


Pride and Prudence

Timothy Shay Arthur, 1850

[Table of Contents](#)

Table of Contents also in PDF Bookmarks 

Contents

Pride and Prudence
Timothy Shay Arthur, 1850

CHAPTER 1.

CHAPTER 2.

CHAPTER 3.

CHAPTER 4.

CHAPTER 5.

CHAPTER 6.

CHAPTER 7.

CHAPTER 8.

CHAPTER 9.

CHAPTER 10.

CHAPTER 11.

CHAPTER 12.

CHAPTER 13.

CHAPTER 14.

CHAPTER 15.

CHAPTER 16.

CHAPTER 17.

CHAPTER 1.

Two maidens, the one about sixteen, and the other just passing her eighteenth summer, were sitting together one evening in June, when the mild airs came laden with a thousand sweet fragrances. They were at an open window, looking out upon a garden well filled with shrubbery, among the green leaves of which the dew drops sparkled like diamonds in the bright moonbeams.

They were conversing of the *future*. The heart of the elder had been stirred from its maiden dream, so pure and passionless, and now thrilled with a new and wilder emotion than had ever passed over its surface. She had fallen in love! One who seemed to her to possess a nobler nature than any she had met — had sought and won her affections. Anna was a new being!

The younger, Mary, felt a glow of lively interest in her sister's prospects for the future; but she feared that Anna's affection for her would decay, in the more absorbing passion which now ruled her.

"You must not forget me, sister," she said, playfully, yet half sadly, "in your new-found love. I shall be jealous of Mr. Ashton, if he wins my sister's affection from me."

"How could I ever forget you, Mary?" the sister replied, drawing her arm around the waist of the gentle creature, who pressed close to her side. "You will be my own dear sister still."

"Twice within the last week," said Mary, pursuing her own thoughts, "have I seen Mrs. Condoret pass in her carriage, and in a few minutes after, her *sister* Jane, on foot, in poor, faded garments. They were once sisters in affection, as well as in name. Now their conditions are changed, and one will pass the other with scarcely a nod of recognition. Dear sister, our future lots may be different; but shall we forget each other?"

Mary leaned her head upon the shoulder of Anna, for her heart was troubled.

"It is strange, Mary, that you should think and talk thus. Mrs. Condoret could never have had a true affection for Jane — or no change in outward circumstances could have affected her feelings. We cannot forget each other. We will not forget each other. When I pass you by with indifference, I shall be unworthy the gentle name of *sister*. But do not vainly imagine that for either of us there is such a condition in the future, as the one you have just alluded to."

"I know I'm a foolish child!" Mary said, forcing a smile. "And I know it is wrong for me to think and feel as I do. I shall never cease to love you, no matter what change may take place. And I am sure that you will continue to love me as tenderly as now. But that both of us will occupy a similar position in society, is hardly to be expected. How rarely it is, that married sisters stand in the same plane as regards external circumstances. You are about to be married to a *rich* husband. He will, doubtless, remain rich. I shall give my hand to the man I love, for his principles, be he rich or poor. If he should be poor, and I, in consequence, compelled to move in a social sphere far below you, how will — . But forgive me, dear sister, these thoughts are ungenerous."

"They are, Mary. Banish them, at once and forever, from your mind. Rich or poor, high or low, courted or neglected by the world — you will ever be my own dear sister. As such, I shall always love you as devotedly as now."

"Mr. Ashton is in the parlor," said a servant, entering at this moment.

Anna rose up quickly, and, kissing the cheek of her sister, hastened to join her intended husband. Mr. Ashton was a man who had lived to very good purpose, so far as *making money* was concerned. As a poor boy, he had entered a mercantile house. For five years he devoted himself to business with an assiduity and intelligence that made him almost invaluable to his employers, who, on his arriving at the age of manhood, retained his services at a handsome salary. At the end of a year, one of the partners of the firm died. An interest in the business was then offered to Ashton. At the end of five years more, he retired from the firm with twenty thousand dollars in cash. On this, he commenced business for himself. Times were prosperous, and he prospered with the times. He was thirty-two years of age when he offered his hand to Anna Lormer, and reputed to be worth seventy or eighty thousand dollars. His business was large — and the prospect fair for his becoming immensely rich.

As a drawback to his merits as a prompt, energetic, systematic, money-making businessman — was the fact that he was *thoroughly selfish*. No wave of generous feeling ever crossed his bosom. He saw nothing beyond a circle, of which he was the *center*. In consequence, he had looked upon every man with something like suspicion, and regarded every man with internal feelings of dislike.

A few months following the time in which our story opens, Anna Lormer became the bride of Ashton. The wedding was a mirthful and brilliant one. After the attendant festivities had passed away, a large house was furnished without regard to the *cost* of anything. The newly married couple entered upon life in a style of great elegance. In the excitement of all this, the mind of the bride became so much absorbed, that she seemed to have no thought beyond herself and husband. Her sister Mary could not help seeing and feeling this at times, although she struggled against it, and chided herself for her ungenerous feelings. Towards the husband of Anna, Mary had never felt much drawn. To her, he had

always seemed cold; and this coldness in no way diminished, as days, and weeks, and months, passed away. His *selfishness* too soon became apparent in *little things*, which are always a true index to character.

Two, years passed away during which the fellowship between the sisters continued to be of the most affectionate character. At the end of that time, *Mary* became the wife of a Mr. Este, a merchant of good standing. Anna, the wife of Mr. Ashton, and a blooming young mother, was one of the happiest of the happy company who witnessed the ceremony. She rejoiced sincerely in the consummation of her sister's hopes, and saluted her cheek with a kiss of pure and fervent affection.

As has been said, Mr. Ashton was a man of great shrewdness and tact. One of those men of wisdom it is usually said, that everything they touch turns to gold. But he was also, as has been intimated, a very *selfish* man. Beyond his own family, he had no sympathies. He lived for himself and the narrow circle that gathered around his own hearth.

Mr. Estes, the husband of *Mary*, was a man of different character. He had views and sympathies extending far beyond the narrow sphere of *selfish* considerations. He was not so well off in the world as Mr. Ashton, nor was he doing so safe a business. As he had nothing in common with him, he met him as rarely as possible. When they did meet, they were *rigidly polite* to each other, but each felt *relieved* when the moment came for separation.

It is almost impossible for a man and his wife to live together in harmony for any length of time, without the wife becoming modified in her character, so as to become, in a degree, like her husband. In some instances, however, it does not occur, owing to an active opposition of the will of the wife to the will of the husband; which opposition always creates discord in a family. Mrs. Ashton loved her husband, and having confidence in his judgment, soon partook of the ruling *self-love* which characterized him. Nothing beyond her own children, and her own household, interested her; and Mrs. Este, whose sisterly affection had never in the least abated, felt after few years, painfully — the gradual change going on in the disposition of Anna. Her style of living was not so splendid and costly as her sister's, and she failed not to observe that Anna felt no interest in her *domestic* arrangements, and even took exception to the *plainness* of her style of living.

"Why don't you come out in a little better style, *Mary*," she said to her one day. "I declare, I am getting almost ashamed of your old fashioned manner of living! Why don't you send to New York and get a *Turkish* carpet? This dull-looking Brussels carpet is only fit for a clerk, or a retail grocer's house."

"I would be no happier, Anna, with my house furnished like a palace! We look for satisfaction of mind, to other sources than mere *parade* and *show*. If *within* there is not peace — then nothing from *without* can bring it. Besides, Mr. Este's business is not so large as Mr. Ashton's, nor so profitable. It would be wrong for us to live in the style that you can afford to live in; and it is well for us that we have *no desire* to do so."

"I don't know. Mr. Este is doing a business that would afford a much higher style of living; and I think you owe it to us to make a better appearance!"

Mrs. Este felt her heart rising, but she kept down her feelings, and changed the subject. Their style of living, as Mrs. Ashton called it, was not *showy*; but it was *tasteful*, and even elegant, involving an expenditure of at least two thousand five hundred dollars a year. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Este were fond of *mirthful company*, and declined mingling in it. Friends they had, but they were of a different character from *fashionable* friends.

It was with no ordinary emotions of pain, that Mrs. Este perceived a gradual decay of that sisterly love which had burned in her own bosom so warmly, and a gradual withdrawal of Anna from a confidential and affectionate fellowship with her.

CHAPTER 2.

Ten years after her marriage, Mrs. Este found herself a widow with four young children. During that time, her *sister* had grown more and more *selfish* and *reserved*. After the funeral of her husband, the stricken heart of the widow turned earnestly towards her sister, but that sister was as cold as ever, and altogether uninterested in her affairs. Mr. Ashton declined administering on the estate of her husband, and this important branch of her interests was confided to a cunning and dishonest lawyer. The settlement of the estate was delayed, month after month, and even ran on to two years, during which time, only money sufficient to supply pressing demands could be obtained from the administrator. On the final settlement of the estate, all that was produced was one thousand dollars in cash; plus ten thousand dollars in bad Western and Southern debts; and ten thousand dollars in unproductive building lots, which, if forced into the market, would not have brought one thousand dollars. An honest settlement of the estate would have left her an unincumbered property of at least *thirty* thousand dollars, in the present, and the building lots, which in time would have been worth at least half that amount.

But Mary knew nothing of business, and had no friend to intervene for her. With a young family to raise and educate, and available means sufficient to take her through little over one year — she felt something like *despair* stealing upon her, while looking into the future.

“What shall I do?” was her frequent, silent ejaculation. One day she called upon Anna, for the purpose of asking her advice as to what she ought to do. Her sister received her with cold formality; so much so, that she could hardly find it in her heart to lay before her the object of her visit.

“I find myself in quite a difficulty, Anna,” she said at length, “and want your advice.”

“Well, what is it? You did not use to think much of my advice. But what is the matter now?”

“I suppose you know that Mr. Este’s estate has yielded me but a comparative trifle, though I am sure it has not been settled fairly.”

“How much? Thirty thousand dollars?”

“But one thousand available; and twenty thousand, little better than nothing.”

“Then you are a *beggar!*” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, rising quickly to her feet. “How can *I* help you?” she continued. “What have I got? I have nothing that is not my husband’s, and I can’t squander his property. What do you expect *me* to do for you?”

“I have asked you for nothing, Anna,” said Mrs. Este, in a low tone, the tears coming to her eyes, “and I want nothing but your *advice*.”

“But how can I advise you?”

“Perhaps you cannot, Anna. But you are my elder sister, and you once loved me.” She could say no more, the fountain was unsealed, and she wept like a child.

For a moment, Mrs. Ashton was moved. Old feelings came back upon her, and touched her heart with something of tenderness, and in a milder tone she said —

“Come, Mary, this won’t help the matter any. Let me hear what you have to propose.”

There was still something so *heartless* in the manner of her sister, that Mrs. Este hesitated to converse further upon a subject which she knew would cause her increased pain, in witnessing her sister’s lack of feeling for her; but thoughts of her children roused her to a sense of duty.

“My object in calling this morning, was to consult you on the best course for me to pursue to raise my children, and properly educate them. I have about one thousand dollars in cash, which must be made productive. If I do nothing, in a year or eighteen months, this will all be gone, and I shall have to force a sale of one of my building lots in the western part of the city, for about as much money as will keep us a year or two longer. In the end, *destitution* will unavoidably come, unless I do something. But the question is, *what shall I do?* Keep a boarding house; set up a small dry goods store; or — ”

“Keep a boarding house! Set up a dry goods store! Mary! are you crazy? Do you suppose I would submit to such a *disgrace?* Never! You must do no such thing!”

“Then what shall I do?” asked Mrs. Este, quietly.

“That’s more than I can tell. There are many ways to live, besides disgracing yourself and me, by keeping a dry goods store, or a boarding house. You say you have enough to support you for three or four years. Something may turn up by that time.”

“It would be unwise to trust to so improbable an event. I have thought of many ways to get a living, and know of none which promise so well as the two I have named. How to choose between them, puzzles me.”

“Mary, I tell you, you must do no such thing — you are young yet, and still fresh and good looking, and — ”

She paused, for, even as *heartless* as she had grown, she felt that she was going too far. Mrs. Este understood the allusion, and, rising on the instant, formally withdrew.

“Mary was here this morning,” said Mrs. Ashton to her husband, when he came in at dinner time.

“Well?” was the brief response.

“She is a *beggar!*”

“As I expected would be the case, when she entrusted her affairs to the person she did.”

“She always would have her own way.”

“And will have to take the *consequences*, I suppose. Her husband’s affairs were in a pretty good condition when he died; and, with proper management, the estate would have yielded forty or fifty thousand dollars.”

“Couldn’t something be done with the administrator?”

“He is a lawyer, and that will make it a hard game to play. I, for one, shall not meddle with it.”

“She talks about opening a dry goods store.”

“Nonsense!”

“Or taking boarders.”

“And losing all she’s got.”

“I will never hear to it.”

“She can do as she pleases, Anna; I shall not meddle with her.”

“But I have no idea, I assure you, of being *disgraced* in such a way. She has been a constant source of mortification to me for years, and — ”

“You had better give yourself no further trouble about her. Everybody gets along some way — and so will she.”

“But isn’t she my sister, and what will people say to my sister keeping a boarding house?”

