turned around from her own conversation at the sudden sound of these animated voices so close to her and lifted her gold lorgnette to examine Arethusa.

"This girl was waiting on me, I believe," she said, indicating Jessie with a wave of her aristocratic hand, and speaking in a pleasantly acid tone that was intended to consign Arethusa to nothingness forever.

But Arethusa gave no smallest sign of doing so.

"She was waiting on me, long before you ever saw her!"

That lorgnette could but irritate Arethusa.

Mrs. Bixby glanced up and down, and then through her.

"Indeed! I think you're mistaken!" Then to Jessie. "I wasn't through, girl."

"But you said . . ." began poor Jessie.

She was torn between her desire to serve Arethusa, whom, girl-like, she had voted a darling, and her great fear of offending one so powerful as Mrs. Bixby. The floor-walker suddenly turned his attention in their direction, which added to her agitation. But she need not

have worried quite so much; her first customer made a sturdy champion of any cause, and she was still most undaunted, lorgnette or no lorgnette.

"There's a whole stack of girls here," declared Arethusa hotly, "and just because you can't help being disagreeable, you want the same one I have! Jessie sold me this shawl before you ever came, and she let me take it over to match it in ribbon!"

Mrs. Bixby displayed an interest. She raised the lorgnette once more.

"Indeed! And had you paid for it?"

"It's none of your business whether I had or not! It's not your store, is it? But I hadn't, so there, if you really want to know!"

"I shall report you immediately," said Mrs. Bixby, majestically to Jessie, "for allowing goods to be taken away from your counter without being paid for, and for not waiting on your customers properly. You were very impudent. And . . ."

"Why, you're a horrible old woman!" interrupted Arethusa, as if the discovery was most surprising. "A perfectly horrible old woman! But go right ahead and report, if you want to! I reckon it won't hurt anything very much, because I brought the shawl back and I'm going to charge it right now, this very minute!"

"And *you*," continued Mrs. Bixby, once more consigning the tempestuously excited Arethusa to nothingness with her glance, "are the most decidedly ill-bred young person I ever saw!"

She sailed away and sought the floor-walker.

His glance, after a brief conversation with her, was sternly directed in the direction of the shawl department. He nodded several times in answer to what she

said to him, and finally bowed her deferentially towards the outer door.

Arethusa turned to Jessie, whose rather frail hands were trembling in their effort to fold her shawls, and her sympathetic heart ached for this evident distress.

"I wouldn't mind, Jessie. That old beast can't really do anything that would hurt you, can she?"

"I don't know," miserably.

"Was it very wrong to let me take the shawl to have it matched before I had paid for it?"

"It's against the rules. People could steal things that way. But I knew you'd bring it right back."

"That nasty old thing!" Arethusa leaned earnestly across the counter-top. "I'll buy two or three shawls. Would it be all right then?"

Jessie was forced to a smile at this suggested method of straightening out the affair.

"That wouldn't make very much difference about this, I'm afraid. And besides, I don't suppose your mother would like your doing it, very much!"

"She wouldn't care," affirmed the daughter, stoutly. "She wouldn't care the least bit. She's the loveliest person in the world!" Suddenly, an altogether new idea seized her. "They won't discharge you, will they?" It was a horrible thought!

"Oh, no! That is, I don't suppose so. It depends on what she said, mostly. If she told the truth, I might just get reprimanded. They'll dock me probably, though; but that's almost as bad to me right now, as being discharged," bitterly; "I need every single cent of my money."

"Oh, well," Arethusa patted Jessie consolingly on the arm, "Don't you worry! I'll get Father to fix it

up for you. He knows Mr. Redmond awfully well. He plays golf with him, and he told me Mr. Redmond owned this store, even if his name isn't on the sign. So he'll fix it!"

She departed, serenity restored all around; for Ross would surely manage it so that Jessie should not suffer for being kind.

But before she was out of the establishment, she unfortunately encountered Mrs. Bixby near the door, who raised her lorgnette and surveyed the "ill-bred young person" through it again. She so aroused Arethusa's ire that she rushed furiously out of the shop and went headlong on up the street. She had gone quite a block when she ran . . . bang! into a man person, who in her excitement she had not noticed as approaching.

"You seem to be in a very great hurry this fine morning," said a familiar voice, and she looked up.

There was Mr. Bennet smiling at her; standing in the middle of the sidewalk, irreproachably groomed as always, very much Mr. Bennet, and evidently glad to see her.

Arethusa was glad to see him also. She clasped her hands, parcel and all, and dimpled charmingly.

"I'm just as mad as I can be! That nasty old beast of a woman!"

"What old beast of a woman?"

Arethusa launched into explanation.

And as the narrative progressed, Mr. Bennet's inward amusement grew. Arethusa was primed with names, and so he recognized Mrs. Bixby for his aunt, the mentor of their rather extensive family connection. He would have given anything to have seen the en-

counter! And he would have backed Arethusa for winner without any hesitancy, as well as he knew his dictatorial relative.

"And will you, Mr. Bennet," finished Jessie's champion imploringly, "will you go back and see that man with me and fix it so they won't do anything to Jessie?"

It might be better to fix things up now with Mr. Bennet's able assistance, than to wait until later on to speak to Ross.

"Certainly," said Mr. Bennet, kindly, "I'll be very glad to; if you think I can do any good."

Arethusa was absolutely sure of this. Was he not Mr. Bennet?

Mr. Platt, the floor-walker to whom Mrs. Bixby had complained of Jessie, was also an assistant manager, and he was very glad to have the facts in this particular case, he said, when Arethusa and Mr. Bennet had hunted him up; Arethusa to do most of the talking, and Mr. Bennet to smile and look on, and impress the one who had Jessie's sentence within his power to make either good or bad, by just the fact of his appearance and his air of being someone of importance, which was so decidedly Mr. Bennet's air. The other lady, added Mr. Platt to his speech apologetically, had slightly misrepresented things. She had accused the girl of impudence and inattention, which had sounded bad. And in a store of this size . . . But when a customer got excited, she was not always just accurate, yet they could not tell . . .

Mr. Bennet was most amused by this little dig at his aunt. Arethusa was vigorous in her defense of Jessie, and her denial that Jessie had been at all impudent. And her indignation had made her so pretty, with her flushed cheeks, that Mr. Platt smiled paternally and

told her that it would be all right. Probably she herself might like to stop by and tell Jessie so? Nothing suited Arethusa better; so with Mr. Bennet in tow, this pleasant duty was performed, and then once more she sought the outside.

"Now come go to lunch with me," said Mr. Bennet, as they paused under the iron and glass porte-cochere for a moment. "It's lunch time," he added, "and maybe considerably after. I was on my way when I met you."

Arethusa's eyes sparkled at the thought. "But do girls go to lunch down-town with gentlemen?"

He assured her that they often did, and as Arethusa had no further scruples of any sort to add, he led the way across the street to the big Patterson Hotel; the shop where shawls and excitement had been found was exactly opposite.

Arethusa followed him on into the dining-room, her heart beating such an excited tattoo against her chest she was very glad that the band on the little balcony at one end of the room was playing so loudly just then, else she was quite certain that Mr. Bennet, and even the tall and imposing head waiter who was so courteously showing them to a table, would have heard that pounding heart.

It was certainly a Real Adventure.

They were piloted to a spot which Mr. Bennet, from the door-way when they had first stepped inside, had selected for its attractions, a little table for two far over in the corner, just enough removed from the band for the music to be a pleasant accompaniment to the business of luncheon, instead of an interruption, as it often was when closer to it. The table held a lighted candle lamp shaded with a soft rose-colored shade of

fluted silk (and not all of the tables boasted little lamps) which seemed to add most delightfully to the intimacy of the occasion.

Arethusa leaned her elbows on the table, and looked happily at Mr. Bennet, sitting so close to her on the other side of the white cloth, ordering a lunch for her to eat. There was a charming intimacy about the situation which could not help but appeal.

"Isn't this fun!" she exclaimed. "Just us!"

Mr. Bennet thought it was, indeed.

And he added instructions to the waiter, about the food which was to be prepared for Arethusa to eat, which further added to the Charm of things. The waiter hurried off with their order, as if he himself deemed it no ordinary order.

Then, while they waited, Arethusa unrolled her parcel and showed Mr. Bennet the shawl and told him all about Miss Asenath.

"It would be wonderful to be loved the way your aunt has loved that man all these years," he said softly, when the Tale was ended, for Arethusa had crowded every single bit of Romance connected with it into her telling.

Her long eyelashes drooped suddenly over her eyes, and the little flush which always came so quickly spread over her face and neck. Her unruly heart beat even faster.

There was a soft, long silence, and Mr. Bennet, admiring the light of the candle lamp on Arethusa's ruddy hair, smiled to himself as he watched her. He had an idea that he knew just about what she was thinking.

Arethusa was thinking that Mr. Bennet was undoubtedly the sort of man that one would be sure to love just that way.

Now Mr. Bennet knew very well how Arethusa felt about him, and this without any real conceit on his part. Arethusa was a woefully transparent young person; she had never learned there are times when it might seem best to dissemble a little. Mr. Bennet knew, perhaps, better than she did herself, the exact state of her Feeling in regard to him. There were some essential points on which they would not have agreed at all; but still . . . His main idea as to just how Arethusa felt was pretty clear.

He leaned back in his chair, and continued to watch her. He could almost have laughed aloud at her pretty confusion. Arethusa's nervous fingers crumbled up a perfectly good slice of bread until it could be of no use of any kind to anybody, her head still bent. If the Situation had such charm, it had not lost altogether the power to embarrass, when Words that could cause such Thoughts were softly spoken by a rich and drawling Voice.

The waiter helped matters considerably by bringing in the soup.

Soup has never been regarded as much in the way of a reliever of embarrassment, but it proved to be something of the kind in this particular case. Arethusa's tongue was loosened again, and she chattered of inconsequential topics of variety, but none of them brought such moments as the one just past. There was much to be said to Mr. Bennet, for they had grown to be great friends in the last few weeks and had many interests in common.

It was an unusually nice little luncheon that Mr. Bennet had ordered; and it was perfect eaten so, just the two of them, thought Arethusa. It was prolonged quite beyond the time generally allotted for luncheons,



for it was almost half-past three when they emerged from the Hotel.

"Well, what shall we do now?" asked Mr. Bennet. He glanced at his watch and then shut it with a snap. "I don't believe I'll go back to the office again this afternoon; that is . . . How about you? Are you free? What do you say to a moving-picture show?"

Arethusa was delighted. She had nothing whatever to do, and she adored the movies. She had seen a few with Ross and Elinor.

So Mr. Bennet stepped back into the Hotel to telephone Miss Ford that he would not be back that afternoon; and then they strolled side by side up the street, he and Arethusa, hunting for the picture show which seemed to have the most to offer.

The one they finally chose to attend proved to be so exciting that Arethusa scarcely breathed a word to him until it was all over, and the film had gone around and started to go around again, so that she could be perfectly sure she had seen every bit of it. There was a great deal of honest realism about the acting done on the screen for Arethusa, photography though it might be. A smothered scream had attested to Mr. Bennet the genuineness of her fear for her own safety during a portion of this picture's running, and her sudden jump when the evil-looking Indian had shot the handsome cowboy, and the little sound of distress she had made, told him that although movie guns were said to fire blank cartridges, they inflicted actual damage for Arethusa.

It was dark when they left the moving-picture theatre, and well after five. Winter days seem woefully short.

"Well, what shall we do now?" asked Mr. Bennet,

for the second time. "I suppose, though, it will be home. It's so late."

Arethusa stopped short in the middle of the crowded sidewalk, full of folks who were plainly impatient to get somewhere, and very probably it was home, flowing past her on either side, all unregarded. She grabbed Mr. Bennet frantically by one arm.

"Oh, Mr. Bennet!"

"What's the matter? Did you leave something in the theater?"

"No! But I've left Clay waiting in the machine for me all this time in front of that store, and I never thought of him once until you said, 'home!'"

The last part of this information was wafted on the breeze to Mr. Bennet, for Arethusa had started off down the street with the swiftness of the wind itself. He followed her immediately, but considerably more slowly as to locomotion (he was no sprinter and Mr. Bennet rarely forgot his dignity) and with the parcel containing Miss Asenath's birthday gift in one hand. Arethusa had dropped it directly at his feet in her excitement. When he caught up with her, she was standing in front of the shop gazing wildly up and down the street, for no Clay and no automobile were to be discovered anywhere.

The door attendant, when questioned by Mr. Bennet, said that he remembered the chauffeur referred to very well. He had seemed to be very worried about the young lady, and had left his car several times to ask him if he had seen her come out. But he had driven off some time ago, about three hours ago, the door attendant thought it was, to be as exact as he could.

Mr. Bennet took Arethusa home in a taxicab to an excited and distraught household.

When Clay had come back without her, with his strange story of having waited for her, and that she had never returned to the machine, Ross had been perfectly sure that she had been kidnapped, and he had gone impetuously to the police station to start an immediate search. Elinor was prostrate in her room, visioning all sorts of dreadful things that might have happened to an Arethusa always too prone to make chance acquaintances, when Arethusa herself, as repentant and contrite a cause of it all as it was possible for her to be, walked in.

Elinor would not allow Ross to scold her after she heard Arethusa's sobbing explanation, that she was having such a good time she forgot everything else; for she said that he was really more to blame for that than anyone concerned.

Which rather cryptic statement, if Arethusa failed of comprehension, seemed to be quite clear to her father.

## CHAPTER XX

The winter sped away until Christmas, on wings of fleetness that made the days seem as if they had only been hours since Arethusa had come to Lewisburg. Life was crowded so full of new experiences and happenings that she had absolutely no smallest room or time for any moments of home-sickness for the Farm. And then . . . There was Mr. Bennet.

Now Arethusa honestly interested Mr. Bennet.

It was not alone her unabashed and open admiration of himself which amused while it flattered, just a little, for he was only human; but she had an unbounding enthusiasm for everything she saw and did which made it a real delight to be with her anywhere, at dance, or theater or football game or moving picture. There was nothing blasé or jaded of any of life's offerings about Arethusa. She developed, as the days passed, into a young lady much sought after by the male of the species; for this same quality which endeared her to Mr. Bennet brought her many other suitors. And, argued Arethusa, being very much in love with one Charming Person does not prevent one from having a very good time with others of the same sex, when the opportunity is presented.

But the Core of her Heart undoubtedly remained true to her First Love, the Wonderful Mr. Bennet.

He was still, of all the men she had met, the one whose approach made her heart beat faster; whose voice, even coming from afar over the telephone, had the power to make her thrill; and around whom she

buildded innocent little castles in the air intended for the Perfect Bliss of two, in which she always saw herself as the other person, and which made her blush as she sat all alone and buildded them. But even a more sophisticated maiden than Arethusa might have been led to the building of air castles by Mr. Bennet's manner, singling her out, as it undoubtedly seemed to do, from among all those girls of his acquaintance as the one with whom he most cared to be.

This affair, as it progressed, amused Ross immensely.

He teased his daughter most unmercifully about Mr. Bennet, and she blushed and bridled over the teasing as any orthodox lovelorn miss should, and has since the beginning of time, when the name of her Beloved is taken in vain. There was no real harm in the object upon which she had so settled her affections, said Ross to Arethusa. She was only about the twenty-fifth girl, to the certain knowledge of all Lewisburg, whom he had graciously permitted to be thus "crazy about" his handsome self; it was a disease positively certain to attack every debutante in the town in her turn; and so on. But Arethusa's invariable reply to such very disagreeable remarks was that no one in his right mind would consider blaming those girls in the least.

But as much as Mr. Bennet sought her company, it was Ross and not Mr. Bennet, who had the pleasure of escorting her to her first football game, on Thanksgiving day. And perhaps it was just as well, for on this Occasion she created more excitement than the game itself by falling down in between the rows of seats as she bodily assisted the ball of her chosen side up the field to goal.

The automobile was another never ending source of delight. Clay had become a sworn ally. He was at her beck and call with cheerful willingness to do whatsoever she commanded, at any hour of the day or night; and the weather was never too unseasonable to go out with a machine if Miss Arethusa wanted it. Hitherto, Clay had been as careful of those two shining cars in Elinor's garage as if they had been bound to suffer permanently from mud splashes and rain drops. He taught her how to run, first the smaller one and then the limousine, as Arethusa insisted she be allowed to try it. She was so strong and quick that she soon learned, and she really liked the larger car better, as it was more powerful. Many an hour was spent out with Clay these first wintry days, out on frosted country roads that crackled under the heavy tires as they rushed along.

Arethusa, somehow, never went on one of these expeditions but that she wished for Timothy. He would have loved it, she was sure; the rushing through the country on wings of a swiftness almost unbelievable, and feeling the heart of the big thing throbbing underneath her and responding to her slightest touch as quickly as if it had been a toy, instead of a monster that required a whole wide street in which to be turned.

Ross informed her she was in a fair way to make some headlines for breakfast tables, which he interpreted as meaning:

“BEAUTIFUL YOUNG DAUGHTER OF WEALTHY PARENTS ELOPES WITH HANDSOME CHAUFFEUR!”

Then Arethusa must tell her father and Elinor all that she had learned about Clay in these many rides,

and about the girl he hoped to marry some day, and about the invalid sister whom he supported.

For Elinor, warm-hearted as she was and as kind to everyone about her, had not even known of their existence until Arethusa told her. But Arethusa had been more than once to call at the tiny cottage where Clay's invalid sister lived with the two stronger ones who worked, and she had carried books and fruit to the sweet-faced girl whose only glimpse of the big world was what was brought to her in her own room by those who loved her. Arethusa's friendships never stopped contented with knowing a person; she had to know all about them. She had met the fiancé at the cottage many times, and she thoroughly approved of her for Clay. And both of these girls adored Arethusa.

It was from one of these excursions she was returning when she brought the automobile to such an abrupt stop, that Clay, who had yielded her the wheel at her request and was not noticing just then at all, was almost thrown out of his seat.

"There's Mrs. Cherry," screamed Arethusa. "Oh, Mrs. Cherry! Mrs. Cherry!"

It was undoubtedly Mrs. Cherry and Helen Louise and Peter; Mrs. Cherry holding a hand of each child and strolling slowly along gazing into shop windows gaily decorated and full of Christmas things. Quite a bit more prosperous-looking trio than of old they were, but Mrs. Cherry, for all the better clothes, was still just as comfortably untidy as ever.

"Mrs. Cherry!"

Arethusa waved wildly, fearful lest her friend should enter the store into whose windows she was at that moment gazing, and miss her altogether. But

Mrs. Cherry turned around at this last wild cry, and looked uncertainly up and down the crowded street and across, directly at Arethusa, without recognizing her, or without locating the call.

"Here, Clay," Arethusa began clambering ungracefully over the brakes and handles around the wheel of the car, and across him before he could move. "Here, you take it. I must go speak to Mrs. Cherry!"

"Well, if it ain't Miss Worth'ton!" exclaimed Mrs. Cherry when Arethusa had reached her, after a rather dangerous scramble between trucks and horses and street cars.

Mrs. Cherry beamed all over in expansive greeting; Peter sidled shyly behind her generous proportions, as for shelter; and Helen Louise smiled, timidly, a slightly more toothless smile than hers had been, even a few weeks past.

Arethusa held out both hands. "Oh, I'm so *glad* to see you! I've thought about you often and often and wondered where you were and what you were doing. And Helen Louise and Peter!"

"You look just as pretty as a peach!" declared Mrs. Cherry, with hearty warmth, grasping those outstretched hands to pump them vigorously, up and down. "I never would have knowed you!"

"Come get in the automobile," invited Arethusa, "and then we can talk. And oh!" seized with a sudden inspiration, "go home to lunch with me, it's most lunch time now! Please, please, Mrs. Cherry!"

Mrs. Cherry demurred. But Peter pulled at a fold of her skirt, the word "lunch" had aroused in him a strong, if sudden, sense of lack.



"Ma, I'm hungry!" he said.

"Well, that's nothing very new, you're always that," replied his parent.

Helen Louise had been focused in round-eyed admiration on the Beautiful Lady before her, without uttering a word; now she murmured something indistinguishable above the roar about her. Her mother stopped to catch it.

"Well, I reckon there ain't no harm in it, if you're right sure it won't be no trouble to anybody. Helen Louise ain't never been in a auto before and she says she's tired and wants to ride . . . I reckon she might be . . . I'm most wore out myself. We've done a sight of walking this morning. I've been aiming to bring these children down here ever' day for a week, and never got clear 'round to it, tel to-day. It was something sorter like Providence done kept me busy, I reckon, Miss Worth'ton, I wouldn't have seen you no other day, p'raps. Law, but your Pa must be a rich man, Miss Worth'ton, to be owning a thing like this here!"

For under cover of Mrs. Cherry's volubility, Arethusa had piloted the whole family safely to the automobile.

Mrs. Cherry leaned back on the cushions as one to the manner born. Helen Louise was frankly overawed by the unaccustomed magnificence of the limousine, and seemed to shrink before it with visibility. Peter's eyes grew rounder and rounder with each passing moment. All of Arethusa's efforts to draw Helen Louise into the conversation failed; she seemed stricken absolutely tongue-tied. Even a reference to her father failed to arouse to animation. Peter sat stiffly erect, also silent,

one grubby hand tightly clutching his mother's sleeve as if he feared the catastrophe of losing her through the swiftness of his riding.

But Mrs. Cherry well supplied any lack of words from her children.

"I've wondered and wondered myself, about you, Miss Worth'ton, ever so many times sence that trip we rode on the cars together. Whether you found your Pa and everything like you was thinking you would and if you been having a good time like you said you knew you was going to."

"Oh, I've had a Heavenly Time!" Arethusa cried, "Just a Perfectly Heavenly Time, Mrs. Cherry! And everyone is so Perfectly Lovely to me!"

"That's 'cause you're what you are," remarked Mrs. Cherry, shrewdly.

She was loud in her sincere admiration of the un-gainly pile where the Worthingtons lived; it seemed a superbly beautiful exterior to her ideas. But when George, who for all the dinginess of his skin had a classic countenance and a dignity of bearing which the Prime Minister of England might well have envied him, opened the front door for Arethusa and her cavalcade, Mrs. Cherry was suddenly stricken as tongue-tied as Helen Louise.

George himself came nearer to losing his equilibrium than ever he had in all his years of efficient service, when he saw what his young lady had in tow; but he concealed his agitation with real credit to his training.

"Is Mother in, George?"

"She's in the music room, Miss Arethusa."

Then Arethusa remembered Something, all at once. It was Something that brought panic. She took Mrs.

Cherry and her progeny into the library as rapidly as it was possible for her to move them onward without actually pushing them.

"I'll go find Mother," she said, hurriedly.

She left them seated, in a row of stiff attitudes of discomfort on the big davenport, Peter still with a tight hold of his mother, who sat erect and glassy-eyed beside him. George had been almost too much for Mrs. Cherry.

Elinor was just coming out of the music room as Arethusa rushed toward her down the hall.

"Did I hear you talking to any one, dear? You're rather late. I'm afraid you barely have time to dress."

"Mother," exclaimed Arethusa, and the sound was tragedy whispered, "I forgot it was your party to-day and I met Mrs. Cherry down-town, and I brought her home to lunch with me!"

"Mrs. Cherry? Who . . .?"

"The one who was so nice to me on the train. I told you about her, don't you remember? But, Mother, I honestly did forget all about your party! Honest to goodness! What shall I do!"

Elinor laughed.

She was somewhat used to Arethusa's impulsiveness by this time, so this did not seem such a very surprising thing for her to do.

"And, Mother," Arethusa's hissing whisper grew yet more tragic, "I brought Helen Louise and Peter home with me too, they were with her when I met her!"

"Peter and Helen Louise!! Who on earth are they?"

Elinor could not help but think that this last *was* going a bit far; for adding three to a carefully arranged luncheon for ten would be somewhat of a strain.

"Her children!" Arethusa was wildly penitent. Her eyes began filling with her ever-ready tears. "Oh, Mother, I was just so glad to see her! I really didn't mean to do anything to mess up your party! I was just so glad to see her! She was so awfully nice to me that day!"

"Don't cry, Arethusa," said Elinor absently, "don't cry, please! It isn't worth tears. We'll fix it somehow."

Yet the situation was a bit peculiar, without a doubt. The Cherry family could not be sent home, though at the same time, Elinor had a vision of some of those worthy ladies she had invited to her luncheon should the Cherry children join the Party. Just what had best be done . . .

Arethusa had a gleam first.

"Could Mrs. Cherry," she suggested timidly, "could Mrs. Cherry come to your Party and let me eat with Helen Louise and Peter in the breakfast room? Would it make very much difference?" And this was the noblest piece of self-sacrifice on Arethusa's part which any human being has ever performed, for above all else on earth, save the Wonderful Mr. Bennet, she loved a Party. "Would it make very much difference if I didn't come?"

Elinor considered that there were possibilities in this Idea of such real worth that it almost atoned for the lapse which had made it necessary of existence. She could tell better, however, after seeing Mrs. Cherry whether it could be carried out in its entirety or modified or extended.

So she and Arethusa proceeded to the library.

Peter had somewhat recovered himself during the moments of Arethusa's absence and was now engaged

in climbing first into one big chair and then another, and bounding out. It was a charming pastime, but one in which Helen Louise had refused to join. She still sat just as at first, like a small graven image, with stiff little flaxen plaits sticking out from each side of her head, and staring straight before her, with unblinking pale blue eyes, at the log fire. Her small hands were clasped between her rigid little knees, and her feet, owing to the fact that she was small and the davenport was large, were far from the floor and extended at direct right angles from her body. She did not even move at the entrance of Arethusa with Elinor.

Mrs. Cherry, like her son, was rapidly coming to herself after that encounter with the magnificent George. She was reclining now, at ease, and her eyes were roving busily about, and she made little ejaculations under her breath with each new object she spied.

Elinor was exceedingly gracious when Arethusa introduced her to the unexpected guest, although she hardly acknowledged the meeting with the unadulterated cordiality as the other party to it, for Mrs. Cherry had been born cordial. But no one, least of all Mrs. Cherry herself, would have gathered from Elinor's manner that plans for a formal luncheon had been a trifle upset. She explained that she was having a few friends of her own to lunch and that she believed that it might be pleasanter for the children to have theirs separately. Grown folks and their conversation were very tiring to children. Mrs. Cherry agreed with all of this.

But Elinor also was of the opinion that the Cherry family had best lunch en masse, with Arethusa, and so adroitly did she manage this part of the affair that Mrs. Cherry ever afterwards firmly believed it was

she, herself, who had suggested that she join Helen Louise and Peter and the younger hostess, rather than Elinor's older guests.

The division of luncheon guests which Arethusa headed was safely garnered in the breakfast room with only a narrow margin of time to spare before Elinor's division arrived.

Mrs. Cherry was treated there to a collation that so long as she lived remained distinctive, with a white-capped maid in a black dress and much befrilled apron to serve it in courses just as the other luncheon was served. She ate from egg-shell china, and drank from glasses, so crystal clear and thin, that they long stood to Mrs. Cherry as a synonym for perfection.

"It's as purty as them glasses of Mis' Worth'ton's," was her final word of praise.

And Helen Louise and Peter ate and ate and ate, until their hostess began to be anxious and wondered where they were putting it all.

Then George smuggled in the Victrola, and behind carefully closed doors Arethusa gave a Concert which endeared her to a music-loving Helen Louise forever, as the brightest memory of her life. Clay took them home in the automobile, with a little ride through the Park beforehand, so that the Cherrys' cup of bliss was almost too full. Arethusa went with them, but when she had come back, it was much too late to join that Real Party of Elinor's.

Miss Eliza would not have considered Elinor's method of dealing with Arethusa any sort of punishment for such a performance as she had been guilty of this day, but Elinor knew only too well what a real punishment it was.

It was a most subdued Arethusa who came down to

the dinner-table that evening, although very eager to know all the details of the Affair she had missed. Even Helen Louise and Peter and their mother, charming as they were, had not proven any sort of substitutes for the Luncheon with Elinor's friends to which Arethusa had looked forward so long.

"Did Miss Grant come?" she asked.

She was somewhat of a worshipper at Miss Grant's shrine these days (Miss Grant was a Real, Live Author whose books Arethusa had read) and it had been planned that she would sit next to her.

"Yes."

It was a disappointing answer, for Arethusa had vaguely hoped that for some reason she had stayed away.

"Yes," volunteered Ross, "your Celebrity was here, and in fine form. I heard her delightful voice as I came in, myself. It has a penetrating quality that probably arises from being so much in the Public Eye."

Arethusa squirmed, unhappily.

"Did she ask where I was?" hopefully.

"No, dear," very gently from Elinor, "I don't suppose she thought for a moment that you were to be there. You know I was just letting you come with all those older women, Arethusa, because I was so anxious for you to really know some of my friends."

"You certainly got yourself in Dutch, my daughter," said Ross, "for starting up that rival entertainment. And it's a mighty good thing, I expect, that the adulated Miss Drusilla Grant did not know you felt that way about her coming to dine. She would have been deeply offended, I know. She's not used to slights. I doubt very much if she'd ever let you pick up her handkerchief after such an affront."

“ Ross! ” exclaimed Elinor, for he had made Arethusa’s punishment almost too complete.

Her downcast head and the trembling of her hands indicated a struggle with distress, and he reached across the table and patted her arm kindly. “ Cheer up, child,” he said, laughing, “ she doesn’t know a thing about it, and nobody’s going to be mean enough to tell her. We just won’t let it happen again.”

Arethusa looked up, her eyes bright with tears, and the fervency of her promise that she would think like everything first, hereafter, made Elinor hope that the Recording Angel gives credit for Real Sincerity of Intention.

Christmas came in snowy and blustery.

It was an ideal Christmas Day, and just such a one as Arethusa had never spent before; with a Christmas Tree in the morning, and a table full of guests in the middle of the day, callers all afternoon long, and presents galore, in the shape of boxes of candy and flowers and many other equally useful articles that were showered upon her by admiring friends.

Mr. Bennet sent another box of American Beauties which Arethusa carried upstairs to put in her own room, so that she could see them the very first thing in the morning and the last thing at night, and she meant to make them last as long as clipped stems and fresh water could make them. His Gift . . .

It was a Wonderful, Wonderful Day, one that was never to be forgotten.

There was a dance that night out at the Country Club, and Arethusa had a new dress for it especially. She had a very guilty feeling sometimes when she thought of Miss Eliza and the rows of new garments



that hung in the closet of the green and white room. It was a gloriously romping, Christmasy dance, for the college boys and girls, and Arethusa wished very much that Timothy could have been in attendance; and this in spite of the fact that she had Mr. Bennet. But it was such an Occasion as Timothy would have loved, with formality thrown to the four winds and everybody just bent on having as much fun as was possible; even the men's evening clothes seemed to partake of the festival feeling and appeared to be worn with a rakish air quite unlike their customary somber wearing. The girls' dresses, of course, all fluttered with the spirit of the season; and voices were gay, and eyes were bright.

Arethusa had never been conscious of the lack of Timothy at any other dance, because they had all been, every one, so unlike anything that she could associate with him. But this dance on Christmas night was so different, so suitable for Timothy, that she did wish he could have been there.

Probably it helped her a little in this wish that he had sent her, all the way from Miss Asenath's Woods, a great box of mistletoe and holly (she and Timothy had gathered mistletoe and holly there together every Christmas since she could remember) and she had had a little homesick moment when she opened it; it brought the Farm, with all its dear inmates, so plainly before her. Christmas was very quiet there; it seemed more like a real Holy Day, and less like a Holiday, than it did in town.

Arethusa had sent Timothy a watch fob for Christmas, one with his fraternity emblem on it which she knew that he had long ardently desired; and books which she had thought would surely appeal to his taste in reading; and handkerchiefs, beautiful big squares of

linen, shakily marked in his initials with her own fair fingers.

The box she had sent to the Farm itself made Miss Eliza close her lips grimly and think unutterable things about the deadly wickedness of extravagance. She uttered some things before she had closed her lips, quite forcibly, but as Arethusa was not present, it could not do much good. Arethusa did not forget a single creature at the Farm. Beginning with Miss Asenath, every living thing had a gift. Miss Johnson had a collar of wonderfully shiny, brassy beauty; old Baldy, the horse, had a new blanket; and there was even a catnip ball for the grey cat that slept in front of Mandy's stove. There were so many cats at the Farm that it was quite impossible to remember them all, but Arethusa reasoned that they would all enjoy a catnip ball.