“That is one of the things which you can’t help. If she does go to keeping boarders, she will come down lower than that, before she’s done. What does she know about such a business? Why, even the most experienced find a great difficulty in succeeding, and the inexperienced almost invariably come out worse than nothing in a year or two.”

“It does seem unnatural; but if she will persist in her course, I shall be compelled to request her to suspend her visits here. It would *ruin our reputation*.”

“You can do as you choose, Anna; it is a matter of no interest to me.”

With a burden upon her heart, weighing heavier than any that had heretofore pressed upon it, Mrs. Este slowly returned home. For more than an hour did she sit alone in her chamber, pondering deeply the course it would be right to pursue. She felt more than ever alone — more than ever thrown upon her own resources. But the active mind never despairs.

“I will take boarders,” she at length said aloud, in a firm voice, and with a changed and more cheerful countenance.

She proceeded at once to rent a pleasant house without further conference with her sister; and, after increasing her stock of bedding and other necessary articles, advertised for half a dozen genteel boarders.

In the course of two weeks, she had three applications from young men; she took them at four dollars a week. At the end of a month, she had her complement, six, which brought her in twenty-four dollars a week. For some time she felt greatly encouraged, though she found little *rest* for her body, or *quiet* for her mind. Between attending the market, and overseeing the internal arrangements of her family — she had no leisure time to calculate the probable chances of succeeding, even if she had imagined such a calculation necessary.

Let us make it for her. House rent four hundred dollars a year. Wages for two servants one hundred and twenty dollars. Marketing and groceries, fifteen dollars a week, or eight hundred dollars a year; besides other expenses, clothes for herself and children, tuition bills, etc., etc., four hundred dollars more, at the lowest calculation — in all, say eighteen hundred dollars a year.

Six boarders at four dollars a week, would be twelve hundred and forty-eight dollars a year, provided the number was kept up, and no one went away without paying her.

But even this kind of plain sailing was not to be her lot, as will presently be seen. Among the boarders was a young man named *Jenkins*, who, three weeks after he came into her house, lost his job as a clerk in a hardware store. Like most young men, he had lived up to his income, and had, therefore, nothing laid aside for a rainy day. Three weeks passed in the vain effort to get a new job. At the end of that time, he stated to Mrs. Este that he had no means of paying her — about twenty dollars already due for board, until he could get a new job, when every cent, he said would be faithfully handed over.

Of course, if he had nothing — then nothing was to be obtained from him. This was a clear case. Nor could she tell him that he must leave her house. That would be inhumane. It was three months before he obtained a new job, at the end of which time, he owed her seventy dollars. Not being a young man of strictly honest principles, he soon began to look upon the debt to Mrs. Este, as a burden that must be shook off if possible. For about a month he paid his board, and four dollars besides each week. But this absorbed so large a part of his salary, leaving him but little for the *indulgence of selfish gratification*, that he began to demur in his own mind against it. He did not like to leave the house without some pretext

for doing so, because that would look too bad — he, therefore, determined to produce, if possible, a cause of *disagreement*, between himself and Mrs. Este, and to go off in a fit of apparent anger.

For some days he studied over the means by which this might be attained, during which time his manner to Mrs. Este was not pleasant. At length, a slight cause presented itself. The servant had neglected to place water in his room. This he observed at night on retiring to bed. On the next morning he rose early, and going to the head of the stairs, called down in a loud, angry voice to the servant —

“Why in the devil is there no water in my room?”

The water was quickly brought, and the servant asked to be excused for the neglect, which would not again occur. This did not satisfy Jenkins. He grumbled and fretted until the servant left the room.

“Who was that yelling downstairs, just now?” asked Mrs. Este, as the servant passed her door.

“Mr. Jenkins, ma’am,” was the reply.

“What was the matter?”

“I forgot to put water in his room.”

“Well don’t neglect him again,” returned Mrs. Este, retiring into her chamber with disturbed feelings. She had heard the angry interrogatory uttered by Jenkins, and it had offended her. Half an hour after, she met the young man in the passage. She was about requesting him, politely, to complain to her in case the servant neglected anything in his room, but was prevented doing so by his remarking, in rather an *insulting* tone —

“I wish, madam, you would see that my room is better attended to!”

“What is wrong?” she asked in a calm tone.

“Why, a good deal. Here’s twice that I’ve had no water in my room within ten days.

“When the first omission occurred, you should have complained to me, sir — not waited until there was another neglect. Or, if you had passed by the first, when the second took place — you should have come to me, instead of using improper language to one of my servants.”

The young man’s face became instantly inflamed with real anger.

“I’ll not stay in anybody’s house to be *insulted!*” he quickly retorted.

“After such language, and the exhibition of such a spirit, I would not keep you a day longer. You can seek a new home at once,” Mrs. Este said, with something of indignation in her voice.

Jenkins turned upon his heel and left her. In half an hour, he was out of the house. He never came back to pay his sixty dollars that were due to Mrs. Este. She went for it several times, but he always returned for answer that he had no money. She did not care to *compel* him by law to pay, and therefore, she lost the whole of it.

A few days after he went away, a man and his wife applied for boarding. They had one child. The only room vacant was that which had been occupied by Jenkins. It was small; but they were willing to take it. The price agreed upon was eight dollars per week.

For a week or two Mr. Slocum, that was the man’s name, paid the eight dollars punctually. After that, he would hand Mrs. Este, four or five dollars on Saturday evening, saying that he would give her the balance on the next Monday or Tuesday. But Monday or Tuesday never saw the “balance due.” Mr. Slocum and his wife did not live very happily together; they jarred frequently, and were not at all particular, even at the table, and in the presence of the other boarders, as to their manner of addressing each other. This, at length, became so *annoying*, that two of Mrs. Este’s best boarders left the house. They did not tell her the reason. By paying only three or four dollars a week, Mr. Slocum managed to get in debt to Mrs. Este pretty heavily in the course of a few months.

Winter set in, adding considerably to the expenses of house keeping. The places of the two boarders who had gone away, had not yet been filled. Only three remained besides Mr. Slocum and his wife. From the whole, she only received fifteen dollars a week, in cash. This was not *half* the amount of her expenses. Of course Mrs. Este found herself going behindhand, and this troubled her very much. To add to her other sources of despondency, Mr. Slocum, who already owed her fifty dollars, had a quarrel with his wife and went off and left her. It was, as has been said, mid-winter, the friends of the deserted wife lived more than a hundred miles away.

She could not get to them until spring opened. Mrs. Este was too humane to send the poor woman and her child to the almshouse. Consequently, she was burdened with their support for two months longer, when spring opened. The boarders in the house, commiserating her situation, raised among themselves money enough to send her home to her friends.

Nine months had now elapsed since Mrs. Este had opened a boarding house. During that time, Mrs. Ashton had not come near her. Twice Mrs. Este called upon her, but the reception she met with was so cold, that she cared not to go again. During this nine months, she had been compelled to check out from bank, four hundred dollars of her little fund, thus showing an actual *loss* of four hundred dollars, instead of having been able to sustain herself. At the end of the year, she gave up this experiment, but not until she had, what ought to have been the first step taken, entered into a close

calculation in regard to income and expenses. This showed her the radical error which vitiated her whole scheme, and caused her to lose six hundred dollars; for only four hundred remained out of her thousand dollars.

No increase of boarders that she could make, would be sufficient to induce her to continue, and she at once gave them up, sold off a great part of her furniture, all of which she had kept since the death of her husband, and removed with her children into a small house, in the western extremity of the city. The proceeds of the sale of her most valuable articles of furniture, brought her, in cash, about sixteen hundred dollars. Thus she had two thousand dollars to draw upon for future expenses.

CHAPTER 3.

The *failure* in her plans for supporting her family, and the *loss* occasioned by it, deterred her from entering into any other business. A judicious friend, such as her sister's husband might have been, could have advised her how to make an investment of her little funds, that would have brought her in at least a support. But she had no friend, no adviser. She loved her children with an affection that might be called idolatry. In the confident hope, that, by the time they were of age, her building lots would be worth fifteen or twenty thousand dollars, did she make her calculations and arrangements without any reference to holding a personal right to them. They were for her children, and her children should have them.

But she saw her means gradually wasting away, and felt that before her was *certain destitution* and the dismemberment of her family. Let not those who have none of these resources that Mrs. Este had, imagine that her mental sufferings were less than theirs, in prospect of some dark moment in the future. She expected more, and *disappointed expectation* pains as acutely, be the desire great or small — especially when the object is the one dear desire.

Another year passed, during which Mrs. Ashton had been but once to see her. The visit was one of cold formality; a mere call of twenty minutes. No questions were asked of her condition or prospects, and no allusion made to them by Mrs. Este. Neither herself nor children were asked to return the visit.

Unchanged in her real feelings towards her sister, though exquisitely *pained* at the unnatural position she now allowed herself to assume, Mrs. Este endeavored to banish all thoughts of the subject from her mind. But a little fellow, about eight years old, who had been present during the interview of his mother and aunt, was not so disposed:

"I don't like Aunt Anna, mother, I do not!"

"My child, you must not dislike anyone."

"But I don't like her — nor cousin George either — but I like cousin Jane."

"Why don't you like George, my son? You haven't seen him for a long time."

"Yes ma'am, I have, though. I see him almost every day. He goes to school close by where we do."

"Well, Henry, I don't suppose George troubles you, or does anything wrong to you."

"I do not see why he does not *speak* to me, mother. I am as good as he is. But whenever I meet cousin Jane, she stops and speaks to me so kind, and always asks about you, and says she wants to come and see you so bad, but that her mother won't let her. O, I love cousin Jane!"

"You must try to love everyone, Henry. George does wrong in not speaking to you; but, you know, I have told you, that when a person acts wrong — they hurt *themselves* more than anyone else. Now George does himself harm, and not you, in what he does. You should *pity* — and not hate him."

"But, mother, I feel bad when the boys ask me if George is my cousin; and why he doesn't speak to me?"

"And what do you tell them?"

"Why, that he's too proud to speak to me," replied the child, emphatically.

"Then you attempt to *injure* him, don't you, Henry, by trying to make the boys think that he is too proud to speak to you?"

"I don't want to hurt him, mother. I know that would be wrong. But —"

"But you do hurt him, though, by what you say to the boys; and in that, you are to blame as well as he, though your faults are different. He is influenced by a foolish pride — and you by a feeling of hate."

"No — no — not *hate*, mother! I don't hate him. I wouldn't hurt him for the world."

"But you do attempt to hurt him, when you try to make others think ill of him — and that can only proceed from a feeling of hate."

The child was silent, though he but half understood the position of his mother. But he understood it well enough to refrain from saying anything about George, when any of his school fellows alluded to him afterwards.

When Mrs. Ashton returned home, her daughter Jane, who was about twelve years old, asked where she had been.

"I have been to your aunt Mary's," she replied indifferently.

"O, mother! why didn't you let me go along?" said Jane. "I want to go and see aunt Mary so bad."

"I'm sure I don't see what you want to go *there* for," spoke up George, a bold looking boy, of about fourteen. "I don't think, for my part, we ought to *associate* with them, and I wonder at mother's going there."

"How can you talk so, George?" said Jane, warmly. "Is not aunt Mary our mother's sister? — and are we not cousins?"

"That may all be so; but just see how aunt Mary has acted."

"What has she done, George?"

"Hasn't she *disgraced* herself by keeping a boarding house? — and disgraced us too?"

"I can't see any disgrace about it. Do you, mother?"

Mrs. Ashton had been taken by surprise by her children's remarks, and some touches of better feeling had suddenly sprung up, and she briefly answered that —

“It was not reputable.”

“No, it was not reputable,” spoke up George in an angry tone, “and I *despise* her for it!”

“George! George! You must not talk so,” interrupted his mother, startled at finding *her own* thoughts and feelings brought out into words by one of her children.

“I am sure, mother, you think just as I do. I heard you say, long ago, that she had forfeited claims to your *respect*, and that you almost felt like *disowning* her entirely.”

Mrs. Ashton was silent. She was convicted by her own child, of unnatural conduct towards her sister, but, although she regretted having used the language, and had been recalled to some gentle and right feelings by her daughter Jane — she had not the *moral courage* at once to own that she had been *wrong*, and to distinctly disavow the present existence of such feeling.

“Mother doesn’t think so now, do you, mother?” said Jane, who perceived the change that had taken place in the mother’s feelings.

“Yes, she does though,” spoke up George, before his mother had time to reply, “Mother knows better, the ground of her objections to aunt Mary.”

“I will hear nothing further on the subject,” she said quickly — pained and confused to a degree that was really embarrassing.

“Mother,” said Jane the next morning when they were alone, “You’ll let me go to see aunt Mary, won’t you!”

“I would rather you would not go, Jane.”

“But, mother, she must feel lonesome and friendless. You don’t know how much pleasure she might take in seeing me, now and then.”

“I cannot consent, Jane. I have my reasons for objecting, and you will have to yield to my wishes.”

CHAPTER 4.