Never, in all of the history of the season, did any one ever have such a Christmas Glow as this of Arethusa's. And it was extended most lavishly to everyone she met through these days, whether she knew them or not, old and young, rich or poor, from smiling lips and starry eyes.

"A Real Spirit of Christmas," Ross called her, "red hair and all!"

But after Christmas was over, there was no actual subsiding of Excitement. For on New Year's Day Elinor was giving Arethusa a Party, her First Party of her Very Own; and it was to be the most Wonderful Party that had ever been given.

And Timothy had been invited. His was the very first invitation sent.

## CHAPTER XXI

But Timothy wrote that he was sorry, but he could not come.

He thought that Arethusa's letters home had lately been almost too full of a person by the name of Bennet, and torn between a curiosity to observe this person for himself in the flesh, and a disinclination to place himself in a position that should give her the opportunity to express her preference in public, the latter won.

Arethusa stormed and raged, as was quite to be expected.

It was so stupid of him to refuse! He would spoil the whole Party if he did not come! She almost cried with vexation as she read his letter at the breakfast-table.

"He's just got to come, that's all! Nasty thing! And I'll just bet he waited till right now to write so it would be too late for me to write to him again! That would be just like him! He's had that invitation two whole weeks! Oh, I just hate him for acting this way!"

"I shouldn't think you would be so anxious to have a person you hated at your Party," remarked Ross.

"Of course I want Timothy to come," replied Arethusa, with decision. "More than anyone else except you and Mother."

"More than Mr. Bennet even?" asked her father, wickedly.

No reply of any kind was made to this sally.

But why couldn't Timothy come? Why did he want to be so horrid for? And she expressed herself with many more ejaculations of a like nature, until finally Ross suggested that it might be a wise plan to send Timothy a telegram of urgency.

Arethusa seized with pleasure on this idea.

When she learned that he would receive it this very morning, if it was started immediately, she left the breakfast-table to get her hat and coat, telling George to notify Clay that she wanted the machine right away. She insisted on personal attention to this important affair, refusing to trust the telephone, although Elinor assured her it would go just as surely. Her own handwriting, said Arethusa, would have far more effect on Timothy than the handwriting of any stranger. She knew very little about telegrams.

So Ross gave her all the details of the sending of one, and told her where it might be done, and Arethusa departed gaily with Clay, who had been called from his breakfast to serve her. She explained to him on the ride down-town how very important it all was, and just how necessary that Timothy receive this message with despatch, so that Clay, being a sensible person, could not help but feel it more vital than his breakfast.

The telegraph operator at the Patterson Hotel where Ross had told her to go, was an obliging youth at all times, and he felt still more obliging when Arethusa's vivid face appeared before him and her eager voice announced that she wanted to send a telegram; and was this the right place?

It was. He informed her further that she could send ten words for fifty cents.

Ten words was a great many; she could say almost twice as much as she wanted to in ten words.

Her first attempt went something on this order . . .

“ Dear Timothy — I will never speak to you again as long as I live if you don't come to my party. You just must come.

“ ARETHUSA.”

Arethusa read it in triumph. It expressed just what she wanted to express to Timothy. Then she counted the words she had written, and her facial expression changed radically. She leaned over the counter toward the operator.

“ Does it have to be ten words? ”

“ If it's a telegram, Miss, unless you want to pay the charges for the extra words. It might be a day letter,” he suggested.

“ Is a telegram quicker? ”

It was.

Then it must be a telegram.

She counted the words over again, but they remained considerably more than ten.

“ But I've got to say all that,” she said, aloud, “ I've just got to! ”

She tried once more, and once more after that. The capacity of ten words for expressing what one wished to say seemed to decrease with each trial to write the telegram. The operator volunteered his professional help, after he had watched her spoil several blanks. He smiled slightly as he read the one she handed him, gratefully accepting his kind offer.

“ You've never sent one before, have you, Miss? ”

Arethusa propped her elbows on the high counter, and rested her chin on them so she could regard his work. “ No, I haven't,” and she smiled down at him so charmingly he could almost have franked that tele-

gram through. "But I thought ten words was oceans."

"No, Miss, it isn't very many." He scratched out the "Dear Timothy," she had written "You don't generally say that."

"You don't! Why, how do you know who it's for?"

"You have the address and that doesn't cost you anything."

Arethusa stood on tip-toe and leaned far over the counter to see what he was doing. She was as close to him as it was possible for her to get with a large piece of furniture in between them.

"Let's see it?" she asked, breathlessly, when he had finished writing.

It read, in the operator's version: —

"Must come to party, very displeased if you do not.  
"ARETHUSA."

Her face clouded. "But I wanted to tell him that I wouldn't speak to him again if he didn't come. I know he won't, unless I do. Let me come around where you are, can't I? And can't you say that, that I won't speak to him?"

The very obliging youth indicated a little gate at one side where she might find a way in, and Arethusa joined him in consultation over the message. Two heads are always better than one.

In its final form, the telegram read: —

"Will never speak to you again if you don't come.  
"ARETHUSA."

Which proved to be perfectly satisfactory, and lived

up to all the good reputations of telegrams; for it fetched Timothy.

Arethusa met him herself, at the station, when he came the morning of the Party. She was so Glad to see him! She flung both arms around his neck and more than one soft kiss was pressed warmly against his cheek; Timothy all unresisting.

“Oh, Timothy! Timothy!! *Timothy!!!*”

It was a far more enthusiastic greeting than he had dared let himself expect he would have. He returned her many soft kisses with one very vigorous osculation that landed near one eyebrow as she bobbed up and down beside him, and which was immediately rubbed off with the back of Arethusa's glove.

“You're always so awfully rough. But . . . *Oh, Timothy!*”

She grabbed him firmly by one arm, as if she really feared he might escape her and the Party even now, though actually in Lewisburg, and led him to where Clay waited for them with the big red automobile. To Clay, she introduced her charge with the simple announcement, “He really came, Clay.” But no other was needed, for the chauffeur knew who it was with Arethusa, and all about him. Timothy's fame had gone before him; Arethusa had not made a single warm friend since she had left the Farm who had not at least heard of Timothy.

She pushed him into the car and banged the door. Then she seated herself close to him, and bounced up and down on the cushions happily.

“Say right away what a wonderful automobile you think this is, Timothy!”

Timothy was perfectly obedient.

“I can run it, all by myself. You don't believe it,

but I can. I'll show you some day, maybe to-morrow. Oh, Timothy, I'm so awfully, awfully glad you came! How is Aunt 'Senath and all of them? How is Miss Johnson? Oh, I would never forgive you if you hadn't! That's a new suit you have on!" suddenly leaning forward to pounce on the portion of the trouser leg that showed from under his overcoat, "And it's a new overcoat, too! Why, Timothy!"

Timothy pleaded guilty to both accusations.

"You look awfully nice!" Arethusa gave him a very violent hug most unexpectedly. "Oh, but it was so dear of you to come! And, Timothy, we're going to have a perfectly wonderful Party!"

Timothy longed to give Arethusa a hug in return for this one, but he really did not dare. She would probably have called him rough again, for his way of hugging. He looked at her a trifle sadly. She seemed to Timothy such a far-away Arethusa, in spite of all this enthusiasm. And after that look, he felt her more unapproachable than at first. He could not tell exactly what it was; perhaps, her clothes.

Arethusa caught his glance at her furs and saucy little hat, with its fly-away feather, and preened herself just a bit.

"How do you like me? My new things? Aren't they darling?"

"Yes," replied Timothy, but there was not very much warmth in his tone. "And I like you in anything; but I believe I like you better in what Miss 'Titia makes you."

"In what Aunt 'Titia makes me!" she exclaimed, horrified at Timothy's poor taste. "Of course you don't! You can't!" But she added, quickly, for her loyal heart felt that something was not quite right



about the sound of that speech "Aunt 'Titia's clothes look better at home, on the Farm! They wouldn't do at all for town! But she's a Dear to make them for me, and I love them! They're perfectly all right in the country!"

"That's where I like you better," replied Timothy decidedly, and very briskly and warmly this time. "On the Farm! And in the country!"

"Oh, Timothy, don't begin and gloom now! Please don't! That's a dear!" Arethusa clasped her hands imploringly. "Please, please, don't gloom! I'm not going to fuss with you once while you're here, not once! I promise, honest! So there!"

This should have been very cheering news. But Timothy merely remarked with calmness that she shouldn't have time to do much fussing, anyway, since he was going home on the morning train.

"Why, Timothy Jarvis!"

Yes, he repeated, the early morning train was the train he fully intended to take.

"No, you're not!"

Arethusa was very firm about it, but then so was he. And a quarrel seemed most imminent, in spite of Arethusa's earnest promise, had they not very fortunately arrived at the house in Lenox Avenue just in time to prevent the disagreement from becoming disagreeable.

Ross liked Timothy immensely. He liked his big-ness, and his honest youngness, and his clean-heartedness, written all over him. Elinor liked him too. And the boy had not been in the house five minutes before Ross and Elinor both had read his story in his blue eyes. Those blue eyes never once left Arethusa.

Arethusa's tongue certainly seemed swung in the middle during the rest of this day. But then there were

two whole months and over to make up. They came within really dangerous hailing distance of an affray several times, sad to relate, when Timothy planted himself in one position, immovable, and she firmly entrenched herself in another. He did not seem to be able to approve of a single thing she had to tell him about the various and sundry occupations with which she filled her days in Lewisburg. But a person in so supremely felicitous a mood as Arethusa was in at the prospect of her very own Party, could not actually quarrel with anybody, however obstinate he might be; so the hours sped happily by, and the pitfalls were somehow avoided.

“Doesn't Timothy look just perfectly heavenly when he has on a dress suit?”

Arethusa asked this pointed question very proudly of her parents when she led him into the library that evening after dinner, to show them how nice he looked, just before the Party came. She held him by one hand, quite as if she had been a fond mother exhibiting an only child whose toilette was solely of her personal making. One could easily have imagined her actually responsible for the cut and fit of Timothy's suit.

But he did look well, undeniably. Ross said that Baldur the Beautiful might have looked just like him, if they had ever worn dress suits in Valhalla, with his wavy blonde head and his sea blue eyes, and his splendid bigness. Although Arethusa knew no myths of the Northland, something about Ross's compliment to Timothy pleased her; she was proud to show him off as such a handsome creature.

But Timothy very nearly spoiled matters by inquiring who sent her the flowers she wore at her belt, as they stood together in front of the library fire, in such

an "I-have-a-right-to-know" manner, that she slapped him and told him to mind his own business. And so the Party, after all, began for Timothy with unhappiness.

Arethusa was wearing a white dress on this Occasion, but it was a glorified White Dress, of such beauty, that some other name would surely have to be found for Miss Letitia's loving effort; it would be clearly impossible to speak of them both as "white dresses." Her hair was piled high on her head in a way that Timothy had never seen her wear it, and that he vaguely did not like, because it made her look so much older. And in her low-necked gown and wearing the flowers another man had sent her, she seemed to Timothy more than ever of a world apart. She was like an Arethusa met for the first time. He wished intensely that he could gather her up and carry her back to the country where he considered she so indisputably belonged, to be the old Arethusa once more. He looked gloomily down the length of the library, which had been cleared for dancing of all its furniture, and that presented an expanse of shining floor on which the firelight danced and gleamed enticingly, and wished another wish. He wished that he himself had stayed at home. Why had he gone contrary to the dictates of his common sense and come in answer to that telegram? Arethusa did not really want him; did not really care, now that he was here. She was altogether changed; and, thought Timothy, rather soberly, his head resting on one hand as he leaned against the mantel-shelf and stared down into the fire, it was not at all for the better.

But Timothy was to be still more unhappy before the evening had got fairly started. For in Arethusa's

transparent face and her eyes lifted adoringly to the Wonderful Mr. Bennet, the very first time he saw her dance with him, poor Timothy read his Certain Doom. As he had predicted before she had ever left the Farm, so it had come to pass.

Timothy left his station by the tall library mantel and wandered across the room to an inconspicuous corner, where he propped his manly form up against the wall and followed Arethusa with his eyes, totally unregardful of anything else in their line of vision, as she swayed and dipped like a snow fairy in her airy white gown, about the room. He was no great adept in the concealment of his feelings; his tragedy was visible so that all they who ran might read, even the swiftest.

He refused to dance. And he could have danced, knowing how very well. Was not Arethusa's present proficiency some evidence of this fact? But Timothy was sure that his heart was broken; and how could he dance with a broken heart? So he sulked in his corner and the moments of the Party sped by joyfully and all too quickly, for everybody else. Arethusa's guests, with the sole exception of Timothy, seemed to be having the very best of times.

She was far too happy herself to notice his unhappiness very much, although she did fly over to him once or twice to beg him to behave and stop being such an awful gloom. And she made him dance with her, one single one-step; a rite which was performed by Timothy promptly at her request, but in a stony silence on his part. When it was over, he discovered that somebody had pre-empted his little corner, a very silly couple were giggling foolishly in the spot which had been sacred to sorrow all evening long; so he betook himself to the doorway into the hall, and propped him-

self up against the jamb, where he continued his unhappy observation of Arethusa's proceedings.

Ross watched him with amusement.

"It is woefully apparent," he remarked to Elinor, "just what is eating our friend, Timothy."

He looked around for Mr. Bennet, and he found him dancing with Arethusa at the moment; then he looked back at Timothy once more, and he could easily tell that Timothy's somber blue eyes had seen just exactly what he had seen; Arethusa and Mr. Bennet so obviously enjoying each other's company.

"Shall I go over there and tell him, do you think, that he is giving himself most unnecessary pain over my daughter's present state of mind, which is only a phase? Or do you believe, my Fount of all Wisdom, that I had best let matters stand as they are?"

"I'd really let him alone, Ross, about that, I think. For he wouldn't believe a single word you could say to him. He has right now what he considers conclusive evidence, what his own eyes have told him. He and Arethusa are a pair of the youngest things I ever saw, bless their hearts! But please do go talk to him about something, Ross, because I cannot bear to see him follow that child around any longer with that utterly hopeless expression."

So Ross, as a dutiful spouse, sauntered over to Timothy in his doorway and made a most noble, and really commendable effort, considering the total lack of real response he received, which is so dampening to all such efforts, to interest him in conversation. Timothy answered with all the politeness due to Mr. Worthington, but without the slightest zeal for pursuit of any one of the subjects which were introduced, in succession, as each one seemed to fail to arouse animation. Eli-

nor's real intention in sending her husband to fill this breach was not a complete success, for the boy's eyes never once rested upon his interlocutor; they still remained fixed wherever Arethusa was.

Timothy adhered to his announced intention of leaving on the following morning, much to Arethusa's fury.

She tried coaxing and threats of future silence, and even tears; all to no avail. Timothy's resolution was absolutely unshaken. His "Good-bye, Arethusa!" was of the very essence of tragedy. Ross found it necessary to look hastily in another direction.

"Please stay, Timothy," pleaded Arethusa for about the hundredth time, even after this "Good-bye!" "Please stay!" Then as a supreme inducement and a last resort . . . "Mr. Bennet said last night that if you would, he would get you an invitation to the January Cotillion next week. Everybody is crazy for them; they give so awfully few away. But he can get you one, and he said he'd be very glad to, too. He's a Governor," proudly.

She had been holding tight to Timothy's hands all this while in her effort to induce him to prolong his visit; but now he rudely wrenched them loose and drew himself to the very tallest of his tall self.

"I wouldn't go anywhere that man was," he exclaimed fiercely, "if he paid me a million dollars a minute! Not unless it was to his funeral, and I'd attend that with the greatest pleasure, and even pay for the privilege of getting into the cemetery!"

"Timothy Jarvis! Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Mr. Bennet said he liked you! He was being kind!"

"Well, he needn't be kind to me, for I certainly don't

want any of his kindness! I can get along a great deal better without it! You can tell him that from me, if you please! And *I* most certainly didn't like *him!* He's a four-flusher, for fair, if ever *I* saw one!"

And before Arethusa had even begun to recover from the Awfulness of this Speech, Timothy of the Sore Heart had run on down the steps, was safe in the automobile, and Clay had driven away with him.

Arethusa could not possibly follow.