Five years have passed since Mrs. Este gave up the hope of earning anything towards a support by keeping boarders. During that time, she ventured upon opening a small dry goods store, but the result was, a year's attention, and five hundred dollars *loss* by trusting irresponsible people. When again introduced to the reader, she has two of her children with her, and is living in three rooms. Her oldest boy has been put out to work, and a younger one has been taken into a store to run errands. The youngest, and Emily, a smart, tidy girl of twelve, are at home with her. She has exhausted the last dollar of the money obtained from her husband's administrator, and from the sale of her furniture, and now earns a scanty support by *sewing*. Emily is attentive, industrious, and kind, thus lightening her labors one half.

For nearly two years, she has not seen her sister, Mrs. Ashton, who does not think it *reputable* to acknowledge the relation. Indeed, her name is not allowed to be mentioned in the house.

I need not here minutely detail the history of her daily toil, and anxiety, and the feelings, akin to despair, which would sometimes steal over her. She still held a clear title to her building lots, and property was gradually rising in value in the part of the town where they were situated. But she had reserved them for her children, and still remained firm in her determination not to sell them.

One evening her oldest boy, William, came home, and with breathless interest asked, "Mother, have you heard the news?"

"What news, William?"

"Uncle Ashton has failed!"

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Mrs. Este, turning pale.

"It is true, mother. And a desperate bad failure it is said to be. He cannot pay forty cents in the dollar, and will be stripped of everything."

"My poor sister! How will she bear so sad a reverse," said Mrs. Este in a tone of *heart-felt commiseration*.

"She will have to bear it, mother, as some other people have had to do. For my part, I am not at all sorry."

"Nor I neither," said Henry, now a bright lad, with five years added to his age since the reader last heard his opinions on matters and things.

"My dear children, this is not right. We must never be *glad at the misfortunes of others*."

"I know that, mother," said William, "but, indeed! aunt Anna has been so mean toward us, that I cannot help feeling a delight that a change has taken place which will bring her to her senses."

A loud knock at the door arrested the conversation. A black servant in livery asked if Mrs. Este lived there, and being answered that she did, said, that Mrs. Ashton had sent her carriage for her, and wished her to come to her immediately.

"Don't go, mother," said two of the children at once. But Mrs. Este paused not to consider. In a few minutes, she was ready to enter the carriage, in which she rode off, much to the dissatisfaction of the proud spirited boy, who had spoken so bitterly against his aunt.

On arriving at the splendid dwelling of her sister, Mrs. Este was hurried through the richly furnished hall, and up into Mrs. Ashton's chamber. There was a funeral stillness about the house, that caused her heart to sink within her. On entering the room, Mrs. Este was, for the first time in two years, in the presence of her sister. How *changed* was she now! The work of a few short hours had been fearful. She lay, amid rich curtains, and massive chamber furniture, a pale, terror-stricken woman, with her dark eyes glancing wildly around, and her hair flowing loose and tangled about her brow, neck, and shoulders."

"Mary!" she exclaimed with emphasis, as Mrs. Este entered: "Mary! have you come?"

"Dear sister!" said Mrs. Este in a voice of tender concern, all the past being for a moment forgotten. "Dear sister! what has happened?"

"Come near, and I will tell you," she said in a deep whisper, while a strange smile flitted over her face.

"Here — now — what has happened, sister, tell me?"

"My husband has shot himself!" she replied, in the same deep, unearthly whisper.

Mrs. Este, startled as if the report of a pistol had rang in her ear. It was, alas! too true. Mr. Ashton, sensible that a total reverse of fortune had taken place, and that his name would be bandied about as a *bankrupt*, dared not brave the *storm of adversity*. He shrank, coward-like, from the field, and left his helpless and unprotected family to meet the enemy alone!

"Ha! ha! ha!" — broke from the lips of the *hysterical* Mrs. Ashton, in a wild *laugh*. "Ha! ha! ha!" —

"Dear sister!" said Mrs. Este, tenderly, entwining an arm around the neck of Mrs. Ashton, and supporting her head upon her bosom —

"Sister — sister!" she exclaimed in a tone of bitter agony — "I have no sister. Hasn't she disgraced herself — and haven't I disowned her? No! I have no sister!" Then looking up into the face of Mrs. Este, she said in a quiet voice, and with a faint smile,

“How much you are *like* Mary, when we were happy together in our father’s house. But Mary didn’t do well. She cost me a great deal of trouble. Sometimes I used to *wish she was dead*. For people would ask me, if that wasn’t my sister, who lived in that shabby little house and was so poor. At last I was forced to deny the relationship altogether, and much trouble this cost me, too. Ah, me! she has much to answer for.”

Every word fell like *ice* upon the heart of Mrs. Este. She had felt deeply the *cruel neglect* of her sister, but could not bring herself to think that this neglect had assumed the form of a *fixed principle* in the mind of Anna.

“Is that you, Mary?” said Mrs. Ashton, her wandering thoughts returning. “Ah, I am glad to see you, Mary; it was kind of you to come. Oh! — it is dreadful — horrible!” and she covered her face with her hands and sobbed and moaned most piteously.

The distress of her sister roused Mrs. Este from the thoughts that were rapidly passing through her mind, in consequence of the strange, unnatural language of that sister.

“Yes, dear sister!” she said instantly, and in a voice subdued and tender. “It is your own sister, Mary. I have come because you sent for me; and now what can I do for you?”

“O, Mary — Mary!” said Mrs. Ashton, again restored to an acute perception of the present reality. “O Mary, how *cruelly* I have treated you! And yet, when the hour of dreadful trial came — there was none I wanted but you. O my sister can you ever *forgive* me?” She covered her face again, and sobbed and wept, and moaned as if her heart were breaking.

“Let the past be forgotten, Anna. It cannot be recalled; and when recollection is painful and unavailing, the thoughts should never go backwards.”

“I shall go *crazy!*” said Mrs. Ashton, rising, and binding her hands together across her forehead. “O, I shall go crazy!” Her daughter Jane, now a tall, graceful girl, just turning seventeen, came in at the moment.

“Jane,” said her mother, “here is your aunt Mary that you have begged me so often to let you go and see.”

The poor girl spoke not, but with the tears streaming down her pale cheeks, she bowed her head even to the bosom of that aunt; and an arm bound her there with an earnestness that came thrilling from a warm heart. The tears of Mrs. Este mingled with those of her afflicted niece. Many minutes passed, before Jane Ashton could quiet the troubled beatings of her heart. But she at length grew calm.

“Dear aunt!” she said, “if you will allow me to speak to you so tenderly; when we had no trouble, you were *neglected* and *forgotten*; and now that the evil day has found us — you are the first to come to us and speak *words of comfort*.”

“Your affliction, my dear Jane, is one of a deep and awful nature. For it, the world can yield no comfort. But turn your thoughts away from earth, and look above and beyond it. There is a divine eye that sleeps not, and a divine love which is unchangeable, watching over you. I have seen many and sore troubles, and but for this abiding confidence in God, I would long since have failed.”

Jane made no answer, but shrank closer within the arms of her aunt.

The chamber door again opened, and a young man about twenty, came in with a slow pace and a troubled countenance. His first deep sorrow had found him, as it had both his mother and sister, utterly unprepared. He paused when he perceived that there was a *stranger* present, and a frown settled upon his face, when she was named as his *aunt Mary*. Suddenly turning he left the room.

But we will hasten on. We might linger for an hour over this *scene of distress*, and yet all would be unavailing. Time alone can soften grief.

CHAPTER 5.

After the sad, hopeless funeral of Mr. Ashton, his creditors proceeded at once to take possession of all his effects. His furniture was too costly not to be considered an object; and the principal part of this was placed under auction and sold. All that his family retained, was a few necessary articles of furniture, and the jewelry with which Mrs. Ashton had been so fond of decking her own person, and that of her daughter. The jewelry was probably worth one thousand dollars.

After almost every valuable article of furniture had been removed, the family shrank together in the only room that retained anything of its former beauty and elegance — the chamber of Mrs. Ashton, which had been spared the rude touch of the trustees to whom had been consigned the settlement of her husband's estate. Here, the mother and her two children sat hour after hour, in silent and gloomy despondency, unable to decide how to act, or which way to look.

George Ashton had no knowledge of business. Up to the hour of his father's death, he had been going to college, and had fostered in himself a *proud and haughty spirit*. Suddenly he found himself shorn of all his *imaginary importance*, and reduced to the condition of a helpless pauper. It was a terrible lesson, but one that it was far better for him to learn. His mother and sister were at once reduced to a condition worse than the poverty of the poor, for they had no means of helping themselves. He would gladly have done anything to keep them in a station such as they had been used to moving in, but that was impossible. What could *he* do? How could he even provide for them the necessities of life? The mechanic, the poor mechanic at whom he had so often *sneered*, was now a better man than he, for he could get food and clothing for his family. In view of the real condition of things, and his own utter helplessness — he felt himself for a time, almost driven to madness.

In his sister *Jane*, George Ashton found one with whom he could take counsel in this great extremity. But his mother's selfish distress utterly broke down his feelings, whenever any allusion was made to their destitute condition in her presence.

"We shall have to move from here in a week," he said to Jane, on the day after the removal of their furniture. "But *where* shall we go, and *what* shall we do?"

"Indeed, brother, I cannot tell," Jane said, despondingly. "If I could only get something to do, I would be willing to work night and day to support you all," said the young man, warmly. "But what can I do? Where shall I go to get employment? If I could only get into a store as clerk."

"As what?" asked the mother, coming in at the moment, and catching the last sentence.

"As clerk in some store," replied George. "As a *servant*, to sweep out, make fires, and run errands!" returned the mother, half sneeringly. "You cannot do a *clerk's* duties."

"But I am willing to try, mother."

"It's no use for you to try. I know about these things. A clerk must be raised to it, and that's what you have not been. And anyhow, I'm not going to consent for you to be put down at the desk as a base and miserable clerk!"

"I must do something," returned the young man, with some bitterness in his tone.

But George was optimistic that he could get a salary of at least a thousand dollars a year as a clerk.

"Suppose you did get a thousand dollars. We couldn't live on that," Mrs. Ashton said, fretfully.

"Not in our present style, mother," remarked Jane. "But with her four children, it doesn't cost *aunt Este* that much."

"Don't liken us to *aunt Este*, and her base-minded children!" quickly replied Mrs. Ashton, in an impatient tone.

"No — don't speak of them, if you please," responded George, also showing impatience, and a slight expression of *disgust*.

Just then, there was a gentle tap at the chamber door. Jane opened it, and Mrs. Este entered. George Ashton nodded coldly, and at once retired. He had been taught to foster, for years, a feeling of *contempt* towards his aunt as a base-minded woman. *Adversity* could not change his opinion of her. It seemed to him, that she must feel a *triumph* at their downfall, and he permitted himself to think that the frequent visits she now made, were to witness with a secret pleasure, their humiliation. The *coldness* and even *disrespect* with which George Ashton continued to treat Mrs. Este, was to her a cause of regret. She had no other feeling in regard to it.

After George had left the room, there was a long, and oppressive silence. Mrs. Ashton looked the picture of distress. Jane, however, tried to assume a cheerful air, and broke through the reserve, by asking her aunt about her children. A few words passed between them, and then Mrs. Este, turning to her sister said:

"When I saw you last, you expected to be compelled to move in a short time. Have you yet determined to go?"

"We must move from here in a week."

"True. Have you made up your mind where to go?"

"Where *can* we go? We have no furniture with which to fit up another house."

"But you have plenty to furnish a couple of neat rooms. One for yourself and Jane, and one for George."

“A couple of rooms!” ejaculated Mrs. Ashton, her face flushing with sudden *indignation* at the thought. “What do you mean by a couple of rooms?” And the lady drew herself up with *offended dignity*.

“Just what the words express,” calmly returned Mrs. Este. “You have neither the means nor the furniture to live in any other way. Rent two neat rooms at a low price, in a retired part of the city, and there remove. George will no doubt get something to do. The amount of his earnings, with the little money you have, and what you may obtain by selling your own and Jane’s jewelry, will keep you very comfortably, until George is able to command a good salary.”

“Two rooms! Sell my jewelry! What does this foolish woman mean?”

“Mother! Dear mother! Don’t talk so?” Jane said, in an earnest, deprecating voice, interrupting Mrs. Ashton. “It seems to me that aunt Mary is right!”

“Hush! will you? Your aunt Mary only wants to drag us down to her own base level,” the *proud* mother retorted bitterly.

Mrs. Este rose slowly and retired, not, however, before Jane had looked her steadily in the face, with an expression that deeply touched the heart of her aunt. Mrs. Este could not help feeling hurt at the unkind and uncalled for remarks of her sister. And she was right in at once leaving her. To such a spirit, kind acts are no charity — and so Mrs. Este felt. But from her heart did she *pity Jane*, and for her sake, she forgave the *insult* which had been given.

“What did your sister want?” asked George of his mother, on entering her room an hour after. “What brings *her* here?”

“Who knows! Unless it is to *insult* us.”

“No — no — indeed it is not that!” Jane broke in. “You wrong aunt Este — I know you do. She is incapable of offering us an insult.”

“She has *done* it at least, incapable or not,” Mrs. Ashton said, tightly compressing her lips.

“She has! What did she do, or say?” This was spoken by George, in a half-threatening tone.

“Why, she had the audacity to propose to us to move into two little rooms, and *live like pigs in a sty*, as she is living with her low minded cubs!”

“She did?”

“Yes she did!”

“And you *insulted* her on the spot, as I would have done?”

“She was out of the house in a minute!”

Jane felt how vain would be anything she could say, while her mother and brother were carried away by their ungenerous, angry feelings. She, therefore, kept silence, although every remark made about her aunt fell like a stroke upon her own heart.

As day after day passed by, in doubt, distress, and irresolution, both George and his mother felt more discouraged and disheartened. They did not know what to do, nor which way to turn. George had conquered his *pride* so far as to call upon one of his father’s old mercantile friends, and ask his advice as to what he should do. He had been kindly received, but very little encouraged. The merchant told him that for the first year or two, a clerk received very little salary — sometimes not over a hundred dollars per annum. In fact, he said, there were a great many men who put their sons into stores without requiring any salary at all, considering the *business knowledge* they obtained as a full equivalent for their services.

“If nothing better should offer,” the merchant said, at the conclusion of their interview, “I think I can get you a situation that will yield about three hundred dollars for the first year. After that, your salary will depend upon your actual *value* to the establishment.”

George felt sick at heart as he left the store of the merchant, and turned his steps homeward. He found his mother greatly excited and distressed, at the gloomy state of affairs. One of the trustees, whose business it was to settle up the affairs of his father, had been there, and given peremptory notice that the house must be vacated within four days. This she related to her son, saying, in conclusion —

“But I’m not going to be turned out of doors in this way! They can’t compel us to move, until it is convenient to do so. They’ve already taken away everything valuable. Let them see what more they can do!”

“We had better get away as quickly as possible,” George returned, despondingly, “and into a smaller house. Into *two rooms* as Aunt Este advised.”

The last sentence was uttered with *sneering bitterness*.

“Better live in two rooms,” Jane said, calmly, “than be subject to demands for money that we cannot pay. We can shrink away from the eye of the world, and be happy among ourselves. I, for one, would gladly hide myself in any quiet spot, secure from all intrusion and prying curiosity. Into two rooms in fact, as our kind aunt has suggested.”

George felt something like *indignation* rising in his heart, at the allusion. But the painful consciousness, forced upon him in spite of himself, that even to that base state, there was every prospect of falling, kept him silent.

Two days more passed, when Mrs. Este, whose kind heart really yearned towards her afflicted sister and children, again called in upon them. She was more kindly received, and her suggestion listened to with more patience and interest.

At last Mrs. Ashton left her splendid mansion, with her children, and retired to a small house, which she permitted her sister to procure for her, in the western extremity of the city. There she shrank away, neglected by all the mirthful folks who had once looked upon her as a center of attraction. To get the actual means of subsistence, there was no way but in the sale of their jewelry. And article after article of this was disposed of for them by Mrs. Este, as their needs required.

The *pride* of Mrs. Ashton's heart had only been *wounded*, not *destroyed*. The thought of selling anything she had, to buy *bread*, was humiliating enough — but she shrank from selling the articles herself. Mrs. Este had long before conquered her *false pride*, and she cheerfully performed for her sister, what she knew could not but be *revolting* to her feelings.

Time kept steadily on; weeks and months passed, and the humble resources of Mrs. Ashton gradually wasted away. George had, after many humiliating applications, finally accepted a situation in a store at three hundred dollars a year. All this, he brought home to his mother and sister, except the small sums it required to keep him in such clothing as it was necessary for him to appear in at his business. The angel-like attentions of his aunt, wrought upon his feelings, though he still maintained towards her the manner which the *injurer* often does toward the injured. But even this was softening and wearing away. His heart always smote him after he had allowed her to go away, without any gentleness in his manner towards her.

CHAPTER 6.

One year passed away, during which Mrs. Ashton had been in a sad condition. Living all that time upon the sale of her jewelry, she had *nursed*, in idleness, the *misery* that was consuming her. But now a new concern aroused her from her selfish stupor. The treasure upon which she had drawn, was nearly consumed. Where was even their *daily bread* to come from? George's earnings would go but a small way towards supporting them. Something like *despair* settled on her heart at the dreadful prospect. While in this mood, her sister came in to see her.

"Still drooping and melancholy, Anna," she said, "This ought not to be. It is time for you to rouse yourself."

"How can I rouse myself, Mary? It is easy to *talk* — but to *act* is a different matter. Who can be contented in view of impending poverty? We have but little left, and I know not what is to become of us."

"Mary," said Mrs. Este, seriously. "It is time for you to think of doing something. Both you and Jane can help George in supporting the family, and you ought to do it."

Mrs. Ashton's face became flushed, and then turned very pale.

"Do something Mary!" she at length, said in an excited tone.

"What do you mean? That I should take in sewing as you do, or — " But she paused suddenly, and looked her sister in the face, agitated and confused.

"I mean just that, Anna," replied Mrs. Este, in a quiet, kind tone. "You and Jane are no better than George, and he has to work. And how can you sit idly at home, while he is laboring for you from morning until night with an anxious heart, and then able only to make a tantalizing pittance. He is ready to sacrifice health, and everything for you — and will you, from mere *false pride*, add to the burdens he bears for you so cheerfully. Help yourselves all you can now, and, by and bye he will be able to do more for you. But don't, my dear sister, discourage your dutiful son."

"Mary you don't know what you are talking about," said Mrs. Ashton, in a faint, but troubled voice.

"Mother, I think aunt is right," said Jane. "I know brother feels *discouraged* at the prospect before him. He looks more and more troubled every day. It can surely be no more *disgrace* for us to work, than for him. Aunt Mary works, and I am sure she has shown herself to be better than all the *idle fashionable people*, who could forget us in a day. I see things differently now, mother, from what I did. I am ready to begin at once to try and do something. But I am at a loss to know where to begin. Can you direct me, aunt Mary?"

"If you are *willing* to work, Jane, something can, no doubt, be found for you to do," said Mrs. Este. "But you must make up your mind to endure the weariness of hours of prolonged application. You cannot earn a great deal; for *women's wages* are but a poor pittance at best. But you can earn as much as will support yourself, I think with your present ideas of what is necessary for you to have."

"I do not want much, aunt."

"By bringing your ideas *within your means*, dear niece — you will begin to find *contentment*. If you have desires *beyond* your means — you will be unhappy. You have had a whole year in which to allow your thoughts to fall back from high hopes and brilliant prospects. Now is the time for you to begin to think correctly of the present. The past is gone. Regrets cannot recall it, nor a vain pondering over its lost delights, make you happy."

"I *know* it all, dear aunt! I have *felt* it all," said Jane, the tears, in spite of her efforts to control herself, falling over her cheeks.

"Then you are beginning to see right, Jane, and I am glad of it. Now, as you are so willing to do something, I have in this bundle, half a dozen shirts to make, for which the pay will be half a dollar each. As I have other work at home, and am pressed for time, I will leave you four of them. Do you think you can make them?"

"I don't know, aunt. I can sew *neatly*, but I never made a shirt."

"Never mind, your mother can show you. She used to make fine shirts for our father, beautifully."

"Mary, how can you!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, suddenly. But with an effort she kept down her feelings of *mortified pride*, and said, more calmly, and with an air of forced resignation, "Yes, Jane, I can show you."

"Then I'll take them, aunt — and thank you!" said Jane.

"That is right, Jane. But I must now hurry home, for I have much to do; so good day to you. And may you keep up a *brave heart*."

On that evening, when George Ashton came home, tired and dispirited, he was surprised to find Jane at work, busily plying her needle, a thing he had not seen her do for a long time.

"Why, Jane, how is this? What's the matter, now?"

"Your aunt Mary has been here today, and has put it into Jane's head that she ought to try and *earn* something, and has actually got her some shirts to make," said Mrs. Ashton.

“Aunt Mary takes great liberties, I think,” rejoined George, *indignantly*. “The fact is, of late, we can’t do anything without her *interference*. She must *advise* and *direct* every movement. I for one, am getting *tired* of it. Jane, you must do no such thing. I will work night and day, rather than you shall so *disgrace* yourself.”

“George, you greatly wrong our kind, good aunt,” said Jane, quietly laying aside her work for the present. “We have had a good deal of talk today, and she has fully convinced me that it is right that we should help you by trying to help ourselves. She has opened my eyes to what is truly honorable. In urging upon mother the necessity of doing something, she used this language about you — ‘You and Jane are no better than George, and he has to work. And how can you sit idly at home, while he is laboring from morning until night, with an anxious heart, and then able to make only a miserable pittance. He is ready to sacrifice health, everything for you, and will you, from mere *false pride*, add to the burdens he bears for you so cheerfully. Help yourselves all you can now, and, by and bye, he will be able to do more for you. But don’t, my dear sister, discourage your dutiful son.’”

The countenance of George flushed while his sister was speaking, and when she finished, he covered his face with his hands, unable to keep down his rising emotion.

“Did she say all that, Jane?” said he, after some moments.

“Yes, George, every word of it.”

“O, Jane, how we have wronged a noble woman! I am forced to acknowledge her worth. Hereafter I shall endeavor to atone for my neglect, by treating her with a respect amounting almost to reverence.”

“You run on wildly, George,” said Mrs. Ashton petulantly.

“No, mother! We have sorely wronged our aunt, and yet, like a guardian angel, has she lingered near us, when we needed direction; and even while I maintained towards her an unkind manner, has she been thinking for me, and sympathizing in my labors and cares.

“Mother, I would be worse than an evil spirit, did I not relent in my proud bearing, and prouder feelings towards her. What have I to be proud of, over her? She is my superior!”

He was excited, and spoke in an exciting tone. But the mother’s very nature had been *warped by selfishness and false pride* — and she could not see beauty in *moral excellence*.

“That is all very fine, George. But I cannot myself see much that is noble or superior in Mary. She has shown herself a good, kind creature towards us; but nothing more than one sister had a right to expect of — ”

“Mother!” said George with startling emphasis — “did we — did you” — but he paused, for he felt that he was about saying more to his mother, than a child had a right to utter.

“We will waive the subject, if you please, George,” replied Mrs. Ashton, in an *offended* tone.

After tea, Jane resumed her sewing, which gave great pleasure to George, now that his thoughts had taken a right direction. He read aloud for an hour or two, during which time Jane employed her needle busily, but the mother sat idly communing with her own unhappy thoughts.

Jane never felt happier in her life, than she did on Saturday, when her aunt carried home the shirts for her, and returned in the evening with more work, and two dollars for what she had already done. The four bright half dollars were her own earnings, and she felt prouder of them, than of anything she had ever possessed.

“I cannot always get work for you Jane, nor take it home for you. But I wish to make your beginning as pleasant as possible. I have much to do, and have to work late and early to get comfortable food for myself and your cousins. After awhile, it will be necessary for you to carry home your work, and make contracts for yourself. I know, Jane, that this will be a sad trial, but let a consciousness of discharging your *duty*, keep you up.”

“She shall *never* do it, Mary! What! have my daughter a *beggar* for work?” said Mrs. Ashton warmly.

“Anna,” said Mrs. Este, gravely, “it is fully time, now, for you to lay aside your *proud*, and I must call them, *foolish* and *wicked* notions. I have borne much from you and forgiven all; but it is trespassing rather too far upon me, to keep constantly indicating that it is *disgraceful* for yourself or Jane to do for yourselves — what you are willing to have me do for you. You must stop this, if you expect me to aid you by my advice and direction. I have more than enough to do for my own children, and always neglect them, when I do anything for you. It will take severe trials yet, to wake you up to right thoughts and feelings, and these trials will come, if you do not rouse yourself speedily to action.”

“Spare us, dear aunt!” interposed Jane, with tearful eyes. “We have been *very proud and foolish*, and it is hard to lay aside old feelings at once. But we are coming on. By and bye, I can do what to think of now, makes my heart shrink within me.”

“I know, Jane, you are doing nobly. Persevere, and look up for strength. In good time you shall reap, if you faint not.”

CHAPTER 7.

For some time, Mrs. Este continued to get work for Jane, and take it home for her; but she began to think that it would be as well for her to begin helping herself a little more; so she purposely remained away from Mrs. Ashton's one Saturday afternoon, when she knew that the family would need the one or two dollars that would be coming to Jane. She usually called in the afternoon, and at the accustomed hour, Jane had the work pinned up in a neat bundle, and ready for her aunt. But as the day began to draw to a close, she experienced a good degree of uneasiness, at not seeing the welcome face of *kind aunt Mary*. Their last dollar had been spent, and George's month's wages were not due until the middle of the next week.

Should anything keep her aunt away, Jane felt a sickening consciousness, that, of necessity, she should have to perform the duty from which she had so long shrunk with a nervous reluctance. Often had she reproached herself for allowing her aunt to neglect her own family to perform what it was but right that she should do. Often had she resolved that she would no longer hold back from the duty; but as often, had her resolution failed her.

The night at last closed in, and George returned home from his business. Almost the last article of food in the house was consumed for supper. After the tea things were cleared away, Jane retired to her room and dressed herself in a neat plain manner to go out. Her heart beat with a troubled uneasy motion, as she took up the small bundle of work and came downstairs.

"George," said she, in as unconcerned a tone as she could assume, "I want you to go down the street with me."

"Where are you going, Jane?" said Mrs. Ashton, with an expression of surprise.