But Ross would have stopped her if she had even tried, for he had promised Timothy he might go to the station absolutely alone. Timothy had asked him before breakfast. For once, Arethusa's wishes had been over-ridden; she had made all sorts of loud objections to the carrying out of this idea. But Ross knew, as well as if Timothy had given him his reason for making this request, that the miserable boy who was so sure he was leaving his Life's Happiness, forever, would far rather say a farewell to that Happiness in the presence of folks that he knew to help him keep a grip on himself than to wait until the last moments at the station; those moments when a parting is so surely at hand, that it brings a breaking-down even to those who would be strongest, sometimes.

It was so like Timothy to have the last word and then run away, that after Arethusa got over her violent anger with him for the Words of Blasphemy he had spoken of the Wonderful Mr. Bennet, she laughed and laughed at the thought. How many times he had done the very same thing!

Then came what Ross had called the "Real Event of the Season"—that long looked-forward-to January Cotillion.

## CHAPTER XXII

The January Cotillion was always held in the very oldest hotel in Lewisburg. All other really fashionable entertainments had long ago ceased to be given there, for it was very far down-town, the heart of the wholesale district had crept up around it, and its character had somewhat changed of late years; but still, January after January, the Cotillion Club continued to give its one yearly and important event within these historic portals. And historic portals they truly were, for the ancient hostelry went back long before the Civil War to trace its beginnings. Dickens was said to have slept under its roof, on his memorable visit to America; duels, in those days when such settlements of affairs of honor were winked at by the law of the community, had not only found the reasons for being duels within these walls, but had actually been fought in that high-ceilinged old lobby. In one or two places could still be seen the traces of bullet marks that had gone wild. The most beautiful woman of her day in America had, in answer to a laughing challenge that she do so, ridden her horse straight up those broad front steps and into the dining-room. The stories in connection with the old hotel were many and varied.

Its ball-room, unlike the ball-rooms in the newer hotels in town, was on the second floor. It was popularly supposed to be built on springs and had long been considered to be the best dancing floor in the South.

No one really remembered now who had first instituted the January Cotillion; just what long ago leader



of society had first had the idea. But it was still kept up, just as it had been started, winter after winter; and had so firmly established itself as the real social tradition of Lewisburg that invitations to it were almost fought for, and no one who had one, or could have one (saving Timothy) had ever been known to decline it. Once a year the Lewisburg aristocracy left its familiar haunts and betook itself to this old building by the water's edge to spend an evening of gayety within its dingy walls. There were other dances given here, it is true, by the Sons and Daughters of the Morning, and the Pleasure Club, and the West End Society; but they were frowned upon by the truly socially elect, not one of whom would have wanted to be seen here by acquaintances as a frivoler, except on the one consecrated evening of the year, the second Tuesday in every January.

Arethusa had gathered all of this knowledge concerning the January Cotillion, and she was quite properly impressed to have been invited to attend.

The old ball-room had been made into fairyland for the Occasion, and as Arethusa stood in between the tall fluted columns that flanked its magnificent old doorway on either side, and looked about her, her eyes sparkled with delight. The walls, so sadly in need of a renewal of their frescoing, had been latticed with thin white strips to the edge of the heavy molding on the ceiling, and in this lattice work was twined smilax most lavishly. Bay trees and tall palms had been used to make recesses like little rooms, in several places, and these each seemed to fairly shriek at the beholder, "Do come and sit out a dance in me! That's just what I was put here for! Oh, do come!"

The faded upholstery on the tall, high-backed chairs

had been covered over with slips of rose-colored chintz, and in each little recess had been placed a matching sofa. It was a very bad color to be close to Arethusa's hair, but so thoroughly pleasing to see that she never once thought of the other side of it. The crystal-draped chandeliers had all had their electric light bulbs shaded with big, pink tissue-paper roses, and extra lights, similarly shaded, had been scattered throughout the green and the lattice work on the walls. The whole room was bathed in a soft, rosy glow. An orchestra played all unseen behind a thick bank of palms on a little platform at the far end of the room. It had quite the effect of music at a distance.

"Isn't it beautiful!" Arethusa drew a long, long breath of admiration. "Oh, isn't it just beautiful!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Bennet. "The decorations are always rather good."

But his agreement altogether lacked a proper fervency, for he had a wretched cold of the thoroughly uncomfortable kind, and he did not feel fervent about anything in the world.

Arethusa was all solicitude. "You don't feel very well, do you? I'm so sorry! Let's go sit down in one of those dear little places." They had been rather early in their arrival at the January Cotillion, hardly anybody was here as yet. "Wouldn't you like to?" She was almost maternal in her desire to make him as comfortable as possible.

And Mr. Bennet was quite agreeable to the idea of being made comfortable. So they strolled almost the length of the ballroom to find a little recess far enough away from the door, so that Arethusa could be sure there would be no draught to make his cold worse.

The little recess she finally selected was so well

screened with green that their occupancy of it on the pink chintz-covered sofa was as effectively hidden from the ballroom proper as if they had actually been in some other apartment. This delighted Arethusa.

"We'll call This One ours," she said, with an air of proprietorship, patting the sofa, "and we'll come back here and sit in it every now and then."

"It would be nice to sit out a dance or two," suggested Mr. Bennet, tentatively.

He was rather inclined to the opinion it would be quite beyond his powers to dance the evening straight through.

His suggestion was received with ecstasy by the Romantic Arethusa. For to sit in this rose-colored recess, side by side on a rose-colored sofa with the Wonderful Mr. Bennet, with a rose-colored glow all over them, while the orchestra played dreamy music afar off and the rest of the world of the Cotillion whirled unconsciously by, appeared to Arethusa as the most that any girl could ask of fate. There was nothing more Perfect as a Situation to be offered to anyone, she was quite positive.

The January Cotillion, in these days of trots and one-steps and hesitations, had of recent seasons become almost a misnomer for this particular party. There was no cotillion at all about it, save for a grand march of all the couples in the early part of the evening, and the fact that favors had remained a feature. But why waste time in the performance of slow figures when one might be joyfully trotting? Yet tradition could by no means dispense with the favors; they were most highly prized. And a feminine person who went through more than three seasons of Lewisburg society without her share of spoils from the

January Cotillion, was indisputably a Rank Failure.

But Arethusa had no lack of favors from the very beginning of this affair, thus indicating partners. Her spoils were amply sufficient for her to show in proof that she was a Social Success, and not a Failure. Mr. Bennet was not once forced to exert himself, when he felt so very little like exertion, to find gentlemen who were willing to dance with her; they flocked around her of their own accord. So instead of making any effort to join the romp, after he had performed a Duty in the grand march, he lolled against a pillar by the door and watched it all, which was much more to his taste this particular evening.

A man detached himself, after awhile, from the group of "stags" in the center of the room and strolled over to join Mr. Bennet.

"Don't seem to see you dancing much with the fair Arethusa," he said. "What's the matter, Grid? Feeling anyways seedy?"

"Got a peach of a cold," replied Mr. Bennet.

"Which is plain to be seen, now that I look more closely. You're not nearly so pretty with it, either. Rubs off considerable of your usual irresistible bloom. Beaving Arethusa Worthington for a change, I suppose?"

The afflicted one nodded.

"Well, she's one girl that I know that you never have to bother about showing a time to; she has it all by herself. I'll hand it to her there. So there's no real use in your sticking around up here. Come on down with me and we'll play a round or two of pool. It'll be much better for you than standing up here in this draughty hall."

Mr. Bennet demurred.

"Oh, come on! I've no business clearing out, either, but we won't stay a minute . . . It'll do you good."

Just what medicinal properties a game of pool may be said to possess was not made plain, but Mr. Bennet seemed, after a moment or two of thought, inclined to agreement with the idea. He cast a weather eye about for Arethusa, but as her dancing partner had changed since he last observed her, not five whole minutes before, he felt himself perfectly safe in leaving her to her own devices for awhile, while he sought more congenial occupation than that of a mere spectator of the enjoyment of others.

Arethusa saw him, as he turned away from the ball-room door and his shapely back disappeared down the hall, and her warm heart smote her at the sight.

"He feels just perfectly rotten, I know!"

And she . . . She was dancing around gayly, enjoying herself leaving him so wretched and alone! She visioned him stretched out somewhere in another room on a lumpy hotel sofa, suffering!

She grew so distraught as this vision broadened in its scope as to the Misery of the Wonderful Mr. Bennet, that she missed step with Billy Watts, with whom she was dancing, entirely. She then stepped squarely on his foot, and missed the time again. And it was not only once or twice she did this most unpardonable thing, but three distinct times in quick succession.

Billy stopped short in the middle of the floor, disgusted.

"See here, Arethusa, what's the matter with you? I've asked you the same question about sixty times, and you've just been climbing all over me!"

Billy had somewhat adopted Timothy's tone with

Arethusa. They were the oldest and best of friends by now, and he gave himself all the privileges of such a friend. Arethusa liked it. . . generally.

She was most apologetic.

"I'm sorry, Billy." (She knew him quite well enough after these weeks to drop the formal, "Mr. Watts.") "I wasn't thinking about my feet just then. I was worrying about Mr. Bennet. He's real sick to-night, and he just went out somewhere. Do you reckon I'd better go see what's the matter with him?"

"Well, of all things!" Billy seized her forcibly around the waist and swung her back into the throng of dancers. "There's nothing the matter with that nut! He's probably off enjoying himself in his own sweet way."

But Arethusa wrenched herself away from his grasp; her quick anger flared.

"You just take that back right now, Billy Watts! Mr. Bennet's not a nut. And he's sick, he told me so himself! If you don't take it back, I won't dance another step with you, not one!"

Billy laughed, good-naturedly. "I didn't say he wasn't sick, did I? But you don't have to trail around after him nursing him; he's plenty old enough, and ugly enough to take care of himself."

"Billy Watts! You are perfectly horrid!"

"Oh, come on, Arethusa, and stop getting all up in the air over nothing!" He took hold of her again, but she jerked angrily away. "Don't be a goose," he added, "everybody in the room's looking at you!"

"I don't care a bit if they are!"

"Do you want me to run out and look up your sick friend and hold his head or anything? I will, if it'll please you very much! Because I sure didn't

mean to set you off like this! Come on now, Arethusa, and be a better sport!"

This offer to go look after the suffering Mr. Bennet, although of a wording hardly as respectful as she considered seemly, mollified Arethusa to the extent of finishing out this dance with Billy. But it was not at all necessary that he actually carry out his offer when the dance was really over, for just as the last strains of music were sounding, Mr. Bennet re-appeared from the direction of the hall.

Arethusa left Billy abruptly, standing open-mouthed in the middle of the floor at the suddenness of her departure, and without a single word of apology for leaving him, to greet Mr. Bennet with outstretched hands and anxious inquiry into the state of his immediate physical being. The answer was reassuring and one calculated to raise her spirits. Mr. Bennet believed he felt much better. Arethusa beamed.

"Do you want to dance this with me?" asked Mr. Bennet, then; for just at that very moment the music started once more.

"Do you feel well enough to be dancing?" Anxiety and solicitude were in voice and manner.

"Yes, indeed. It seems to me I haven't danced with you to amount to anything this evening. And I couldn't let it all slip by that way. What's the use of being here with you, if other men have all the pleasure?"

Arethusa blushed.

And off they started together to the sound of a waltz that could not have helped but make the stiffest possible person dance like an angel, no matter how badly he might have danced before hearing this particular tune. It was a strain of melody with a haunting tinge of deli-

cious melancholy. It aroused all sorts of queer, indistinct little longings, and aching memories of other happy times irretrievably past. Its sound seemed meant to dream by, or to make love by; ordinary speech seemed a real sacrilege while it quivered in the air.

Mr. Bennet had a little way when he danced with Arethusa (or when he danced with any girl alive for that matter, although she did not know this) of making it seem as though he thought that they were the one and only couple in all Christendom who had ever danced together for the dance to amount to anything worth remembering; as though she were the only girl he had ever really cared to dance with; and as though now, with bodies tuned to the one strain of those violins sobbing their soft refrain over and over, he had reached Paradise with the girl in his arms.

The music stopped.

Arethusa sighed with a funny little catch of her breath. "That . . . that sounded just like Heaven," she said, softly.

Mr. Bennet bent his handsome head. "Was it only the music?" he asked.

He could not help asking it, and asking it just exactly as he did.

Arethusa laughed. It was a most subdued little sound of embarrassment, and her only answer. And partly the spell of that wonderful music, and partly her quaint worship of the man standing beside her, made her wish to get away from the crowd and their chattering talk of nothings for a wee while.

"Let's go sit in our little room," she suggested, with a bit of emphasis on the "our."

An encore to that waltz was starting just as they reached the entrance to the green recess, and Mr.



Bennet hesitated. "Shall we go back and try this?"

But Arethusa shook her head.

She had a vague feeling that no other Waltz in all her life, no matter how many more she might dance hereafter, was ever going to be as perfect as the One just danced had been. And she could not spoil its memory by so immediately dancing another waltz to the very same tune. So they went instead into the little recess and sat down on the rose-colored sofa, side by side, and without saying a word for a long time. Such music demanded silence, especially when listened to in such a setting. And the rose-colored lights threw the softest sort of glow all over them.

Mr. Bennet reclined a little in his corner of the sofa, with his feet gracefully outstretched and his ankles crossed, his arms folded, watching Arethusa, for her head was downcast and turned away from him, and she could not know that he was watching her. He smiled a bit as he always did whenever he watched her this way when she was not noticing.

But Arethusa may have felt his look, although she did not turn around to really see it, or it may have been those shy little thoughts of him which were at the moment filling her head which caused it, for a soft flush suddenly ran all over her neck, and even up behind her ears. Mr. Bennet's smile broadened, perceptibly.

If anyone had asked him just then what he thought of Arethusa, he would have said that she was a very pretty girl, in his opinion; the prettiest girl, in fact, that he had known for some time. Mr. Bennet had even found himself wondering, on several occasions lately, if he was not beginning to think too much of Arethusa and her prettiness; just a little bit more than

was quite wise, from his own point of view. There was very open admiration in his face as he studied her now. He noticed the tiny curls at the back of her neck, warm from dancing to be twisted in the tightest little rings; they were the most babyish looking little curls he had ever seen, he thought. And he distinctly liked that proud little way she carried her head. He moved just a trifle, then, so that he could see more of her face; how her extraordinarily long lashes swept her cheek, and her adorable nose, which was ever so slightly *retroussée*. Timothy, in some of those moments when Arethusa was inclined to be most trying, had called it a "pug nose," but Mr. Bennet's ideas were much more poetical. And he could see her mouth, with her red lips curved in a slight smile; Arethusa had a very pretty mouth.

And then quite suddenly, without himself having any really preconceived idea that he was going to do such a thing, Mr. Bennet leaned over and kissed Arethusa. He kissed her square on her sweet mouth.

And almost immediately, he kissed her the second time.

Arethusa had been startled by his first kiss, very naturally; it had broken rudely into her shy dreams to scatter them far away and bring her back to reality. But she returned his second salutation with all of her young soul. Then she sprang up from the sofa, gently disengaging herself from the arm he had half slipped around her.

"Now, you musn't kiss me any more," she said, with a quaint air of authority.

Mr. Bennet was somewhat startled by this, himself; and then rather amused. He had hardly intended to

do so again, being a trifle ashamed of himself already, but Arethusa's reasons for anything were always original.

"Why not?" he enquired.

"Because . . ." She blushed deeply, rosy-red.

"Because what?"

"Because . . ." She looked down for just a moment, then raised her head with an adorable air of dignity most becoming, "you musn't kiss me any more until after we're married. Aunt 'Liza always says a girl mustn't!"

"Married!" The thoroughly startled Mr. Bennet sank backward on the pink sofa. "Why . . ."

"Yes," repeated Arethusa. Then something in his expression suddenly frightened her; her face went chalk white. "Why . . . Why did you . . . Didn't you . . ."

"I think you've misunderstood me," began Mr. Bennet, gently, "I didn't mean . . ." Then he stopped awkwardly. For once in his life the Wonderful Mr. Bennet was at an utter loss for the words with which to continue a conversation with a lady.

"You ki . . . kissed me," said Arethusa.

But Mr. Bennet made no reply. It was a Fact which it was unnecessary to confirm, and could not be denied.