"Aunt couldn't come today, and I'm just going to step down to Mrs. Gendreau's with my work."

"Indeed you are *not* going to do any such a thing! Jane," said her mother. "I am surprised at your aunt for not coming to carry home the work? Is it possible that you can so *demean* yourself?"

"Mother, we are out of everything, and have not a dollar in the house," said Jane, in a voice that trembled with ill suppressed emotion.

"Has it come to this!" exclaimed George in a bitter tone, rising and walking the room hastily. Mastering her feelings, Jane, who possessed, with all her shrinking from duty, more *moral courage* than any of the family, said,

"I see nothing so very dreadful in the idea of taking back a little work after it is done, and getting the money for it. Surely, George you do not feel *degraded* when you receive the reward of your honest industry! — and why should I? I think mother is unjust to aunt Este. For months has she neglected her own family to bring me work, and when I have finished the work — she has come, cheerfully, and carried it home for me, and then brought us the money. We are no better than she. And it seems to me, that if we are *ashamed* to do for ourselves, what we are willing that she should do for us — we deserve to suffer."

"All very pretty, and romantic, Jane," said her mother, in a tone of *irony*.

"It is sober truth, mother. Don't you think so, George?"

George, thus unexpectedly appealed to, could only answer, "It sounds very much like it, Jane."

"Truth or not, Jane, you can't carry that work back, so there's the end of it," said Mrs. Ashton. "I think I ought to know what is right and *proper* for you to do, and, unless you are determined to *disobey* my express commands — you will not leave this house tonight!"

Jane burst into tears and sat dawn. She had, by hard efforts, schooled herself to act as *duty* called; but just as she was entering with some little degree of *willingness* into the duty, all her feelings were checked and chilled by an unreasonable parental interposition.

It was nearly half an hour before anyone broke the silence that ensued. Each one's thoughts were oppressed by their own peculiar burdens. Jane was the first who spoke. She asked the simple, but to them, startling question — "Then, mother, what shall we do?"

"I'm sure I don't know, child," replied Mrs. Ashton, in an *irritable* tone of voice.

"Unless I carry this work back, mother, and get the money for it — we shall have nothing to eat tomorrow, nor until George's month's wages become due.

"Could not you go to your aunt with the work and get her to take it back for you?"

"I will carry it back myself, first," said George, warmly. "It would be wrong to ask aunt Este to do any such thing."

"Indeed it would, mother. Do just say that you withdraw your command, and then I shall know how to act," urged Jane.

"Well, Jane, I withdraw that command, but still, I would much rather you would *not* go."

"Come, George, you must go with me, as it is night," said Jane in a cheerful, animated tone; and in a few moments from the time Mrs. Ashton withdrew her positive interdiction, they were on their way to the dwelling of Mrs. Gendreau, where, in the days of prosperity, they had been welcome visitors. It was a sore trial for those young, but chastened spirits

to bear the *mortification* of thus acknowledging in person, their great reverse and poverty, to one with whom they had held an equal station. But strong *necessity* urged them on to duty.

CHAPTER 8.

Arriving at the beautiful dwelling of Mrs. Gendreau, Jane timidly pulled the bell, while George waited on the pavement in front of the house, until she should finish her business and return. It was nearly two years since she last stood at that door, and rang that same bell — but with what different feelings! Then, mirthful, thoughtless, happy — now, bowed down in spirit. Then, ready to bound in and meet that mansion's beautiful mistress with a feeling of *equality* and *companionship* — now going as a *humble work-woman*, asking for the wages of her labor. Before her agitated thoughts could take any particular form, the door opened, and to her timid request to see Mrs. Gendreau, she was roughly told to wait in the hall a moment, by the same servant who had often before stood at her carriage and treated her with *servile deference*.

In a few moments Mrs. Gendreau came out of one of the parlors, and, with a mild, encouraging smile, took her hand and said —

“I am glad to see you, Jane. I have heard of your excellent resolution to try and help yourself, and I approve it with all my heart. Look upon me as a friend, and consult me whenever you are in trouble. But, come in; something more than mere compliments must gratify you tonight. You have brought home your work, and you want your honest earnings.”

“Don't speak of it, Mrs. Gendreau. You are —”

“Yes, Jane — these are things to be spoken of. You have rendered me a service, the return is due to you. You, doubtless, have had much with which to contend, in combating your own feelings; but, my dear young friend, the heart-felt consciousness of having done what is our *duty* — is a higher reward than any that this life can afford. Do not forget that *happiness is nothing but an internal consciousness of having done right*, and is never dependent on external circumstances. But let me see your work, Jane,” said Mrs. Gendreau, taking the bundle from her hand.

Jane's heart throbbed quickly in her bosom, while Mrs. Gendreau spoke to her so kindly and encouragingly, and her eyes were filled, though they did not run over with tears.

After looking over the articles which Jane had made, and made neatly, too, Mrs. Gendreau left the room a moment, and then returned and handed her *three* dollars, saying —

“Your work is done so well, Jane, and I like it done well, that I must pay you a little over the ordinary price. I would always prefer paying more, to have my sewing done as I like it. Here is another small bundle of work, which I would like done in a few days. When you get through for me, there are several of my acquaintances who would like to engage you. Do not fear but that you will get plenty of work, and good prices for it.”

“Thank you — thank you, Mrs. Gendreau,” said Jane, rising. “You don't know how much you have encouraged a weak and fainting heart. I had *dreaded* nothing so much as the necessity which I knew would arise for bringing back my work. It will now be a *pleasure*.”

“Thus, my dear Jane,” said Mrs. Gendreau, taking her hand affectionately, “will you ever find *satisfaction to spring from a discharge of your duty*. Again, I repeat, look upon me as a friend, and when in doubt or difficulty — come to me, and tell me all your troubles freely.”

Jane could but faintly murmur “good night,” as she hurried from the house.

When she drew her arm within that of her brother, it trembled, and her feelings so overcame her, that she gave way to a fit of sobbing, so violent as to be almost hysterical.

George, who had waited for Jane with feelings that few can imagine, found them wound up to a pitch of excitement by this indication, to him, that his sister had not received kind treatment, and he said with indignant warmth,

“Jane, has Mrs. Gendreau dared to speak to you unkindly?”

“No — no — no, George! — she received me like a *mother*,” was all that the sister could utter in vindication of her new found friend, before her emotion spent itself in tears.

“God bless her!” fervently ejaculated George, a load in an instant removed from his heart. And more than once did he utter the same expression, as Jane, in a few words, recited the history of her brief interview with Mrs. Gendreau.

“I hope you have had enough of carrying back work,” was the first and *unfeeling* remark of Mrs. Ashton, as the brother and sister entered. I never did like Mrs. Gendreau, and I suppose you are sick of her now.”

“O mother!” said Jane, with warmth — “you don't know how much you wrong a good woman and a kind friend. But we must think of something else just now. I have *three* dollars, more by a dollar, than I expected to receive for my work, and with them we must replenish our exhausted stock of food. It has come to be a question of *necessary bread*, mother, you know,” she said smiling, “and when it comes to that, it is wisest to let things of less vital importance go on as they will.”

CHAPTER 9.

Having gotten Jane and her brother into a better state of mind, and in more pleasant prospects, we will look in for a little while upon Mrs. Este, a *true woman* in every sense of the word.

A sick child, the pressing necessity to give more attention to the immediate wants of her family, and a resolution to leave Jane to the necessary adoption of a course of conduct, which, sooner or later, she would have to enter into — all determined Mrs. Este not to pay her usual visit of *benevolence* to her sister's house.

Her oldest boy was now nearly of age, and, although his present income was small, yet he was promised by his employers, who were much pleased with his intelligence and attention to business, a handsome salary when he reached his majority. In view of this period, she toiled for her family with unremitting industry. A gradual improvement was in progress in the western part of the city, and already had she received several fair offers for some of her building lots. One of them she had sold, and with the money paid off an accumulation of taxes, with which the property had become burdened; but she preferred still waiting for better prices.

On this evening, while bending wearily over her work, ever and always pausing to look upon her sick child, who lay on a pallet on the floor near where she was sitting, there was a loud knock at the door, and in the next moment two men, strangers to her, came in, and asked if she were Mrs. Este.

To her affirmative answer, the two men looked at each other, and each involuntarily exclaimed, "Can it be possible?"

"Did not your husband do a large business, a few years ago?" asked one of them.

"He was, up to the day of his death, a merchant, doing an extensive business."

"How did you become so poor, then?"

"Either he was worth less than reputed — or the administrator has wronged me."

"Mr. Hunter was your husband's administrator, was he not, Mrs. Este?"

"He was, sir."

"Then this explains everything. He is a successful lawyer, but a subtle cheat. Have his accounts ever been subjected to a legal examination?"

"No sir. I was a friendless woman, and had none to take up my cause."

"Where was Mr. Ashton? Was he not your brother-in-law? He could have made the wretch disgorge his ill-gotten gain — for he must have wronged you."

"Mr. Ashton took no interest in my affairs."

"Hum — m! — Well — did the administrator hand you over any accounts marked 'desperate?'" said one of the strangers.

"Several."

"Will you be so kind as to let me examine them?"

"Certainly, sir." And Mrs. Este went to a chest of drawers, and brought out a package of papers, neatly tied up with red tape. From these, she selected a smaller package, marked conspicuously with the words, "Desperate and Doubtful Claims," and handed them to one of her visitors.

After glancing from paper to paper in the package, quickly, he drew out a sheet, and opened and commenced a careful examination. The two now communed hurriedly, in a low tone, in which Mrs. Este only distinguished the words, "all right," "pay over Monday," "next week," "away," and a few other expressions of which she could make out nothing. After a short time spent in examining all the papers in the package, one of the strangers turned to Mrs. Este and said —

"We are two of your *husbands debtors* whose accounts have been considered *desperate*. We were unfortunate in business, but things have changed with us, and we are now fully able to meet all the claims against us. Our indebtedness, interest added, amounts to ten thousand dollars, and we are here to pay it over.

"The passage of the papers into your hands, makes it unnecessary, as it would be useless, to settle these accounts through your husband's administrator. We will, therefore, on Monday, hand you over the money, and may God bless and prosper you!"

"O, gentlemen!" said Mrs. Este, rising to her feet, and trembling from head to foot, "do not *trifle* with me. To raise my hopes thus, just at this time, and then disappoint me, would be more than I could bear."

"We solemnly tell you it is true, madam; and we would hand you the whole amount on the spot, if we thought it would be safe for you to have so much money in the house through two nights."

"No one would know it — no one could suspect it — but, pardon me, gentlemen," she said, pausing, and then speaking in a calmer tone. "It seems impossible that the present is only a *dream*. What you have said, confuses me — but I will not insult you by urging a present payment."

After consulting together for some time, the one who had spoken more frequently than the other, turned to Mrs. Este, and said —

“Madam, we have concluded to hand you bills tonight, to the amount of five thousand dollars, as a *surety* to you that there is a *reality* in what we tell you. Be silent on the matter — and no danger can reach you. On Monday we will pay you the balance of what is justly your due. And, let us tell you, that among these accounts, there are at least five thousand dollars more that we can obtain for you without trouble, and will do so if you will place in our hands a *power of attorney* for the transaction of the business.”

Mrs. Este had no words to express her thanks, but she *looked* her gratitude, and well was its mute language comprehended. A receipt was soon passed for the five thousand dollars, and the strangers left the humble dwelling of Mrs. Este with lighter hearts than had ever beaten in their bosoms.

“Dear children,” said Mrs. Este, when the strangers had left, “let us give thanks to the Giver of all good for this merciful providence.” And mother and children bowed themselves in humble, but heart-felt acknowledgment of *gratitude*, before Him whose mercies are over all the earth, and who sends prosperity or adversity alone for the spiritual good of His erring children.

“Let us, my dear children,” said Mrs. Este, when they had risen from their position of worship — “not feel ourselves *uplifted* by this change. We are no better than we were an hour ago, and should, therefore, give no place to idle thoughts, or vain imaginations. As William will, in the course of a couple of years, be of age, after a suitable time for experience, thereafter — it would be well for him to enter into business. Till then, we must not use anything but the *interest* of the money we have so providentially obtained. The interest added to William’s salary, and accompanied with our constant industry, will make us comfortable.”

“Won’t aunt Ashton be mortified, though, when she hears of our good fortune!” said Henry, dancing up and down on the floor, utterly unable to control his rising spirits.

“You are wrong to think so, Henry,” said Mrs. Este. “Why should you suppose that she would be other than pleased at our good fortune?”

“I know she will be *jealous*, mother; she is as *proud* as ever, and always *irritated at the good fortune of others*.”

“You must not judge so harshly, Henry. You do not know her heart. And remember, my son, that you are speaking of your mother’s sister.”

The boy was *silenced* — but not *convinced*.

CHAPTER 10.

On Monday, true to their promise, the strangers came again, and paid over the balance of five thousand dollars to Mrs. Este. Under their continued and kind direction, she invested the whole of it in *safe stocks*, yielding an interest of at least six percent, thus securing an annual income of six hundred dollars a year. These true friends urged her to reserve at least five hundred dollars for present application, in elevating her circumstances to a comfortable and more respectable condition; but she said she preferred waiting until a semi-annual dividend would be declared on the stock, which would take place in three months, interest already due having been included in the purchase. Still not satisfied, they finally insisted on making her an advance of five hundred dollars on the accounts they had agreed to collect for her in the west. After closing up all their business with her, and making her the *advance* just named, they left the city with more pleasant feelings than had ever warmed their hearts; not, however, until they had given Mr. Osmond, the lawyer, a hint, that on their return a legal investigation would be had of his conduct as Mrs. Este's administrator Mr. Hunter.

It now became a serious question in the mind of Mrs. Este, whether any good would arise from letting her sister know of the extent of her good fortune. She was not disposed to *squander* it herself in mere show and extravagance, nor was she at all willing that Mrs. Ashton should be allowed that privilege. But it did not rest with her to keep the secret, as will be seen.

On Monday night George Ashton came home from the store, and exclaimed as soon as he entered, in an excited voice

—
“Aunt Este is rich again!”

“What is that?” said Mrs. Ashton, springing to her feet.

“Why, two of uncle Este's insolvent debtors are here, and they have just paid aunt ten thousand dollars, and I heard one of them, a Mr. Flathers, say today, that he could easily get five thousand more for her, in the West, out of her *desperate claims*. He says her building lots will be worth twenty thousand dollars in two years, if property increases in value in the western section of the city as fast as it has for the last five years. He also says that he is determined, when he returns, to have the affairs of the administrator investigated, and has no doubt but that he can be made to disgorge at least twenty thousand more.”

“Heaven help us!” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, excited and almost breathless. “What is going to happen? Jane, come, put up your work, there'll be no more cause for slaving for a dollar or two a week.”

“The same cause as ever, mother,” said Jane, quietly, though her cheeks were flushed, and her voice slightly trembled in spite of her effort to be calm.

“Are you crazy, Jane? Do you think Mary will allow us to remain in this *wretched* state — and she rich. You are always full of strange notions.”

“Mother,” said George, in a quick, excited voice, “We have had our day, and now aunt Este's time has come. I little doubt, but that she will act towards us, a more natural part, than we did towards her. But we have no right to *expect* anything; and I for one want nothing. She has four children, and if she has toiled so long for them, without touching one of her building lots, when the sale of them would have made her comfortable for years, there is little doubt but she will at once invest the money she receives, for the use of her children. Indeed, I understood Mr. Flathers to say, that stocks to the amount of the *whole ten thousand dollars* had been purchased at her request, although he had strongly urged her to retain five hundred dollars for immediate use.”

“Foolish woman!” said Mrs. Ashton, in a tone of *profound disappointment*, throwing herself upon a chair, and swinging her body backwards and forwards, her mind in a state of deep dejection and mortification.

Jane kept on with her work as usual, though her hand trembled so that she could hardly hold her needle, and her face burned as if she had been sitting near a large fire. No one had spoken since the last remark of Mrs. Ashton, when a slight knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Mrs. Este and William. It was the first time the latter had ever paid a visit to his aunt and cousins.

Jane dropped her work, and George was on his feet in a moment; neither of them spoke until William came forward and offered his hand to George, which was immediately taken. Each hand tightened in the grasp of the other, with a feeling of instant regard.

“We will hereafter be friends, George,” said William. “We have kept aloof too long. And, aunt, how do you do? And you, Jane?” offering his hand in turn to each with a frank and earnest manner.

“We do bad enough, William,” said Mrs. Ashton, with a solemn countenance, and a long drawn sigh. “Bad enough! Hardly able to keep soul and body together.”

“O mother, don't say that!” said George and Jane in the same instant.

“We have no particular cause of complaint, William,” continued Jane. “Things are not as they used to be with us; and, it is, perhaps, as well.”

“The girl must be crazy!” said Mrs. Ashton, instantly excited. “It is not as well for us!”

“All things, sister, are under the direction of an especial Providence, and are for our good,” said Mrs. Este. “Jane is right. *Adversity* has done much for her. May she come out of it like *gold purified in the fire*.”

“We owe you much, dear aunt,” said George, warmly, “in teaching us rightly to receive the *lessons of adversity*. May you be rewarded a hundred fold.”

“The best and only reward that we ever receive for doing what is just and merciful, is a *consciousness of having done our duty*; in this consciousness, there is a delight of which those who neglect their duty, can have no conception. It seems to me, that the happiness of Heaven cannot consist in anything, but the *delight of being useful*.”

“You are always preaching up some new fangled notion, Mary. I, for one, cannot understand you half of the time. I can see happiness only in the *gratification of desire*,” said Mrs. Ashton.

“You can never be happy, Anna, for *desire* will always keep far in advance of *possession*. But I have something else to talk of tonight. We both live in small, uncomfortable houses, and are in consequence subjected to many inconveniences. I propose that we rent a large house together, and each occupy a respective part. I have found such a house nearer the center of the city than this, and at the moderate rent of one hundred and fifty dollars a year. You now pay eighty and we the same. The arrangement I speak of, besides being much pleasanter, will be something cheaper. What do you think of it?”

“In what street is the house, Mary?”

“In Avalon Street near the church.”

“At what rent did you say?”

“One hundred and fifty dollars.”

“It must be a poor kind of a house, to rent for only a hundred and fifty dollars in that neighborhood,” returned Mrs. Ashton, with something of *contempt* in her manner.

“It is quite a comfortable house for people in our circumstances,” Mrs. Este said, a little coldly.

“In *our circumstances!* Indeed! and I wonder if we are not as good as anybody, and as fit to live in a genteel house as anybody?”

“If we have the ability to pay for it,” replied Mrs. Este, in the same cold voice.

“Which house is it? I know everyone along there,” Mrs. Ashton said —

“The old brick house where Mr. Baker lived many years ago.”

“O dear! That old looking affair. Goodness! I’d rather stay where I am.”

“Just as you like, Anna. I thought that it would be agreeable to you, especially as it would be a desirable change on account of George, who now has to walk a long distance to his business. But if you have any, even the smallest objection — it settles the matter at once.”

“I have no objection to the arrangement in itself. That I think a very good one. But I’m sure we might *afford* a much better style than you propose. Why can’t we get a house at three hundred? For that rent, we might make a very genteel appearance.”

“Can you pay one hundred and fifty dollars a year for rent?” asked Mrs. Este, in a serious voice, steadily regarding her sister as she spoke.

“I expect so. Can’t we George?”

“Not unless my salary were raised. It requires all of sister’s care and economy, to make our income meet our *present* expenses,” George replied.

“Well, I’m sure we could do it. I’m in favor, therefore, of going into a *genteel* house, if we do move.”

“As to *mere gentility*, I am not prepared to look at that just now,” Mrs. Este said, calmly. “The house I speak of is quite genteel enough for people in our circumstances; more than that, it is large and comfortable. But if you do not wish to go into it, that settles the matter; I will say no more about it. As to paying *double* the rent I now do, that is altogether out of the question.

“I see no objection to the house,” Jane ventured to say.

“No, I don’t expect that you do. You see no objection to *anything* your aunt proposes!” said Mrs. Ashton.

The blood mounted instantly to the cheek of *William Este*, at this allusion to his mother, by one for whose character he had a deep seated *contempt* — by one whose conduct, as a near relative, had been almost unpardonable. George Ashton saw the effect produced on the mind of his cousin, with a feeling of pain and mortification. He instantly said —

“I cannot but think and feel with Jane in this matter. As to *mere appearance* — we have nothing to do with that. Let those who can afford to do so, study *gentility*. We have other matters to look after. For your constant kindness towards us, aunt Este,” he continued, “let me again express my sincere gratitude. For myself, the proposal you make meets my warmest approval. Brought thus intimately together, we shall know each other better. Our families have been too long separated; for which, I blush to own, *we* have been entirely to blame. Let this separation no longer continue.”

“As to that, George,” said his mother with some excitement of manner, “you may say what you please. But let me tell you one thing, I am not going to move into that old dump of a house. If I go from here, I go into something more *decent* than that.

“Which, of course, settles the whole matter,” remarked Mrs. Este. “So, now, let us change the subject.”

The effort to change the theme of discourse was a hard one. Conversation dragged heavily. After a short time, Mrs. Este and William went home, not, however, until the cousins had perfectly understood and appreciated each other. From that hour, they were fast friends.

CHAPTER 11.

“It’s too bad! I’m out of all patience!” ejaculated Mrs. Ashton, as soon as her sister had left the house. “But I don’t believe a word of it. I don’t believe she’s got a cent of money from her husband’s estate, say what you will.”

“It is true, you may be sure, mother.”

“Then why didn’t she speak of it? Why didn’t she tell me about it? What does she mean by talking to us about renting that cheap, old house?”

“I don’t think, mother,” George said, respectfully, “that we have any just cause to *find fault* with aunt, for not having mentioned her good fortune.”

“Well, I think we have,” was replied.

“I don’t know,” Jane remarked, “why she did not mention it to us. She must have known that it would give us sincere pleasure.”

“The reason is plain enough. I see it as clearly as if she had told me. She was afraid we would want a dollar or two.”

“O no, no — no, mother! don’t say so,” quickly spoke up Jane. “Aunt Este is too generous, too noble-hearted, to be governed in any act, by so base a motive.”

“There, there — Don’t talk to me about her *nobleness* and *generosity*. Do you think I would — ”

The memory of what she *had done* flashed suddenly across her mind, and caused Mrs. Ashton to pause and look slightly confused. She was going to say, “Do you think I would act so *selfish* a part towards her, if I were to receive a large sum of money?” But her *conduct* had been far worse than anything she attributed to her sister, and a sudden consciousness of this, put a seal upon her lips.

A long silence followed, painful to all. George and Jane felt acutely the unkind conduct of their mother. She had wronged their aunt by unjust suspicions, and had *insulted* her at the very moment when she was seeking their good.

“I am sure, mother,” Jane at length ventured to say, breaking through the oppressive reserve, “that aunt means to be kind and generous to us. Has she not always been so? What would we have done without her?”

“Kind and generous, indeed! Don’t talk in that way to me, Jane. It’s very kind and generous, no doubt, for her, with thirty or forty thousand dollars, as George says, to come and offer to bear *half* the rent of a *miserable old house*. I never heard of such *selfishness*.”

“But, mother,” said George, “aunt does not feel that it would be prudent for her to increase her expenses just now. She wishes, no doubt, to manage well all her resources, until William gets of age, so that she may set him up in business with a good capital.

“Set him up in business!” This was spoken *sneeringly*. “Oh yes. That’s what she’s looking to. Set William Este up in business, to *squander* all she’s got. What miserable folly! Much good he’ll do in business! But that’s the way with some people — they’re never satisfied. All I can say is, that Mary is acting like a *downright fool*. I’d never pinch myself in the way she’s doing for any child. No, indeed — not I! There never was a child yet, which didn’t prove *ungrateful* in the end!”

These ungenerous remarks cut George and Jane to the heart. With all her *weakness* and *self-love*, their affection was strong for their mother. They would have, willingly, made any sacrifice for her; and were sacrificing everything in their power to secure her comfort. To have their motives so rudely and unjustly assailed, was a severe trial. But they bore it patiently, and in silence. Both George and his sister at once saw, that any attempt to vindicate their aunt was useless. Her uniform kindness impressed them both with a high regard for her; and this, no complaint or sneer of their mother, could affect.

As soon as William Este had left the house of Mrs. Ashton, in company with his mother, on the evening that the proposition to rent a larger house had been rejected, he said indignantly —

“I see nothing to cause me to change my opinion of aunt Ashton. She’s a *selfish, proud, insulting woman*, and I wouldn’t care if I never saw her again.”

“I would rather not hear you talk so, William,” his mother said, in a mild, reproving voice. “You should *pity* your aunt — not feel *angry* at her.”

“I don’t see that she is worthy of my pity. And as to my not feeling angry, how can I hear you *insulted* and not be angry. It is not in me, mother, to bear this!”

“Think only of the good you might do your aunt; and try to forget everything that causes you to feel excited against her. She is not happy.”

“Happy? No. I would think her one of the most miserable creatures in existence.”

“Should you not *pity* those who are miserable?”

“If they *make themselves* miserable?”

“I do not see, William, that you need inquire as to the cause of misery, before your pity is excited. They whose wretchedness depends upon their *own* perverted affections — are much *more* to be pitied than those who are made unhappy through the wrong conduct of others. The latter may possibly remove themselves from the cause of pain — but the former carry it ever in their bosoms! To them, there is no peace, day nor night. Bound to the *rock of self-love*, the *vulture of unsatiated desire preys constantly upon their hearts!* Do not, then, be angry with such, my son. If, in the agonies of pain, they speak bitter things against you and others, still regard them with a *pity* which would seek to unbind them from the *rock of self-love* to which they are fixed. If acute *physical* pain will make a man restless, peevish, and sometimes unkind in his remarks — how much more so severe *mental* pain. Forget, then, the words and manner of your aunt. Think of her as *suffering under a sore disease*, and seek to find for her a palliative, or a remedy.”

“But she won’t permit even you to do for her a kind act, without returning an *insult*.”

“It is because there are *scales* on her eyes. She does not *see clearly*.”