"And di . . . didn't you . . . you mean," she continued slowly, "that you wanted to marry me?" She brought each word of this question out with difficulty. "I thought me . . . men never kissed girls that way unless they wanted to marry them?" This last was also an interrogation.

"No," replied Mr. Bennet, uncomfortably, "not necessarily."

She began backing away from him, her eyes fixed upon him, wide with a sort of horror.

"My dear child . . ."

"I'm not your dear child!" Arethusa was suddenly so angry that she trembled with rage from head to foot. "Don't come anywhere near me," she exploded, as Mr. Bennet started towards her.

She stuck her hands straight out in front of her as if to push him away, and Mr. Bennet stopped short where he was.

"If you'll let me explain," he said, "I think I can. I didn't . . . That is, I'm just as sorry as I can be. And I really didn't mean a single thing!" But this was a very wrong beginning.

It made matters, already bad enough, very much worse. He had Kissed her and he had Not Meant a Single Thing! There was Deep Disgrace for Arethusa in this simple declaration.

Now Arethusa's rearing by Miss Eliza had been according to a few very simple Rules for Conduct, which were nevertheless as ironbound and unalterable as the most complicated laws that were ever framed. And one of those Rules was that no really Nice girl would ever permit herself to be kissed by a man unless she had every intention of marrying him immediately or was already married to him. Miss Eliza had often said that she would far rather see Arethusa dead and cold in her coffin than to see her the sort of girl who thought so little of herself as to kiss a man she was not to marry. This was really at the bottom of Arethusa's expressed objection to being kissed by Timothy on those occasions when such unexpected conduct of his had so displeased her. She had no intention of ever

marrying Timothy, whatever his own intentions might have been; therefore, it seemed to Arethusa, according to this Miss Elizian Guide for the Proper Behavior of Nice Young Ladies, it was wrong for him to salute her in any such fashion, or for her to permit him to. It is true that she had kissed Timothy herself under the stress of such excitement as arrivals and departures, but such salutations were really in a class quite apart, and of their own.

Into the Kiss she had given Mr. Bennet, Arethusa had put her construction of the meaning of his unexpected action founded upon these ideas of kisses, and her sentiments in regard to him, and all the thoughts and dreams about him in which she had linked their two selves together; only to find that Mr. Bennet himself had no such ideas of kisses, and had evidently had no such thoughts and dreams. Is there any one to wonder at her sudden feeling of humiliation? She rubbed fiercely at her lips with the back of one hand, as if to remove the visible and outward sign of her feeling of Disgrace. Then the color surged back into her face; and once more, hot Rage mounted high, flashing its signal from her stormy eyes and quick breathing.

"I hate you!" she exclaimed, suddenly, "Oh . . . *I hate you!*"

"Please listen to me just a moment, Arethusa. I . . ."

"Don't say anything to me!" She stamped one foot with angry emphasis. "I won't listen! I don't want to hear anything you have to say! And Timothy was exactly right about you! Oh . . .!"

She flung herself face downward on the rose-colored sofa and began to sob violently, her shoulders quivering; burying her head farther and farther back into

the corner of the sofa until it seemed more like a piled up heap of party finery huddled there than an actual girl.

This was truly Dreadful!

Mr. Bennet stood, man-fashion, helplessly above her, with an overpowering desire to flee far from those tears; and yet with a strong conviction, at the same time, that he ought to stay and at least attempt a justification of what had been so sadly misconstrued, if there was any earthly way in which it could be justified. He was willing to say, or to do, anything which she might demand of him, to straighten it out. The sobs decreased in intensity and so Mr. Bennet spoke.

"Arethusa . . ." he began.

Then Arethusa's sobs stopped altogether as abruptly almost as they had begun, and she rose majestically from the sofa, keeping her tear-stained face averted.

"I asked you not to speak to me. And I'm going home," not once did she look, even in his direction.

"By myself," she added, positively.

"I can't let you do a thing like that . . ."

"It has nothing whatever to do with what *you* can't let, and I shall scream out loud right here, if you start to try to follow me!"

"Will you let me apologize then, at least, before you go? If you insist on going?"

"No, you can't apologize. I don't want a single one of your apologies."

Mr. Bennet felt as weak as the proverbial water in the face of such personified determination as was Arethusa. He meekly permitted her to leave the little recess of palms and to fly across the ball room floor while he stood as one hypnotized without moving. When he had recovered his powers of locomotion suffi-

ciently to follow, she was just coming out of the dressing room door wrapped in her green cloak. The sight of the green cloak almost unnerved him again. He had not dreamed that the child would carry out her wild plan of going home. He had thought that she might retire to the dressing-room for awhile, but that she would surely recover before many moments were flown. He took one or two half-hearted steps forward. The Wonderful Mr. Bennet had no precedent established for his guidance in this predicament. He was all at sea; no such situation had ever befallen him before. Arethusa was the only lady he had ever taken to a Party who had gone home without him. Would decided pursuit be too undignified; or could he risk a Scene?

Arethusa caught a glimpse of him in his uncertain regard of her, as he stood near the ballroom entrance, and off she flew like the wind in the direction she judged the stairs to be, luckily finding them right there; for she could not risk the waiting for the elevator to come up and get her. He should not be given the slightest opportunity to speak to her again!

She plunged madly down one long flight of wide steps, broken by several landings, to find herself in the wide old lobby, where the startled night clerk was aroused from his dozing, for this ancient inn was far from lively at this hour of the night especially in this part of it, by her sudden entrance; and he went to hunt for Clay at her breathless request. Very fortunately, for Arethusa's impulsive departing, he had not driven off anywhere, but was easily located by the obliging clerk among a small group of chauffeurs who were lounging in the barber shop; while Arethusa waited impatiently in the lobby, casting fearful glances

in the direction of first the stairs and then the elevator, fully expectant of seeing Mr. Bennet appear from either direction. Clay was slightly mystified at this sudden summons, so early in the evening, but like a good chauffeur and the friend of Arethusa's which he so truly was, he asked no questions; and unfastened the back door for her, having driven in the back way without a word of comment. Arethusa knew that Ross and Elinor would still be up at this early hour, within hearing of the opening of the front door, and she wanted to slip into the house without their knowledge. She was quite sure that their interrogations would fall fast and furious; a natural curiosity which would have to be gratified as to the Reason for this unexpectedly early return from the Real Event of the Season.

It was a Silent and Miserable Maiden who thus went home so prematurely from what was to have been the most Marvelous Affair ever attended, huddled back into one corner of the limousine; and it was a still more Silent and Miserable Maiden who crept softly up the back stairs and sought her room, where she undressed entirely in the dark and climbed immediately into bed.

And the grey hours of the dawning found her still wakeful under the same green silk coverlid beneath which she had slept so many, many nights with Happy Dreaming of the Wonderful Mr. Bennet and his very great Charm.



## CHAPTER XXIII

This was the very first night in all of her healthy young life that Arethusa did not go to sleep just as soon as her head had touched the pillow.

Over and over again her active imagination re-lived for her that scene with Mr. Bennet, and her whole body seemed to burn with the Disgrace of his Kiss. She writhed and twisted and turned in her bed, but she could not get away from the Shame of it, anywhere; and the way Mr. Bennet had looked when he had said she had misunderstood him.

Miss Eliza's convictions upon all subjects were most decided, but on no single subject were they more decided than on this very one of a Kiss. No Decent Woman, said Miss Eliza with a terrible emphasis, would allow a man's lips to Touch hers, or permit him to embrace her, unless there were Matrimonial Intentions.

But poor Arethusa's Intentions had all been Matrimonial, however Mr. Bennet's, for with all her heart she had given of her very best. Her shy building of air castles for the Perfect Bliss of Two, through all these golden weeks just past, superinduced, one might say, by Mr. Bennet's attitude of unmistakable delight in her companionship, had led to this catastrophe of a misunderstanding.

And as the hours wore on the feeling of humiliation at having so misunderstood with her thought that he had wanted to marry her when he had Kissed her, grew and grew until it was almost unbearable.

Then, quite suddenly, she sat bolt upright in bed. For an Idea concerning Mr. Bennet, no longer prefixed the Wonderful, had wormed itself into her brain without her having the slightest conception how it had got there, and now it presented itself to her, fully formed.

*Mr. Bennet was very decidedly one of the very sort of men Miss Eliza had been so careful to warn her against!*

He was one of those Awful Male Beings who were nice to girls to win their affections, only to deceive them!

No one in the world could have been nicer to any girl than Mr. Bennet had been to her! And he had most certainly won her Affections! And she had most certainly been completely deceived! His had been the Kiss of a Judas! So Arethusa would undoubtedly have named it had she known any of the classification of Kisses. But one thing about the Whole Affair loomed Large and Certain; she had gone contrary to Miss Eliza's Expressed Wishes once more! And this time, it was with what Dire Results!

This made it twice that she had lapsed from the path pointed out for her treading in her intercourse with the members of the other sex; the man on the train, and now . . . Mr. Bennet! The man of the train appeared before Arethusa at the moment. She had thought him such a nice man, until superior wisdom had informed her differently. Yet that affair had ended comparatively smoothly, thanks to Mrs. Cherry. There was no punishment Miss Eliza could fairly inflict for that, beyond scolding a little. But this! What would Miss Eliza ever do if she found this out? And Arethusa had thought Mr. Bennet a Nice man

also. Nay, more than merely nice; he had seemed Perfect. It was quite plain to Arethusa that she knew nothing whatever about men. The best thing for her to do hereafter would be walk in directions where they were not to be found.

Arethusa decided, going back to the very beginning for about the hundredth time, and reviewing this Affair in this new light of Miss Eliza's regard of it, that her lips had best be locked so closely together in regard to her Fall from Grace that Inquisitional Torture would not be strong enough to force it from her.

No, whatever happened hereafter under her eagle eye that so little escaped, to cause the pouring forth of the vials of her wrath upon Arethusa's head, Miss Eliza must never, never know of the Bennet Escapade. And further considering It, from the other angle of her deep humiliation of having misunderstood, she also decided that no human being should ever learn, from her own lips, of the Great Shame that had befallen the daughter of the House of Worthington this Fatal Evening of the January Cotillion.

The first wan light of dawn struggling through her half drawn blinds found Arethusa thus, still wakeful, and still miserably thoughtful; but a little while after she had heard the first milkman's cart rattle past in the street, she fell into a troubled slumber of vague, unpleasant dreams that made her toss and mutter in her sleep. They were Dreams of Miss Eliza's fury in a personified form, and of Mr. Bennet, cloven-hoofed, with horns upon his handsome head and grinning as diabolically as any fiend (that half-sad, half-sweet smile of his she had so loved distorted thus!) both of which phantoms pursued her wheresoever she fled in her dreaming to escape them, even to the uttermost

parts of the earth; sometimes they were together in pursuit, and sometimes they pursued singly. But they gave her no chance to get away from either of them.

She slept straight on through the breakfast hour, for they rarely disturbed her when she had been to a party the night before, and did not waken until nearly noon. Then for a long while she lay there conscious that something Terrible had happened to her, but not wholly conscious, through the heaviness of her waking, just what it was. But it dawned upon her fully in time, and she turned and buried her face in her pillow with a little miserable cry.

It was the greyest sort of day, a real January day, with leaden clouds that hung low to the earth. Snow clouds, they would have called them at the Farm. When Arethusa looked out of the window, she was glad that the sun was not shining; for what a mockery of Absolute Unhappiness a sunshiny day would have seemed!

She dragged herself out of bed, and dressed herself slowly; it was as if she were trying to postpone her inevitable appearance in public as long as possible. When she had finished she stood and stared intently at herself in the mirror. In such reality were the shame and humiliation of the night just past still with her, that she could not be sure that the roundness of that Kiss did not show plainly on her lips for the observation of all beholders. But even her closest scrutiny could not detect anything actually visibly different about her mouth, though her eyes had unaccustomed deep shadows painted darkly under them, and her face looked queerly white and drawn.

Arethusa drew herself to her fullest height and shook

her shoulders decidedly once or twice; Ross and Elinor must not know about This. They must not even be permitted to suspect that anything was wrong.

They were just starting luncheon when she went downstairs.

Elinor glanced at Arethusa who came slowly into the little breakfast room, where they always lunched, to greet her gayly.

"Did you have a good . . ." she began with eagerness, but she stopped when she noticed those dark circles under the grey eyes, and her own eyes widened in alarm, "Why, Arethusa, dearest, what on earth has happened?"

And Arethusa, completely unnerved by the kindness of the anxious tone, flew across the room and flopped down on the floor by Elinor's chair, to bury her head in Elinor's lap and weep uncontrollably.

Over her bent red head, Ross and Elinor exchanged a few eyebrow telegrams which could be translated easily as, "Gridley Bennet."

No one spoke to the sorrowing Arethusa though, and her mother stroked her hair softly to help her somewhat toward a recovery. But after awhile muffled words became distinguishable through the sobs.

"I want to go home! Oh, I want to go home! Mayn't I go home?"

"Do you mean back to the Farm, dear?" asked Elinor, with a nod in Ross's direction which meant that she was quite sure that Mr. Bennet *was* at the bottom of all this suffering.

Arethusa's own nod of affirmation to the question was so violent that it shook out several hairpins.

"Well, we'll see about it. Suppose you eat some

lunch now, and you'll feel much better. Then we can talk it over."

"I don't want any lunch!" Arethusa raised her head and looked tragically up into the kind face which was bending over her, "I want to go home now, to-day. I want," and a deep sob shook her voice again, "I want Aunt 'Senath!"

"But you can't possibly go to-day, Arethusa," it was Ross who spoke this time. "There are no more trains that you could take to-day, except one that gets you home at midnight; none until to-morrow morning. Will," smiling slightly, "will to-morrow morning be soon enough to leave us? Do you think you can continue to put up with us for that little bit of a while longer?"

But his daughter made no sort of response to this attempt at levity; her face was soberness itself.

"Couldn't you tell me what is troubling you, dear?" Elinor's sweet voice was all sympathy. "Could I help you in any way? You know I'd gladly do all I can. And perhaps, if you tell me . . ."

Then the grey eyes filled with tears once more, some of which brimmed clear over; but Arethusa shook her head to that kind offer to share the burden of her woe. She could not tell Elinor about it. It would be absolutely impossible.

She could not tell anyone about it.

She would not be able to tell even Miss Asenath whom she wanted so intensely. But since she was the very tiniest scrap she had snuggled close up to Miss Asenath on her couch when troubles came. And she wanted (oh, how terribly she wanted it!) to snuggle up on that couch right now; and it was so very far

away! Miss Asenath had somehow always understood things which were hard to put in words, without Arethusa having to make any effort to put them in words. And in her present miserable state, she felt that Miss Asenath, with her gentle understanding, was the only person in the whole world who would be able to make her feel less miserable without having to be told what had specifically caused the misery. No matter how much Miss Eliza had ever punished her for misdeeds in the past, no matter how bad she might have been, Miss Asenath had always loved and wanted Arethusa to come and snuggle up to her that the sorrow might be comforted into nothing. No childish disgrace of former years had ever been black enough to change her feeling for the culprit.

Arethusa clung to the thought of Miss Asenath.

But lacking her right at this moment, she continued to sit on the floor at Elinor's feet, and Elinor's kind hand lovingly patted her back into a certain semblance of composure. George stood disapprovingly over by the pantry door. There were times for everything, considered George, and any mealtime was the time to be eating. An excellent lunch was getting cold while Miss Arethusa sat on the floor; good food was being wasted.

"Miss Arethusa's soup will be quite cold," he suggested, after a few moments. George was an old family servant, and he had Certain Privileges. "Shall I bring another plate?"

"So it is!" exclaimed Elinor. "Yes, suppose you do, George. And, Arethusa dear, you must really eat your lunch. Or breakfast, if you'd rather call it what it is for you. I think it will make you feel much better."

But Arethusa was all unresponsive to Elinor's tiny bit of friendly levity also; her face was still sober. Yet she obediently got up from the floor and seated herself at the table to eat the steaming plate of soup which George immediately brought. And it went down her throat much easier than she had imagined any sort of food would go; her throat had seemed so contracted and full of painful lumps. As she ate, her healthy young appetite began to assert itself, and she finished all of her soup and made a very good meal besides. Some of the color came back into her white face.

After lunch, Ross took her into the library with him. He could not bear to see her so strange and quiet, and he hated that curious look of misery so foreign to her young eyes.