William still felt *indignant* towards his aunt. The *insult* offered to his mother, he could neither forget nor forgive. He knew not how often she had been thus insulted, even while making sacrifices for the good of her proud-minded sister. If he had, he would not have remained silent when his mother *excused* Mrs. Ashton.

“Shall we remain where we are, now that aunt Ashton has refused to join us in taking a house?” he asked, as they walked towards home.

“That is just what I am thinking about at this moment. What is your opinion?”

“I don’t want to live with aunt Ashton,” William said firmly.

“Don’t you like George?”

“Very much, judging from the little I saw of him this evening. Jane, I have always liked.

“Wouldn’t you like to live in the house with them?”

“Yes, very well. But their *mother* — I could not bear. She would be ever *insulting* both you and us. She evidently looks upon us with *contempt* — thinks us *inferior*, and will continue to do so. Now, I don’t believe that we are called upon to make the great sacrifice of living with anyone who thus regards us. Do you?”

Mrs. Este remained silent.

“In fact,” continued William, “it strikes me, the more I begin to think about it, that it would be wrong for our two families to be in the same house; for, I am sure, none of us could or would put up with aunt Ashton, if she made any *insulting* remarks to you. Of course, unpleasant feelings would arise between us and our cousins, and then a separation would take place. Such a breach would not very easily be healed.”

“Sensibly said, William,” his mother returned, “and well worth considering. I am anxious to have you cultivate *kind* feelings towards your cousins, for I like them very much. *Adversity* has brought out their *good qualities*. If, as it now strikes me might be the case, living in the same house would tend to destroy these feelings — I could not think for a moment of uniting with your aunt in renting a larger house.”

“I do not think it would be the best course. Though, I must say, that it would give me sincere pleasure to be in the same house with George and Jane.”

“At any rate, we will think about it seriously before determining to act. I cannot say that I regret the turn affairs have taken,” Mrs. Este said.

Under this view of the case, the mother and her son returned home.

CHAPTER 12.

After calmly weighing the matter for a day or two, Mrs. Este came to the fixed conclusion that it would not be best to join her family with that of her sister. This determination caused her to abandon the idea of renting the house upon which her eye had been fixed. Nearly a week passed without her calling upon Mrs. Ashton. At the end of that time, Jane came to see her.

“Mother would like you to call upon her,” Jane said, after spending some time with her aunt. “When can you come?”

“Not for a day or two,” was the reply.

“She wants to see you *today* very much.”

“I am sorry, but I shall not be able to see her sooner. I am very much engaged.”

“It’s wrong, I know,” Jane said, after a little while, “for us to ask so much from you. I wanted mother to call and see you. But I can’t get her out. I wish I could induce her to come here, I know it would do her good.”

After Jane had gone away, Mrs. Este thought over what she had said, a good deal, and finally came to the conclusion, that it would be her duty to require her sister to reciprocate visits. All at once, she remembered what had not before occurred to her, that Mrs. Ashton had not *once* returned a visit. She had no doubt but that one cause of this, lay in the *pride* that prevented her showing herself in the street.

“I have encouraged these false notions long enough,” she said to herself, after having thought over the matter for some time. “I ought to do it no longer.”

With Mrs. Este to perceive a *true principle* was to act from it. One, two, three days, and even a week passed, and she did not go to see her sister. The effect upon Mrs. Ashton’s mind was irritating.

“Why in the world doesn’t your aunt Mary come?” she would say frequently to Jane. “It’s very strange! when did she say she would be here?”

“In two or three days. She is very much occupied.”

“Two or three days! Why didn’t she come on the *same day* I sent for her. It’s not *kind* in her! She knew I wished to see her, or I wouldn’t have sent for her.”

“Aunt Este is very much engaged, mother. Couldn’t you go to see her?”

“*Me*, go to see her!” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton.

“Yes, mother. Why not?”

“Why not! You are really beside yourself.”

“But I do think, mother, that we ought not to ask aunt Este to be coming here whenever we want to see her for anything. It is no more than *right* for us to call upon her. She has a large family to attend to, and I think it hardly just for us to ask her to neglect her own duties — to look after things that concern us.”

“Do hush! will you!” retorted her mother, impatiently.

Jane shrank away from her side, and going to the little table upon which her work lay, took it up, and bent low down over it to conceal the *tears* which started forth unbidden. In the meantime, Mrs. Ashton sat, in *moody idleness*.

The reason why she wished to see her sister, was this: George had seen a neat house to rent for two hundred dollars per annum. It was in a pleasant neighborhood, and was large and more genteel in its appearance than houses at that price usually are. As soon as he had mentioned it to his mother, she became eager to have it rented, in order that the plan of living together, as proposed by her sister, might be entered upon. It was to converse with her upon this subject, that she had sent for Mrs. Este. No wonder, then, that she became impatient when the time of acceding to her wish, was put off for several days. When the third, fourth, and even the fifth day went by, she became really *indignant* at what she was pleased to call her sister’s *unpardonable neglect*.

“Go and tell your aunt that I wish to see her!” she said peremptorily to Jane. “Tell her that I *must* see her today!”

“She knows that you wish to see her,” Jane said. “If she does not wish to come, she ought to be left to do as she likes.”

“Doesn’t wish to come! Already she’s so *puffed up*, I suppose, with *self-importance*, as to feel vastly *superior* to us. But I’ll not put up with any of her arrogance. Go, and say to her, that if she intends coming to see me at all, she must come at once.”

Jane remonstrated. But nothing would do. Her mother would not rest until she consented to call again upon her aunt. It was just one week from the day on which she had held her last interview with her, when she started out again to pay her a visit — but with reluctance. The true reason why Mrs. Este did not come had occurred to her, and caused her a sensation of *painful mortification*.

For a long time, her aunt had acted towards them the kindest, and most self-sacrificing part. In return for this, her mother had never evinced the slightest feeling of *gratitude*. She had, on the contrary, treated Mrs. Este more like an *inferior* than an equal. Sometimes she had hoped that nothing of this would be perceived by her generous-minded, kind-thinking aunt. But this hope was a feeble one. Her mother’s feelings were too openly expressed in her conduct.

When Mrs. Este said that she could not see her mother for several days, she had an interior consciousness of the true reason. This was confirmed by the fact, that her aunt remained away even beyond the time named by herself as the earliest in which she could comply with the request of which Jane had been the bearer. No wonder, then, that she went to repeat her message with a deep feeling of *reluctance*, which increased at every step. This, however, changed into surprise and disappointment, when, on arriving at Mrs. Este's dwelling, she found it closed, and a *notice* up giving notice that the house was to rent. Inquiry at the adjoining residence, gave no clue to the place of removal. No one knew where Mrs. Este had gone. All that Jane could learn, was, that the family had moved out on the preceding day.

With feelings deeply saddened, she could hardly tell why, Jane slowly returned home.

"Well? what did your aunt say!" asked Mrs. Ashton, the moment her daughter came.

"I didn't see her," was the reply.

"Didn't see her! why not?"

"They have *moved*."

"Moved!" And Mrs. Ashton arose suddenly.

"Yes. Their house is closed, and has a notice on it."

"Moved! where have they moved to?"

"I could not learn. No one seemed to know."

"When did they move?"

"Yesterday."

"Too bad!" with this brief ejaculation, uttered in a tone of extreme mortification, Mrs. Ashton sank back in the chair from which she had arisen. All her hopes of getting into a *genteel house* at once vanished. The salary of her son was yet, only three hundred and fifty dollars. That, with what Jane could earn, made a sum barely sufficient to meet their most urgent needs. To have increased their rent much beyond what they at present paid, would have been folly — a folly that would not have been sanctioned by her children, however much Mrs. Ashton might feel inclined to commit it.

CHAPTER 13.

On the day that Jane had called upon her aunt with the request from her mother that she wished to see her, William Este came home with the intelligence that he had seen a very pretty house, not more than half the distance from his place of business, than was the one in which they now resided, that could be rented for one hundred and fifty dollars. It had been vacated on that very morning.

“But isn’t one hundred and fifty dollars, William, too much rent for us to pay?” his mother said.

“I think we can very well afford it, and not be compelled to draw a single dollar from the money you have just received. You know that a hundred dollars has been added to my salary, and the increase of rent will only be about fifty or sixty dollars.”

“But, is it right to increase our *expenses*, simply because our *income* is a little augmented?”

“It might not be,” William said, “if we had nothing to look forward to beyond our limited income; but, when there are reserved the means upon which to commence business, so soon as myself, and the other children come of age, I think we ought to try and live comfortably, even if it consumed every dollar of what is now earned. This house, besides being very small and inconvenient, is too far away from business. Often when we are much pressed, I am compelled to go without my dinner, or get it in an eating house. To do the latter, requires an extra expenditure, which in a year, if often called upon to do it, would take from me, no inconsiderable sum of money. I have thought about this pretty seriously, and am well satisfied that we ought to take this house.”

William’s opinion had weight with his mother. He was now about twenty years of age, his rational mind well developed. He had learned, from his mother, to take rational views of things — to be governed by reason, and not by impulse, or preference. Gradually Mrs. Este was beginning to lean upon him, as it were; to consult him, and to let his views have influence with her. They had their effect in this case. After some further conversation with him, she felt satisfied that it was right for them to live in a larger and better house. The one he had pointed out, was accordingly taken and moved into.

“I don’t think aunt Ashton will like this very much,” William said, after they had moved, and were all gathered in one of their neat little parlors, feeling *thankful* and happy for the good things of life they were permitted to enjoy.

“Why not?” asked Mrs. Este.

“Because it will make her *jealous*. She will not be able to bear our prosperity, I am sure.”

“Don’t permit yourself to think in that way, my son. Rather look for *good*, than evil in others.”

“But it’s impossible for me to help seeing what is before my eyes.”

“Then, it is sometimes better that you should shut them, or try and direct them to some new point of vision.”

“Perhaps so,” said William, and then changed the subject by remarking —

“I saw George today, and told him that we had moved.”

“Did you? I am glad of that. They would not have known where to look for us.”

“He seemed pleased, when I described our pleasant house, and expressed regret that his mother had been so unwilling to join us in renting the large house you spoke to them about.”

“I wish she had been not only in a state of mind to consent to that arrangement, but to warrant our taking a house in connection with her. But she is not,” said Mrs. Este abstractedly.

“You haven’t been there for several days?” William remarked after a pause.

“No. It is more than a *week* since I called to see them.”

“I hope you will not go there again, until aunt comes to see us. I can’t see anything fair in you going to her all the time. Let her visit you.”

“I had partly made up my mind to the same thing before we moved. But now I feel somewhat concerned, lest the *false impression* should be made, that, getting into better external circumstances, we are growing *indifferent* to them. I do not wish this to appear.

“Nor do I, mother. I like George and Jane very much, and wish to see them often. Suppose, as aunt has sent for you, we go there this evening, but for the last time, as far as you are concerned, until she *reciprocates* the visits. As for the rest of us, we can see each other backwards and forwards, as often as we please.”

This met, fully, both the views and feelings of the mother. After tea, she went with William to the house of her sister.

“O, aunt, I am so glad to see you again,” Jane said, seizing the hand of Mrs. Este, as she entered.

“And I am glad to see you Jane,” was returned in a tone of affection. Then turning to her sister, who had not risen on her entrance, she extended her hand.

“Well Mary,” was said with *repulsive coldness* of voice, and an *offended countenance*.

The quick eye of William saw the nature of his mother’s reception, and his young blood rose to fever heat. But he controlled himself, and, entering into conversation with his cousins, seemed not to notice the rude manner of his aunt. The

fellowship between the young people was pleasant and affectionate. But stiff, cold, and formal between the sisters. So *repulsive* did the manner of Mrs. Ashton continue, that the mother of William rose to leave in half an hour after her entrance. Not one word, had been asked her about her removal, nor the slightest remark made when she spoke of her having done so. And when she made a movement to go, her sister did not ask her to remain longer, or to come again. Very different was the parting of the cousins. It was with the warmest expressions of regard, and the promise to see each other very frequently.

“Oh, mother! How could you treat aunt Este as you did?” Jane said, as soon as they were alone, tears filling her eyes as she spoke.

“Because I think her conduct *unpardonable*,” was the indignant reply. “Didn’t she propose to rent a house with us, and then go off and rent one for herself alone? It’s a downright *insult* and *outrage* that I’ll never forgive!”

“Don’t — don’t talk so mother,” George interposed, with a look of pain and regret upon his face. “I can’t see that we have any cause to *blame* her. She asked us to join her in renting a certain house, and we declined — ”

“That old run-down house! Yes, I declined. What honorable person would put their head into such a place? Not I! It was an *insult*, in the first instance, to propose such a thing.”

“Aunt Este was sincere in her proposal. She would have been willing to go there.”

“*She* might go there, or into a mud hole — for all that I care. But I’m not going to.”

“O, mother! mother!” cried Jane, the tears now glittering on her cheeks, “I cannot bear to hear you talk so, after all our kind, good aunt has done for us. We owe her a *debt of gratitude* which I, for one, would gladly repay at any sacrifice.”

“Hush, will you!” the mother exclaimed *angrily*.