"Suppose you tell *me* about it, daughter, couldn't you?" he asked, when he had settled her comfortably in a big chair in front of the fire and seated himself on the arm of it with one of his arms protectingly across the back.

Arethusa wept stormily again.

But she could not possibly tell him about it.

For he was certain to be terribly angry with her, and no telling what he might do to Mr. Bennet. Fathers surely had some way of punishing men for Disgraced Daughters. It was not that any lingering affection for Mr. Bennet made her thus anxious to shield him from any consequences which might be legitimately his for the way he had acted; but everyone might hear of it then, and incidentally . . . It might reach Miss Eliza.

Ross could not help smiling as he looked down at his daughter, sitting there with the warm firelight play-



ing over her. She looked so young, so altogether young, with her slimness and her tumbled hair, and her childishly quivering red mouth, for all that great unhappiness in her eyes. And even if she would not tell him the exact nature of her trouble, Ross was almost positive that he knew what it was. He was well acquainted with Mr. Bennet, and with Arethusa and Arethusa's worship of Mr. Bennet, and he had had for some time a rather shrewd idea that Mr. Bennet really thought a great deal of Arethusa. He knew also what sometimes happened at dances, especially in rose bowers as romantic as those that were always a feature of the January Cotillion; Ross had been to dances himself, in his day, where there had been the equivalent of Romantic Rose Bowers, in moons and balconies. It was all the same. He also knew very well just what Miss Eliza's ideas were about such things. He knew that most of this unhappiness over what had happened was really due to Miss Eliza's rearing; yet Ross was not going to say a word which would disclose all of this varied knowledge of his.

Further knowledge he was positive he possessed was that Arethusa would recover before very long. If she really insisted on going back to the Farm, Timothy was there to help in the recovery. He would undoubtedly be of assistance along this line. This last thought almost made Ross laugh aloud.

But Ross was not so aware as he imagined he was of just the way his daughter felt. For it did not occur to him, for an instant, that Arethusa's whole idea of the Wonderful Mr. Bennet had changed; that now she saw him, instead of as the one Perfect Human Being in a very faulty world, as a Ravening Wolf ranging within the supposedly Safe Folds of Society seeking

whom he might Devour, all unknown to the parents of his Innocent Victims; that she felt so deeply humiliated at having misunderstood Mr. Bennet's Intentions, and at having misconstrued them to be as Matrimonial as her own; and so deeply disgraced at being Kissed by him, such a Man as he had proved himself to be; and so completely terror-stricken at the Bare Idea of Miss Eliza finding out the very least bit of all this: that Arethusa could almost have been torn limb from limb to have kept such knowledge from her aunt.

No, Ross's understanding did not extend itself to any of this.

But he sat in front of the wood fire with her, in the same big chair with his arm around her, silently, as seemed to suit her mood; and every now and then he patted her a little on the shoulder, as lovingly as Elinor had patted her, to let her know that she was to feel sure of his sympathy, even if she could not bring herself to confide in him, and that he was still right there, and at her service, whenever she should want him. Arethusa loved to have him with her; it was delightful, just the two of them together so cozily; but every one of his soft fatherly pats brought her near to tears as she felt it, for she knew herself so very unworthy to receive it.

George appeared in the library about half-past three, bearing under one arm an enormous flower box and in the other hand a card-tray with one small white slip of cardboard upon it.

"Mr. Bennet to see Miss Arethusa," he announced.

Arethusa sprang up, almost overturning Ross.

"Who did you say, George?"

"Mr. Bennet." He extended the card-tray, and then the flower box.

"I *won't* see Mr. Bennet!" exclaimed Arethusa, all over pride at once, and drawing herself up.

"Very well, Miss Arethusa."

George turned to go, but Ross stopped him.

"Wait just a moment, George. Are you quite sure, daughter, that you hadn't better see him?"

Arethusa's eyes flashed.

"*I won't see him, Father! I . . . I . . .*" she fairly choked over the words, her utterance was so intense, "*I hate him!* I never want to see him again as long as I live!"

George looked inquiringly at Mr. Worthington; this was no message for him to be carrying to the gentleman in the reception room.

"Tell Mr. Bennet, George," said Ross, in answer to the look, for he knew that the butler wished the conventions observed on every occasion, and he was half smiling as he said it, "Tell Mr. Bennet that Miss Arethusa wishes to be excused."

George bowed,—this was much better — and disappeared.

Arethusa waited, standing poised with a queer little expression of strained attention, until she heard the front door close; then she sighed, a soft sigh unmistakably of relief.

Mr. Bennet turned away from the Worthington House uncertainly. He was half of a mind to go right straight back and try to see Arethusa once more. He was very sorry about last night. He was remorsefully sorry, when the day had fully come. He would not have thought that Arethusa would be inclined to view such an episode as she so very evidently had. And yet, on further intensive consideration, he realized **that** if he had stopped beforehand to give any real

thought to it, at all, he might have known that she would take it in just the way she had.

There was nothing really horrid about Mr. Bennet. It is to be doubted if he had ever had a really horrid thought in all his life; but he could not help looking like a man in a collar advertisement and he was born with his manner. He was not himself to blame if young and impressionable things feminine insisted upon falling in love with him. Who could blame him for accepting such admiration and attempting, at times, what might be considered as a slight return? Most of us like to be admired. Mr. Bennet's biggest fault was that he was a little selfish; right now, it was no larger cloud on the horizon of his perfection than might be compared to the palm of one's hand, but owing to all this admiration he so constantly received, and the fact that he did not have to exert himself very much to make a cause for popularity, the little cloud was growing.

But Mr. Bennet was really almost as unhappy over this affair as Arethusa herself, after he went over it again very carefully, in the garish light of perspective. Yet he had thought of course he would be permitted to explain at his call this afternoon; that is, explain in so far as he could explain. Which would surely make it all right. He was even prepared to explain to Ross, if it was necessary, and although Mr. Bennet realized that it would not put him in such a very good light in the eyes of Arethusa's father, he felt that Mr. Worthington might understand. And to explain to Ross and to appear so undignified as he was bound to appear, would have been a very hard thing for Mr. Bennet to do, but he was quite prepared to do it; so anxious he was to straighten out this very Miserable Business.

Then Mr. Bennet, as he sorrowfully walked in all the bravery of a most careful toilette made especially for this important call, remembered the little air of dignity with which Arethusa had mentioned marriage. He was genuinely fond of Arethusa. If it had not been for that little cloud of selfishness, no bigger than the palm of one's hand, which was keeping him so much in love with Mr. Bennet, he might have been really in love with her. But there was not quite enough room for Arethusa, although she had crowded into his heart enough for him to give a great deal of thought to her.

"She's a dear," he said aloud, "a perfect dear! And I'm just as sorry as the deuce! But any other girl . . ."

And he poked his slender cane so deep in between the bricks of the old-fashioned sidewalk of this conservative neighborhood that it was wrenched out of his hand and stood there quivering, and in his pre-occupation with the idea of Arethusa he had gone on without it before he realized.

But then . . . Arethusa was not any other girl, and she had had an Aunt Eliza.

"Open the flower box," suggested Ross, "and let's see who they're from."

It was a truly marvelous box of blue violets then disclosed to Arethusa's enraptured gaze. She almost forgot her unhappiness in sheer joy of the wonder of their beauty and fragrance. They were like waxen things in the absolute perfection of their tiny petals; and there seemed to be hundreds of them, each as perfect as a violet ever was, smiling at her with friendly blue faces.

No clue to the sender could be found at first, for

no card was visible. She and Ross hunted all through the box, and finally, way down in one corner under the paper, she discovered a damp white scrap.

"*Mr. Gridley Warfield Bennet,*" it read, in irreproachably correct Old English Script.

Into the fire immediately went flowers and box and card, and Arethusa flopped herself back into her chair and buried her head deep to weep such scalding tears as Niobe, synonym for those who really weep, could not have scorned to be seen weeping. Mingled with these tears was more than a trifle of regret that violets so supremely beautiful must be absolutely destroyed because the gift of such a Man!

Arethusa remained determined to go home, and as she really seemed to want to see Miss Asenath so much, Elinor made no attempt to dissuade her of her purpose beyond reminding her of the parties she was sure to miss by rushing off so suddenly. There were several during this very week that Arethusa had been looking forward to. But Parties had no real attraction for Arethusa now; their prospect failed to move her in the least. She only desired to get away as quickly as possible from all the scenes in any way connected with the late Wonderful Mr. Bennet; and to avoid encounters with any of those friends of hers who might be at all likely to guess what had happened. Arethusa felt as if she could not bear to meet Billy Watts again, or the still faithful Mr. Harrison; or any single, solitary one of the boys and girls she had come to know so well these last few weeks. They had all teased her for her adoration of Mr. Bennet, and as friendly as that teasing surely was, she could not trust herself to face it again.

And so, early the very next morning, she took the

train for Home. She had so much more to put in her little trunk than she had had when she came that Elinor had sent down town and got her a brand new one to take with her instead, and she carried, as a successor to the ancient handbag with which she had come, a smart little traveling case all fitted out inside, that had been one of her gifts for Christmas. But some dim idea of not hurting Miss Letitia's feelings made her don for this returning journey the quaint little blue suit her aunt had made her.

Everyone in that big house, from Ross and Elinor on down the scale of its inmates to even the outside man who cut the grass and hedges in the summer and cared for the furnace in the winter, was sorry to see her leave them. George forgot his immeasurable dignity as a butler long enough for an excited display of real feeling in begging her most earnestly "to come back again, real soon." Nettie was red-eyed as she packed the trunk. She would miss Arethusa dreadfully. She was young, and she loved Parties as much as the debutante herself, and it was almost as good as going to them to help Miss Arethusa get ready for them, and then to hear such glowing and vivid descriptions of those Festivities as hers were when she returned home. Clay could hardly guide his car. He, also, was going to miss Arethusa dreadfully.

"You must come back, Arethusa," said Elinor, over and over again. "You must be sure to come back, and soon. For this is just as much your home as that, you know, dear."

And Arethusa promised that she would. She surely did mean to come back, some day. But right now she only wanted Miss Asenath.

The returning traveller was armed, as well as with

her legitimate luggage, with a huge box of candy with a flamboyantly colored lady on its top, the shy gift of Clay; a bunch of violets identically like the ones which had to be destroyed yesterday, from Ross; and a most superior package of lunch that Rosalia, most marvelous of cooks, had prepared every bit with her own hands. This really had more significance than either of those other gifts, for it was considerable of a condescension for Rosalia.

Ross put her and all her belongings directly into the charge of the conductor and asked him to please see that she was comfortable every moment, and then the train pulled out. And it pulled out bearing such a different Arethusa from the one who had started to the city so happily and so confident of a Wonderful Time, barely three months ago. But it actually seemed much more like three years to Arethusa, when she considered all that happened to her in that short calendar space.

But after all, as those wheels revolved, faster and faster, it was hard to remain wholly unhappy. She was going back to the Farm and to the warmest sort of welcome from all of them there, she knew; even if she had been guilty of that which would have Miss Eliza's heartiest condemnation should it ever come to her ears. And how glad she, Arethusa, was that she was so soon going to see the folks at the Farm! She was really a little homesick now, for almost the first time since the twenty-fifth of October.

There was no Mrs. Cherry to entertain on this train, and as Arethusa was well worn out with excitement, the whole of the latter half of her journey she slept; and she only woke when the fatherly old conductor bent over her to tell her she had reached Vandalia.



## CHAPTER XXIV

Arethusa stood on top of the stile a moment or two and surveyed the old House with eyes that saw none too clearly anything that was before them, before she climbed down; yet she had no real need to actually see it, she knew it all, in every well-loved detail, so well.

It stood there, facing the West, and hugging the earth with that curious appearance of having grown in its place like some sort of solid plant, the green blinds every one swung hospitably open. The January sun was far down in the afternoon sky, and its golden light was reflected in every small and shining square of the square-paned front windows, to make each twinkling pane seem to be smiling a welcome.

And it was all just as neat and precise as ever, although in winter garb instead of that of summer. For the clematis vine over the front porch was a matted heap of dead tendrils (they had died for the season in an orderly way, however) and the little garden at one end of the House was all covered over with straw for the cold weather, and queer little miniature straw stacks were bound around all the rose bushes. Miss Eliza's roses were never known to die during the winter. Only the honeysuckle vine retained its greenness. All the dead leaves had been raked out of the yard, and although the trees stood as gaunt and bare as any other trees at this time of the year, they did not seem naked like other trees. They leaned protectingly towards the house, and they seemed to welcome Arethusa too.

Through the lower windows with their looped white curtains, Arethusa caught a glimpse of the flickering of the sitting-room fire, that fire which warmed Miss Ase-nath. After all, as dear as Ross and Elinor had proved to be, and as much as she truly loved them, this was Home, as Timothy and Miss Eliza had declared. And how good it was to see it all once more. She had never really known before just how much it meant to her!

Miss Eliza had met her at the station and had scolded her vigorously (scolding sometimes meant that Miss Eliza was trying to control her feelings) nearly all of the six miles from Vandalia, because Arethusa looked so badly, in Miss Eliza's opinion.

"I knew no earthly good would come of it," she said, with a satisfied, I-told-you-so air. "You've come back home sick, after gallivanting around in the city, for me to nurse. And my hands full as they are! I knew just exactly how it would be!"

But Arethusa did not mind this scolding. It was really so much a part of the Home atmosphere that she even rather welcomed it. And she needed a scolding, she felt, so she might as well have it for one thing as for another. This was a mere bagatelle to what Miss Eliza would say if she knew What had happened at the January Cotillion!

Arethusa received her tirade with such unusual meekness that Miss Eliza was alarmed immediately, and convinced that the girl *was* actually sick.

While the returned wanderer stood on the stile, gazing at the House, the front door flew open and Miss Letitia bustled out, arms outstretched. She almost ran to meet Arethusa. She could not move very fast with such a fat little figure as hers, but she moved

faster than she had moved for some years past. And Arethusa dropped every single thing she held and flew down the walk and met Miss Letitia before she was really fairly started.

"Oh, Aunt 'Titia, Aunt 'Titia!"

"There, there," crooned Miss Letitia. "My! My! But we're all glad to get you back! Sister 'Senath's done absolutely nothing but watch the clock ever since we got your father's telegram you were coming. Why, Dearie!" For Arethusa was crying openly on Miss Letitia's comfortable shoulder.

"Arethusa isn't well," remarked Miss Eliza, coming up behind them with most of the dropped belongings; "she must go to bed just as soon as she gets inside the house."

Arethusa lifted her head. "I don't want to go to bed, Aunt 'Liza. I'm not a bit sick."

"Well, do stop carrying on like such a ninny, then!"

But underneath all the sharpness of word and tone of this speech, her niece could somehow read that Miss Eliza was glad to have her back also.

And as for Miss Asenath . . .

She fairly trembled as she lay on the couch and waited for Arethusa to come to her. She wore the rose-colored birthday gift, but it was not the rose of the shawl that had reflected that faint pink flush to each frail cheek. And it was with all the rush of the old Arethusa across the floor that the girl greeted her dearest of the aunts, and her strong young arms clasped the tiny old lady close to her warm heart in the old loving way. But this Arethusa's eyes were dewy and her voice held a hint of tears; and they were tears which wise Miss Asenath knew almost immediately came not from the mere gladness at being home, after

she bade Arethusa stand off so that she might look at her. Miss Asenath, however, said nothing to anybody about her knowledge.

It was good to be at home again, Arethusa felt; good to snuggle down in that old place of hers on the couch and hold Miss Asenath's hand just as she used to; good to watch Miss Letitia's placidity throned in her straight-backed chair and to see her fingers flying as usual and the heap of work in her lap; good even to listen to Miss Eliza's scolding tongue; and good to see Mandy when she waddled in from the kitchen to see "Arethusie" and to state with positiveness that the city did not agree with her at all. But with all of this glow of feeling over getting Home, there was really something wrong, something lacking about it; something Arethusa dimly sensed, but could not exactly define. After awhile Miss Eliza gave her the clue to it, when she imparted the news that Timothy had gone over to Hawesville to a dance.

"Timothy's getting mighty giddy," she added, with great disapproval in voice and manner. "He just gads from one dance to another, all over the county, and he's taken to calling on the town girls. That little visit he made to you in the city had a very bad effect on him, too."

And then with a very little thought, Arethusa knew just what was wrong with her home-coming. It was Timothy.

Timothy, who had always been a part of things for her ever since she could remember, was not there to greet her. Timothy had gone off to a dance and let her come home alone. Timothy, who had always said that he cared more about Arethusa than anyone else in the world, had not seemed to care about her coming

back to the Farm. Not in the older, happier days would he have done such a thing as this. And it was well calculated to hurt when she was already so miserable. But then maybe he had not known she was to come; her decision had been so sudden. This might explain.

"Did Timothy know I was coming home to-day?" she asked after a bit, rather timidly.

Miss Eliza snorted. "He most certainly did. I telephoned him myself, this morning, to let him know. That's how I happen to know where he is! You did something to Timothy, Arethusa, when he was in the City to see you. He hasn't been a bit the same since he came home. Gallivanting around with those flip hussies in town! His mother's real worried about him. And he just's running himself thin!"

She would have pursued the subject further, had not Miss Asenath, with gentle diplomacy, interrupted such pursuit. She did not feel as if she could listen to Miss Eliza and Arethusa wrangle over Timothy when the child had just barely got home, after being away so long.

But Arethusa would not have wrangled. She could not have wrangled with Miss Eliza over anything in the world, much less Timothy. She wondered who those girls in town were that he was going to see; Timothy had always declared very emphatically his dislike of the town girls. But she wondered to herself, without asking anybody any questions.

Miss Eliza's sharp eyes watched her niece. She noticed those unusual dark circles under Arethusa's eyes, circles which most certainly were not there when the girl went away; and this strange quietness with which she had come back to them Miss Eliza did not

like a bit. The tongue of the Arethusa of three months ago would have gone like a bell clapper under circumstances such as these. And Miss Eliza, who for all her sharp manner and her scolding tongue, loved her niece in her own way as much as either Miss Ase-nath or Miss Letitia, suddenly wished that she had not let Arethusa make her visit to Lewisburg. She left the sitting-room abruptly and bustled out to the back door to find Blish, whom she scolded most vigorously, much to his astonishment and consternation, for he could not remember a thing he had done or left undone within the last twenty-four hours, since the last scolding, to be scolded for.

Mandy had prepared such a supper for the Arethusa come back to them as not even that much vaunted feast of the prodigal son, for all its fatted calf, could equal. All of Arethusa's favorite dishes were on the table, and it had been set with the company china. Then Mandy and Blish and Nathan, also, came in a group to the door of the dining-room and peeped in with good-natured dark faces stretched wide in brilliant smiling, just to see her eat a few mouthfuls. They were so glad to have her back at the Farm.

Arethusa choked up several times with all the homely kindnesses she received. These dear people who loved her so, how much sweeter they were to her than she at all deserved!

Immediately after supper, Miss Eliza made her niece go to bed. And Arethusa went with such meekness and so altogether unprotesting, that Miss Eliza trotted along up to her room with her, and felt anxiously of her forehead for fever. She was quite positive now that the girl was sick! She bustled around and helped Arethusa undress. She tucked her tightly into the

little wooden bed with its turned posts which had always been Arethusa's very own, covering her clear up to her chin with the blue and white squared "counterpin" Miss Letitia had made as a surprise for Arethusa when she should come home. Then Miss Eliza blew out the lamp, efficiently with one blow as always, bade Arethusa peremptorily to go right straight to sleep, and left her. But very unexpectedly, she came back after shutting the door, and trotted briskly across the dark room to give Arethusa a quick little peck on one cheek, which was Miss Eliza's only way of kissing, and to tell her very gruffly that she was awfully glad Arethusa was at home again, and she certainly hoped that she'd have sense enough to stay. Then she once more bade her niece to go straight to sleep and once more departed.

But Arethusa could not go to sleep. She threw back the carefully tucked in covers and got up out of bed, draping the new "counterpin" around her shoulders, and paddled, bare-footed, over to that window of her room which looked in the direction of Timothy's house. It was velvety black over on that horizon, but Arethusa could find the place where the house ought to be. It was a very beautiful night, cold and clear and starry. Arethusa put her head down on the window-sill and gazed up at the stars. There were millions of them, and they all seemed to be winking straight down at her just as sympathetically as possible. She had always loved stars.

As she watched them, a sort of mist began obscuring them from her, and so she brushed at her eyes to wipe it away, but it only seemed to keep on growing to be more decided as a mist; and then it dissolved itself into tears which fell thick and fast, hot tears which splashed

on the window-sill . . . all because of Timothy's treatment of her on this home-coming afternoon. Arethusa felt as if Timothy's friendship were lost to her forever. Shamed and humiliated by Mr. Bennet, it had remained for life in its cruelty to add this last blow. For unless his feeling for her was absolutely changed, he would never have treated her like this. Arethusa knew Timothy too well.

He had read Mr. Bennet correctly, she remembered now, thinking about her best friend; or about the one who had always, till so recently, been her best friend. He had called Mr. Bennet a "four-flusher." Would that she had not been so blinded in her infatuation as not to heed this warning! She could recall a great many times when Timothy had been proved right in his deductions, which surely ought to have made her place more value on the one concerning Mr. Bennet than she had.

Arethusa felt, just then, as if she would even rather that Miss Eliza should know of that Episode at the January Cotillion than that Timothy should know about it. Timothy's good opinion of her, suddenly, seemed to Arethusa to possess a great charm.

After awhile she crept back into bed, her teeth chattering with the cold, and cried herself to sleep.

In the days which followed Arethusa was kept very busy telling her aunts all that she had done and seen in those three months she had been away from them. And early in the next week, Elinor packed all of the pretty evening frocks which Arethusa, for various scruples, had left hanging in the closet of the green and white room in Lewisburg and sent them down to the Farm, thinking that Arethusa had forgotten them, and might like to have them. There was the Green



Frock, and the one like tinted autumn leaves, and the White Dress of her Very Own Party, and many others besides, all reminders of evenings with Mr. Bennet. But even so, Arethusa was glad to see them. She had not realized that she loved them so dearly, until she saw them again. It was just as it had been with the people at the Farm. She spread all the gay beauty of the contents of that box out in the sitting room, and tried them all on, pirouetting and turning and making vivid for the three old ladies who listened to her the parties to which she had worn them.

Miss Letitia was loud in her outspoken admiration of every single frock; her simple heart could not decide which one she liked best, and her seamstress instinct marveled at the wonder of their making. Miss Ase-nath was more quiet in her approval, but her eyes sparkled at the brightness of their various colors all around her. Miss Eliza was noncommittal, though it was very evident that she found much to displease. When Arethusa tried on the Green Frock which she so dearly loved, she openly expressed her displeasure.

“Did your stepmother,” and if ever her rigid little body had signified disapproval of anything it did then, in every line, “did your stepmother permit you to go around dressed like that?”

“All the girls wear dresses like this,” replied Arethusa, defensively.

“Then —,” began Miss Eliza, with decision, but she snapped her lips together just like a trap and did not finish.

Arethusa, with cheeks that flamed, put away the Green Dress, hung in the darkest corner of the high old walnut wardrobe in her room. The exhibition of the box of clothes ceased abruptly for the time being,

and Arethusa fled far away from any chance of Miss Eliza's questions. The Green Dress had been her attire that Fatal Night of the January Cotillion.

Timothy took his time about coming over to see Arethusa, although, had she but known it, it required every bit of self-control he possessed to stay away. He had wanted to rush right over that first afternoon, but his heart was mighty sore still, and he was taking the only way he knew to make Arethusa understand that he did not care in the least how much she gazed adoringly at that very objectionable Mr. Bennet.

She did not see it just exactly that way, however, and as the days went by and she watched for him and he did not come, she put her own construction upon his behavior, and it was right along the line of her conclusions in regard to him that night when she had gazed up at the stars, thinking of him.

But he strolled over, late one afternoon quite formally, just as if he, who had half lived at the Farm all of his life, was making a polite and necessary social call upon its inmates.

Miss Eliza gave him a most vigorous tongue-lashing — before he was quite seated she began it — for going to dances. She considered him headed straight for destruction and had had no opportunity to tell him so. She had seen him but once since he came back from that visit to Arethusa.

“Arethusa dances; ask her to tell you what it's like,” he said, most ungraciously.

It was a horrid trick, altogether unworthy of him; but then Timothy was young and things were going hard with him these days. And Miss Eliza's tongue was very sharp; it cut.

So Miss Eliza immediately attacked Arethusa.

"Timothy's of course mistaken. I imagined you'd be going to places where other people did such things, that probably couldn't be helped in a city, but I know you wouldn't so far forget all I've tried to teach you as to indulge in it yourself. It's just public hugging, that's all it is, dancing nowadays!"

"But she did," put in Timothy. "I saw her."

"I can answer for myself, thank you, Timothy Jarvis!" Arethusa said this with a bit of her old asperity. "Yes, I danced, Aunt 'Liza; Father and Mother let me and they didn't think anything was wrong with it."

"Well, I must say! This beats anything I ever heard! I'm not surprised at Ross Worthington, for he was always a bit free in his ideas; but his wife certainly ought to know better than to allow a young girl to take part in such goings on! I must say! I must say!" Miss Eliza's glasses left her nose entirely in her excitement. "What else did you do in the City that you haven't told us about?"

And then . . . Arethusa, to the great amazement of everybody, suddenly burst into tears and ran out of the room.

"What on earth ails the child?" inquired Miss Letitia, anxiously. "She's not the least bit like herself!"

"She needs a tonic," answered Miss Eliza decidedly. "I'll see that she begins it, tomorrow. All that carrying-on in the City! Ross Worthington ought to've been ashamed of himself to set by and allow it!" She shut her mouth very grimly. "I'll see to it that she doesn't go there soon again!"

"But he's her father, Sister," interposed Miss Ase-nath softly; "you must remember that."

“ He’s her father, ’Senath, and I can’t dispute it. But he’s an awful unnatural one, the way *I* look at things! And I reckon, when you get right down to it, Arethusa’s just as much my child as she is anybody’s, seeing how I’ve taken care of her ever since she was born and had all the trouble of raising her. And if *I* know it, she shan’t go to Lewisburg again and come home like this, all worn out! *I just won’t have it!* ”

And it was not hard for everyone in the room, Timothy included, to realize that Arethusa’s future visits to her father would be few and far between, if there were any.

But Miss Asenath, alone of all of them who loved her, dimly guessed at Arethusa’s real trouble. And she tried in every way she could to make her tell, for Arethusa had written Miss Asenath pages and pages of rhapsody of the Wonderful Mr. Bennet. But the girl veered away from such a subject, however adroitly introduced, just like a scared rabbit. So after a little while, Miss Asenath gave up her attempt to find out definitely, and contented herself with showing Arethusa that no matter what it was that was troubling her, Aunt ’Senath loved her as much as ever. And her niece clung to the tenderness of this unfailing love as a drowning man clings to a straw; it was the most that was left to her, with the loss of Timothy’s comradeship. She took that tonic Miss Eliza procured for her with meek obedience, although it might seem as if Miss Eliza had hunted until she had found the bitterest and nastiest that she could find. But Arethusa only grew paler and thinner than ever; she lost her appetite also, in spite of the tonic. Ere long, Miss Asenath’s intuition told her something else. It was Timothy caus-

ing this, she believed, and not something that had happened in the City.

And it was Timothy.

He was as top-loftical and as haughty as possible. He made his visits to the Farm of a scarcity and brevity that brought them near to being no visits at all. Such times as he did condescend to come over to see them, he spent the moments telling of all those gay affairs of which he was a part and which Arethusa did not attend, with a brave show of worldliness that deceived them all except Miss Asenath. Miss Eliza shook her head over him. She did not like this change in Timothy.

Arethusa alternated between a desire to slap him for his suddenly acquired society veneer which had such power to irritate her, and a desire to weep the bitterest and most scalding tears for the completeness of his defection. She could not help wondering, sometimes, if he had, by any most uncanny chance, heard of that Episode at the January Cotillion; and knew that Mr. Bennet had Kissed her and that she had believed that he wanted to marry her and he had Not. The Thought made her writhe in agony under the new blue and white "counter-pin." Rather would she have died a thousand deaths than to have Timothy know of that Disgrace!

For he had been to the City twice since she had come home, with his other gadding about; flying trips — "on business," it is true he had said they were — yet he might have heard of it. All Lewisburg might be ringing with it. Such would undoubtedly explain quite satisfactorily his present scorn of her. He did not seem in the least anxious to marry her now.

Timothy, however, no matter what Arethusa thought

concerning him and his gayety and his neglect of her, was having the hardest of hard times. If Arethusa cried herself to sleep at night, and he did not, being masculine and not much given to taking a refuge in tears, he suffered none the less keenly. It seemed to Timothy that he would never, as long as he lived, forget Arethusa's lovely face as she danced with Mr. Bennet that night of her New Year's Party. Every single time he saw her now, it seemed to bring before him the picture she was that night; wearing Mr. Bennet's flowers (he was quite sure that he knew now just who had sent her those flowers) and with that wonderful shine in her eyes just for Mr. Bennet. But he was determined that she should not know that it made any difference to him.

Poor Timothy!

He loved Arethusa more than he ever had, with all the wealth of love his clean young heart had in its power to give, now that he thought her unattainable and with all her own affection given to another man. And this same heart that loved her so ached and ached over Arethusa's paleness and thinness; but he accepted Miss Eliza's explanation as the literal one, that the winter in Lewisburg had been too much for her, and that all she needed was a tonic. Had Timothy talked a little to Miss Asenath, as in the old and far happier days, he might have formed very different conclusions. Yet he would have bitten out his tongue rather than have mentioned Mr. Bennet's hated name, even to gentle Miss Asenath, who never failed to understand all that troubled.

So Timothy and Arethusa played at their cross purposes all through the spring.

For the winter had sped itself away somehow and

before anyone was really aware of its coming, spring had slipped upon all of them. The days grew warm once more and Arethusa might once again take her books back to the congenial solitude of Miss Asenath's Woods, where, with a thick, woolly carriage rug spread on the ground under the hollow tree, she lay for long hours and read or dreamed. Miss Eliza absolutely refused to countenance any sitting or lying on the damp earth of spring without that rug beneath her, in Arethusa's present state of seeming ill-health; but she made no objections to as many hours spent in the woodland as Arethusa pleased, only provided the rug was there too.

Timothy was very busy, as all farmers needs must be in the spring. The garden had to be got in, and the fields plowed and planted. He did not have nearly so much time for gadding, and Miss Eliza was pleased. She told him she was every chance she had to do so.

Timothy looked much older, Miss Asenath thought. He had a great deal more dignity, and his blue eyes seemed to have acquired depth. There were stern little lines in his face that had never been there before; just as if the boy Timothy had given place to the man. Miss Asenath loved these evidences of his growing.

But often, when he made his rare and formal visits to the Farm of an evening and he and Arethusa sat so decorously in front of the sitting-room fire with the family, she watched him then a trifle sadly. Miss Asenath believed that she would almost be glad to hear him and Arethusa quarrel once more.

"Poor children!" she said to herself one night. "I wonder when they're going to even begin realizing how much time they're wasting! All these precious

days are slipping by and nothing can ever bring them back! ”

And then, with her frail hands clasped on the locket at her throat, Miss Asenath fell to dreaming.



## CHAPTER XXV.

Arethusa gathered up her woolly rug and a dog-eared copy of "Jane Eyre," which would have known almost instant confiscation if Miss Eliza had glimpsed it in her possession, and proceeded to go down to the woodland. It was an afternoon in early May, and unseasonably hot. As she passed through the kitchen, Mandy paused in her bread-making and looked around. She shook her head at the girl's evident intention, with disapproval.

"I wouldn' be gwine out theah to be settin' this arternoon, Arethusie. It are gwine to rain," she stated with positiveness. Mandy was by way of being something of a weather prophet.

"Nonsense, Mandy! The sky's as blue as blue! There's not a cloud anywhere!" Arethusa dismissed the idea with laughter. "Don't be such an old prophet of evil!"

"Yes'sum, it are gwine to rain." Mandy left the table and went to the door, her hands full of bread dough, to peer out at the metallic looking sky, "and 'foah ve'y long, too. See thet theah?" She pointed to a low brownish grey line far down on the horizon.

"Oh that! That doesn't mean anything!" Arethusa was not to be deterred.

She trailed the rug after her across the orchard and into the woodland without noticing that it was touching the ground nearly all the way.

Miss Asenath's Woods were very beautiful just now;

they were always at their loveliest in the spring. The May-apples were in full bloom, and the ground was spotted with great clumps of them, with their straight waxy stems and their pale green umbrella-like leaves, almost hiding the delicate flowers. Everywhere, through the woodland, were all sorts of ambitious, tiny trees which would be choked out later on by the heaviness of the growth above them, but just at present they lifted their beginning life towards the sun, each one as erect as possible; making, all together, something that seemed like a miniature forest. A love-vine, sentimentally named parasite, was starting its curling way over one of the shrubs; the moss was tinted with new green; and blue and white and purple violets showed their saucy faces here and there in patches, scattered with bits of the straight dark-green of the spears of the star of Bethlehem leaves which made a contrast for the lighter color of the violet foliage. And the spring world was all very still, and very peaceful.

Arethusa spread the rug underneath the Hollow Tree, and lay down upon it, resting her head on her crossed arms. She looked above her into the curving arch of those faraway branches, their gnarled age made beautiful with the tenderness of young leaves. Some of these were so small and delicately curly in their newness, they were almost like the crumpling of a baby's fingers. Patches of the bright blue sky showed through them all. An alert robin ran across the woodland like a very fat little man in a terrible hurry, and he paused at the edge of the rug to look at Arethusa inquiringly, his head on one side. But she never moved an inch to notice him, and so, quite satisfied that she was nothing that could harm him, he pecked about within three feet of her head.

Dreaming was her favorite occupation through these spring days, dreaming of the future and what it might bring to her. And Arethusa, believing that she knew just exactly what was to happen by reason of what had already happened, settled the outlines of this future in her dreaming, over and over again, without a single ray of light to break through the darkness of her picture. She would spend it here at the Farm, this strangely quiet Farm; more than ever "a household of women," without Timothy running in and out every day. And some day she would be old and grey like Miss Eliza, busy farming it herself, and wearing plain black dresses and scolding the servants when they did not do just as she wanted. It was a blank future that contained no Timothy. But Arethusa could not very well put Timothy into the future when he refused to be in the present. She would always live alone, she decided, and when she was quite old she would wear a locket like Miss Asenath's, and people would speak of her as having had a Romance; for she had *had* a Romance, and it had ended very sadly. But she would not wear Mr. Bennet's picture in her locket; he was not worthy of that. Perhaps she might wear Timothy's. She had a splendid picture of Timothy which would look very well in a Locket. There were times when, comparing them, Arethusa was quite of the opinion that Timothy was far handsomer than Mr. Bennet. And even if he did go off and marry some one else, he could surely have no objection to her honoring his picture so. His grandfather had not minded Miss Asenath's ownership of his miniature, and he had married some one else, because she had loved him when he was young. Arethusa had always loved Timothy; she loved him now. If Timothy would only stop to think long enough, he

would remember the hundreds of times she had told him he was the best friend she had ever had.

Timothy had found, besides his farmer's duties, another way to occupy himself this spring. It was an automobile of very recent acquisition, a long, dark, grey car of beauty. And nearly every night he raced past the front gate of the Farm in it, while Arethusa stood under the shadow of the clematis vine on the front porch and listened for the first low hum of its motor which carried so far ahead of it through the sleeping country, and watched to see its light come flashing up the Pike, drawing back hastily under the vine when it was close to the gate. Timothy had stopped once or twice and asked them all to ride, but he had never asked Arethusa alone. And since he did not ask her by herself, she was too proud to hop in beside him when Miss Letitia and Miss Eliza refused his invitation. If either one of them had gone, it would have been all right. But neither would.

No human power could have got Miss Letitia into it, and Miss Eliza considered it such a sinful waste of money when Timothy told her how much it had cost him, that she showed her great disapproval by declining to even sit in it.

But nearly every night it whizzed by on the way to town, and Arethusa watched for it in the shadow of the clematis vine.

Arethusa sighed deeply, and reached for "Jane Eyre," at the side of the rug.

It was a most abused and mistreated copy of this work, bearing her father's name on its fly leaf, which she had found on a recent rummaging through the garret. A glance through its pages had made her most

anxious to read it. It seemed to be rich with sentiment and entertainment, of a truly Romantick nature.

She had read only as far as Jane's venture into the world of Mr. Rochester last night, when forced by the unfeeling Miss Eliza who viewed no printed matter as of such interest as to make for any forgetfulness of what one ought to do, with a stern call from the foot of the stairs, to "put out that light, and stop whatever it is you're reading this minute, and go straight to sleep!" Arethusa had wept bitterly over the cruelty of the early years; she hoped, this afternoon, to see Jane through to an uninterrupted conclusion of Perfect Happiness such as she so unmistakably deserved.

She read eagerly; her grey-green eyes following the lines of print without once lifting. Her only movement was the turning of the leaves, until a large and splashing drop of something fell plump on the page then open, and she wiped it off. But another fell, immediately after it; then another. It was Mandy's rain.

So Arethusa rose and gathered up her rug to start for the house. In her recently acquired submissiveness, the disobeying of Miss Eliza to stay out in a rain seemed to have no attraction.

But the storm broke with such quickness and fury, that Arethusa got no farther towards the house than a big oak a few yards away from the Hollow Tree. Underneath this, she crouched, covering her head with her arms. For the first time in her life she was frightened of a storm. But then, she never remembered having seen such a battle of the elements as this became, in the fewest possible moments. In fact, for years afterwards, folks in the neighborhood spoke of

happenings as being just before, or just after, the "Big Storm."

The lightning flashed so continuously that the heavens were like one steady glare of white light; the thunder boomed and crashed in a hideous din without any cessation. The rain beat against her as sharp as needle points, and the wind seemed as if it were trying to lift her off the ground to fling her back again to crush, so hard it blew. Several trees within her observation went down, some torn up by the roots; Arethusa could have wept miserably to see them go, these woodland friends of hers. "Jane Eyre" was blown from her unheeding grasp and against a crooked root of the oak tree. Its water-soaked pages flapped madly back and forth; the equally water-soaked rug had been flung against a near-by bush, wide spread like a sail.

Then suddenly, with a rush and a roar as if the world itself were being torn from its moorings, the Hollow Tree, the very dearest of all the growth in Miss Asenath's Woods, went crashing to the ground. It fell through the tree against which Arethusa crouched, carrying branches of the latter along with it. It was a pure miracle that she was not hit by some of these flying branches, or by the Hollow Tree itself, in its fall; for it was all around her, hemming her into a prison of instantaneous building so that she could not move. Undoubtedly, had she stayed under the Hollow Tree after the Storm began, she would have been killed.

But with this last desecration the Storm seemed satisfied; its fury abated. And ere long leaves slowly dripping and birds chirping were the only sounds.

Arethusa shivered. Her teeth were chattering,

partly through fear and partly because she was really very cold. The Storm had seemed to wring every single bit of warmth out of the air, and she had been wet to the skin with that stinging, chilly rain. Her tears fell fast as she reached to touch the Hollow Tree, all about her. Would that the wind had blown down every single tree in the woodland if it had only left her this one!

She tried to climb out. But every attempt she made was unsuccessful. She was pinned in against the oak tree by interlocked branches which her strength seemed unavailing to so much as disturb. It seemed that all she could do would be to lie helplessly back and wait for somebody to come and find her before she could get out.

But would she have to stay in this place all night before anyone did come? And wait until they could chop her out after they came? How many hours would that take? It might even take days! This was such a big tree!

The thought brought a sudden overwhelming terror of her predicament.

She began calling loudly and frantically for everyone at the house; Miss Eliza and Miss Letitia, Blish and Nathan and Mandy, but none of them came. She even called Miss Asenath, hoping she would hear and tell the others.

Then . . . she called Timothy.

And Timothy came.

He plunged through the dripping woodland as if on wings or seven-leagued boots, unmindful of the sloppy ground and the wet branches which flopped back as he passed to sting his face, and he came as straight to Arethusa as it was possible for him to come. He had

stopped at the Farm to get out of the Storm, on his way back from town, and 'way up there at the house, standing on the back porch watching it, he had heard her calls for Miss Eliza and the rest, and then for him.

But once in the woodland, and there was no visible evidence of her presence, when he had been so sure just where she was to be found, Timothy stopped running and called wildly himself for Arethusa.

"Here I am!" It sounded thin and like a ghost voice, coming from underneath the piled up heap of broken tree right beside him in the most uncanny way.

"Merciful Heavens!" Timothy knelt down and began making frantic efforts to move the huge branches. "Are you hurt?"

"Not a single bit!" Arethusa's spirits began an immediate reviving. Here was Timothy! The unmistakable cheerfulness in her tones somewhat reassured her rescuer. "Only I can't get out!"

"And you're quite positive you're not hurt?" He asked the question solely for the comfort of hearing her repeat that she was not. For he did not see how she had escaped death in such a catastrophe.

"Sure!"

Arethusa, feeling now so much happier, thought that perhaps she might stand upright. She tried the experiment cautiously and found that she could. Her head and shoulders appeared dryad-like above the young green of the leaves beneath her, and leaves and branches framed her face all around. She waved her hand energetically, and called, to attract the stooping Timothy's attention to her present superior position.

His relief when he saw her was almost comical.

"I'll have you out now in a jiffy!"

But such was not to be the case, for although he



poked and poked about everywhere distractedly, and pulled at first one part of it and then another, he was unable to move any of that tree, for all his great strength. Then, very unexpectedly, sticking his head around under the lower branches next the ground, he discovered what seemed to offer some possibilities as a road to Arethusa. He started exploration, and very suddenly, he was right beside her.

Now that his anxiety for her safety was no longer rampant, Timothy could see for himself that Arethusa had not a scratch, he remembered the present state of their relationship. That look of sternness which made his young face seem so much older settled down, and he made business-like preparations to help her get out, breaking off small branches all about him.

"Do you think you could crawl back the way I came in here, or do you want me to go back up to the house and get something to cut the tree away?"

But Arethusa was loath to leave just yet. This seemed so much like old times, the way he had come at her call, when he had used to help her down from hay-stacks which she had climbed too rashly, and rescue her from all sorts of other strange situations. She could not see his face, and so she clasped his arm, gratefully, as she had used to do in those other days. Timothy stiffened a little, but she did not notice it.

"Oh, Timothy!" she exclaimed. "Just suppose you hadn't come! I might have had to stay here all night long!"

"I reckon not! Somebody would have come."

She was chilled by his tone. And when she looked up at him, his grim expression made her draw her hand away from his arm, abruptly.

"How did you get in?" she asked, with dignity.

Timothy indicated the road.

So a little procession started back through that gap in the branches, which Arethusa, had she not been so frightened, might have found for herself without bothering him. He went first, to show the way, and she followed, both on hands and knees. He was out when he heard her scream.

"My hair! My hair is all caught! And I can't get it undone at all!"

She had not really asked for his help, but Timothy turned and crept under the tree once more. Arethusa was badly caught. Her red hair had been grabbed by the crookedest possible branch and it was all wound around it as if the Hollow Tree were so determined to keep her underneath it that either the branch or some of her hair would have to be cut off, before it would let her go. And Arethusa's own efforts to get loose had only succeeded in fastening her tighter.

She accepted Timothy's offer of aid as one who is forced to something inevitable, and bent her head obediently so that he could get at the snarl better. Timothy worked away in silence, his knees braced in the soft ground. His fingers were never very good at this sort of thing, and right now they seemed to become clumsiness personified. They trembled so that the snarl seemed to grow worse and worse with each moment. He gritted his teeth and tried his best to control his hands and his heart, which raced and beat so loudly above the crouching girl. He was quite sure she heard it. This nearness was almost more than he could bear.

And to have his hands buried in that fragrant mass of the hair he loved, suddenly proved his undoing.

He stopped his ineffectual work of untangling; but Arethusa did not know that he had until she felt herself

held close to a wildly beating heart and heard him whispering, hoarsely, "Arethusa, I . . . I just can't bear it . . . any longer!"

Then Timothy Kissed her. He kissed her hungrily; her hair, caught in the branches, her startled eyes, her cheeks, and last of all, her mouth.

"I love you," he said, brokenly, over and over again. "I love you!"

And Arethusa lay very quietly, and listened to him say it.

"I can't get your hair out," said Timothy, miserably, "I'll go and get somebody at the house to come, but I . . ."

Then Arethusa spoke, softly.

"I don't want you to go get somebody at the house. I want you, yourself, to get my hair out."

He almost groaned. Why did she make things so terribly hard for him? Suddenly, something occurred to Timothy. Arethusa had not even tried to slap him for those kisses, nor had she made even the beginnings of a struggle to get away; which was all most un-Arethusa like. He looked down at her, and he saw that her eyes were full of a truly wonderful light, a light which he had never seen in those eyes before, and it was shining straight at him.

"I want *you* to get my hair out," she repeated, "but bef . . . before you do, T . . . Timothy, please ki . . . kiss me again!"

Timothy did as requested.

And the whole world did seem to really be hushed into a Startled Silence by What had happened.

And Arethusa forgot that her hair was fastened apparently inextricably in the branches of the Hollow Tree; perhaps the Hollow Tree had served its best

purpose in crashing to the ground. She forgot all about Mr. Bennet and that Timothy might not want to marry her if he knew of the Episode of the January Cotillion. She forgot to question the propriety of the number of Timothy's kisses, as too many before their marriage. She thought of nothing in the wide, wide world but just one thing; that never had she felt more contented than where she was, held in the safety of these strong arms of Timothy's. They seemed to shut her in to guard from all unhappiness or terror, or anything that could possibly hurt her in the days to come. It was just as though she had found a place most truly her own, made for her by Timothy's love; and that it was exactly what she had been searching for, for a long, long while.

But she was still Arethusa.

So after a time she stirred, and said very softly, "I can't possibly stay here all my life with my hair caught like this, Timothy, you know. I . . . I really think you'd better undo it. I asked you to."

He roused himself with a happy little laugh, and as his fingers were not trembling so much, this attempt was quite successful, and the red locks were soon free.

Then they crawled through the place in the branches and stood upright, face to face. Arethusa's head drooped, and a warm flush mounted suddenly. She could not be said to be at her best appearance, for her hair was all matted and tangled, and wildly disheveled; her dress was muddy to her knees, and torn in several places; there were dirty marks on her face. But to Timothy, she had never looked lovelier in her life.

It was his suggestion that they have a run up to the house.

Hand in hand, they set off at a mad pace through the

orchard. Miss Eliza saw them coming, for she was restlessly waiting on the back porch; she had been waiting for some time. She was grim and disapproving as the flushed pair brought up, panting, before her.

"Well, Arethusa . . ." she began.

But Timothy interposed in a very masterful sort of way.

"You mustn't scold her, Miss 'Liza, for she came very near being killed!" He drew Arethusa's hand through his arm with a little air of proprietorship which did not escape unnoticed. "The big Hollow Tree fell and it pinned her down. I had an awfully hard time getting her out from under it."

At a sudden recollection of the getting Arethusa out from under the tree he blushed boyishly, and most violently, even through his flush of running. Arethusa followed suit.

"Hum . . . ph!" said Miss Eliza.

She regarded them both with keen eyes for a moment, those keen eyes of hers that so little escaped.

"Have you," she asked suddenly, and so suddenly that both boy and girl jumped, "have you decided to marry Timothy at last, Arethusa?"

"Yes," replied Timothy.

"No," replied Arethusa, although very weakly, for it was more from force of habit than anything else.

Timothy put his arm clear around her quite unashamed before Miss Eliza, to the deep interest and great delight of Mandy, peering through the kitchen door; and he drew the unresisting girl close to his side.

"Yes," he repeated, with firmness, "she has!"

Arethusa looked up at him sideways, at the strength of his young profile; and feeling his arm around her and remembering how strong and sure that arm had

seemed such a little while before, like a bulwark for safety between her and anything that might threaten, she answered meekly, almost like an echo, "Yes, I have!"

And this was quite in spite of the fact (and yet that may have been the very reason why she did, for she had always declared so emphatically that she would say, "no!" to any such proposition coming from him) that Timothy had made no formal proposal of marriage to her so far this summer.

THE END