Jane shrank away, weeping, and left the room. George felt a good deal *agitated* and *displeased* at what his mother had said, but more so at the ugly spirit which she manifested. It was so unkind — so ungenerous, and had in it so little that was noble. He would have said something condemnatory of his mother’s manifested feelings, but knowing that it would be utterly useless, he restrained himself, and kept silence. But both himself and his sister felt very unhappy. How could it be otherwise. To children who love, and desire to respect their parents in all things, the trial is a severe one, when those parents do not act with justice and judgement — when they show neither discretion, nor generous feelings in their acts towards others. Few situations can be more severely trying.

So much did Mrs. Ashton allow herself to come under improper influences, that she at first made the effort to prevent George and Jane from visiting their cousins. But, in this, she was made sensible by them that *she was going too far*. They felt that it would neither be good for her nor them, to yield to so wrong a spirit. Reluctantly she waived the interdiction which she at first *angrily* laid upon them.

CHAPTER 14.

A whole year went by without any fellowship existing between Mrs. Este and her sister. The passage of that time produced little or no change in the feelings of the latter. Tried and afflicted as she had been — still *her proud and selfish spirit was unbroken*. The confirmation of what she had at first learned in regard to the good fortune of Mrs. Este, only tended to *embitter* her feelings against her. In her mind, the fact of her having invested all the money she had received in interest-paying securities, for the purpose of setting up her sons in business at some future time, instead of giving a portion of it to *her*, in order to improve her external condition in the present — showed her to be *mean, selfish*, and altogether *unnatural*. Steadily keeping out from her mind, all kind and *generous* thoughts, she continued to nourish the worst of feelings. Of course, she was unhappy. And, of course, her children, living under the shadow of her gloomy spirit, were unhappy also.

Jane went frequently to see her aunt. Every interview with her *refreshed* her spirits, and *strengthened* her good purposes. Still, she drooped at times, and often felt discouraged. Her burdens had become heavier. In spite of all that she and her brother could say, her mother, shortly after the removal of Mrs. Este into a larger and better house — *insisted* upon their moving also. An increase of George's salary to five hundred dollars, caused her to urge the matter in a way that admitted of no refusal. A larger and better house, for which the rent of one hundred and sixty dollars had to be paid, was rented, and into this they removed.

Both George and his sister were conscious that the expense to which they would now be subjected, would be greater than their income. It was not so much the bare increase of rent which made the great difference. A better *house* would cause their mother to want better *furniture*. The consequence would be, *constant opposition* to her, or the certain incurrence of debt, which it would be out of their power to pay. Up to the time of their going into their new house, they had been able to do without a *servant*. But now Mrs. Ashton *insisted* upon having a servant, and her wishes had to be complied with.

The difficulty of paying the first quarter's rent more than confirmed all the fears of George Ashton. From that time, he began to have a troubled look. This was noticed by Mrs. Este. The cause she soon learned, not by any open statement made to her by the young man, but from admissions which she *drew* from him. At first her regard for, and sympathy with, her greatly changed nephew and niece, made her think about coming to their assistance, and helping them in a financial way to bear up. But this, she at once perceived, would not do. It would only *encourage her sister to new acts of extravagance*.

A better course, she saw, would be to let them go on, and manage their affairs *entirely unaided*. The difficulties and embarrassments into which they would certainly fall, sooner or later, would teach, she hoped, a *lesson* to Mrs. Ashton, not soon to be forgotten.

At the end of the second quarter, instead of having forty dollars in hand to pay the rent, only twenty dollars could be raised.

"This is *quarter* day," George said, looking into his mother's face while eating, or endeavoring to eat his breakfast, on the morning of the day on which the bill of rent was due.

"It is?"

"Yes. And we haven't more than half enough money to meet the rent."

"Mr. Langston will have to wait, then."

"But that won't help us much. If he should wait for half the coming quarter for what is *now* due, his next rent will only be called for the quicker."

"Let him wait for *that* also."

George shook his head and sat silent. He tried to finish his breakfast, but he could not eat. The food was tasteless, and the organs of swallowing refused to conspire in the act of transmitting it to the stomach.

"Couldn't you get a month's advance of salary?" suggested Jane.

"Yes, of *course* he could," spoke up Mrs. Ashton.

"I could, no doubt," returned George. "But I would rather not ask the favor. I never have asked a dollar yet *before* it was earned, and I don't wish to now. Mr. Thompson is a little peculiar in some things. If I were to get an advance, even of only a month's wages, it would affect my standing with him, I am sure."

"All nonsense!" broke in Mrs. Ashton.

"No, mother — it is not mere nonsense. I have been with Mr. Thompson long enough to satisfy me, that any deviation in a clerk from the regular order of doing things, awakens *suspicion* in his mind. Especially does he dislike being called upon to pay any portion of a salary *before* it is due. One young man lost his situation from this very cause, since I have been in the store. He drew his money always a *little in advance*. This made Mr. Thompson suspicious of him. He got it into his head, I believe, that the young man was *extravagant*, or spent his money in a still more improper manner. But this

was not so — the young man had a mother and sister to support, and this heavy expense took the whole of his income, even before it was due. At last, Mr. Thompson made an excuse to fire him.”

“But how do you know it was for that?”

“He hinted as much to the head clerk.”

“Then, I say, he is an *unfeeling brute!*” Mrs. Ashton said, with much indignation.

“He is not so bad as that, mother,” returned George in a calm voice. “But he is sometimes *hasty in his conclusions*, and was so in this case. He might judge as erroneously in mine.”

“But it will be easy enough to explain, and put all right.”

“I could explain, it is true. But that would not put all right. He would ask me too many questions, the end of which would be a conviction on his part, that our rent was too high, and that my salary would continue to be insufficient to meet the expense to which I was subjected. And as a *prudent* man, somewhat inclined to be suspicious, he might be impressed with the fear, that as my *income* was too small for my *expenses* — that I might be tempted to increase it myself, by pilfering from him.”

“O no, George, he couldn’t think that!” Jane said, speaking quickly. “He could not think that of *you*.”

“I would rather, Jane, not lay myself liable to such a *suspicion*. It would break down my spirits, and, perhaps, stain my reputation. No — no — I must not run this risk.”

“How, then, is the rent to be paid?” asked Mrs. Ashton.

“I cannot tell,” George replied, despondingly. “But one thing is certain. I would rather brave the landlord’s angry demand for his rent, than Mr. Thompson’s suspicion. I could bear up against the former, but the latter would break down my spirits — would make me seem guilty of all that was suggested against me.”

“All a mere notion,” Mrs. Ashton said, impatiently.

To this, George made no reply. In a little while he rose from the table and went away to the store.

CHAPTER 15.

When George Ashton came home to his dinner, the first object that particularly attracted his eye, was a slip of paper upon the mantelpiece. He took it up and glanced over it. It was the landlord's bill for rent. He laid it down with a sigh, and went upstairs to seek for his sister. As he came into the room where she sat sewing, she raised her eyes to his with a look of pain and languor,

"Are you sick, Jane?" he asked quickly, going up to her, and laying his hand gently upon her cheek.

"No — yes — That is, I don't feel very well," Jane stammered out, and then, commenced weeping.

"What is the matter, sister?" George asked, seating himself by her side, and taking her hand tenderly in his. "Something has happened to distress you, what is it?"

"It's wrong in me to give way to my feelings, I know," Jane said, after a little while; "but I can't help it sometimes. I have felt depressed and discouraged all the morning. I felt bad enough before the *rent bill* came in. But since Mr. Langston was here, and said that he would call and see you at dinner time, I have not been able to keep up any heart at all. I believe I have made myself sick, for my head aches and throbs as if it would burst."

At that moment, the door bell rung.

"That is the *landlord* now, I suppose. What will you say to him, George?"

George sat with his eyes upon the floor, silent and almost motionless for about a minute, when the servant entered and said that Mr. Langston was below.

At this announcement, the young man heaved a long sigh. Then rising, he took two or three turns across the floor, irresolute still, what course to pursue. At length he went into the next room, where he slept, and took from a drawer the twenty dollars to which allusion has already been made. It was all the family possessed in the world. With this in his hand, he descended to meet the landlord.

"I believe your quarterly rent is due today," said that individual, smiling with one of those peculiar, indescribable smiles, which the *doomed debtor* has so often seen — a smile that had in it no soul — no warmth.

"Yes — yes!" returned George, in a hesitating tone, and with an *embarrassed* manner. "I believe it is. Bu — but, I shall — n — not be able to give you the whole of it just now. Here are *twenty* dollars. The other will be ready for you soon."

The smile faded instantly from the face of the landlord. "How soon?" he asked, looking George steadily and coldly in the face.

"In about three weeks."

"Three weeks! It is due *today*, and I need the money particularly. I fully calculated on receiving it."

"I am sorry," George said, more firmly; for the importunity of the landlord chafed him, "but I can't help it. In three weeks, the balance of rent will be ready for you — not before."

"Humph!" sneered the landlord, reaching out his hand for the twenty dollars offered by the young man. For a moment, George was tempted not to hand it over to him then, but to compel him to wait for the whole sum, until a month's salary was due him. But his eagerness to pay what he owed, subdued this impulse. The landlord gave a receipt for this amount in silence, and then left the house.

When George re-ascended to the room where he had left his sister, he found her still weeping. She lifted her eyes as he came in, with a look of affectionate sympathy.

"Did he consent to wait?" she asked, in evident anxiety.

"Of course," George replied. "He had no other alternative."

"But what are we now to do?" Jane said. "We have not a dollar in the house, and nothing more will be due you for three weeks. Even then, we shall not be any better off, for there are several little bills to pay, besides the rent bill; these will take all that then comes in. As for me, it seems as if I didn't earn anything."

Her brother made no reply; Mrs. Ashton came in at the moment.

"What had Mr. Langston to say?" she asked.

"What could he say? I paid him twenty dollars, and put him off three weeks for the balance."

"Paid him twenty dollars! The last cent we had in the house! Are you beside yourself, boy! What do you think we are going to live upon for the next three weeks?"

"Don't speak so to George, mother!" Jane said quickly in a deprecating voice. "He does the *best* he can for us. I can earn enough, I am sure, to buy all we need for three weeks. There are five dollars due me now by Mrs. Cloutier."

"And will continue to be *due* you. I didn't want you to work for her in the first place. But you thought you knew best."

"I'll get it, mother," was Jane's confident reply. "I'll see her this very afternoon."

"And suppose you should see her — and suppose she should pay you, which I don't believe she will — what is *five dollars* going to do towards supporting us for three weeks? I need that much myself this very day."

Neither Jane nor George replied to these *unfeeling words*. They felt that it would be altogether useless. But the words sank deeply into their hearts, and *pained* them intensely. After dinner, Jane put on her bonnet and went to see Mrs. Cloutier. She had done a good deal of work for her; but always had to call three or four times before she could get her money. Mrs. Cloutier was one of those *selfish* women who never consider the *condition of others* — who never think that a *seamstress, servant, or washerwoman* needs the money they have earned. Besides this negative defect — she had a positive one, namely, a *love of money* — and a consequent *reluctance* to part with it. She never paid anyone who worked for her, without being asked two or three times.

The amount due Jane had been allowed to stand for some weeks, because she disliked to call a second time upon a woman who had put her off once, and who always seemed to *grudge her the pittance she earned*. But now, the pain of asking for what was due her, was much less than the pain which would certainly follow, if she did not obtain the sum she needed. She, therefore, walked firmly and resolutely to the dwelling of Mrs. Cloutier, nor did her heart begin to flutter and sink in her bosom until she had rung the door bell, and then stood waiting to be admitted.

Much to her relief of mind, Mrs. Cloutier received her kindly, and paid her the five dollars for which she had called, without waiting to be asked.

This sum, with about four dollars besides, which Jane earned, was carefully economized, so as to last until George received his wages. In order to make her slender means sufficient for the bare necessities required, Jane had, resolutely, to oppose her mother in the disposition evinced to spend money for articles not *really* needed. In these contentions, Mrs. Ashton often became *angry*, and spoke with *unkind harshness*. But Jane thought of her brother and persevered.

After the balance of the quarter's rent had been paid, and one or two other bills — eight dollars remained. This sum George gave to his sister, who regulated all the family expenditures. She disbursed it with such prudence, that, with her own earnings — it sufficed until another month's salary was due.

CHAPTER 16.

But, economize and manage as Jane would, their *income* fell short of their *expenses*. Every quarter they went a little and a little more behindhand; and every quarter George was subjected to the importunities of an exacting landlord. Thus matters went on for nearly two years, during which time Mrs. Ashton had not once seen her sister. But the cousins visited each other constantly, and were on terms of affectionate intimacy.

Before this time, *George* had attained his majority, and with it, an advance of salary to eight hundred dollars. *William Este* had also come of age, and was receiving one thousand dollars per annum. With the advance in the income of George, came increased demands from his mother, whose *pride* and *selfishness* ever kept in advance of the *means of gratification*. It was impossible for the son to refuse to meet his mother's wishes in everything. But in almost every instance, he yielded to her under the conviction that the result to him would be a new financial embarrassment.

At the time George came of age, he owed his landlord nearly six month's rent. He was paying him in monthly installments; but not as fast as rent was accumulating. The landlord worried him constantly; frequently calling at the store, sometimes asking his employer about his ability to pay.

"I wish you would keep away from the store," George said to him one day, when he was paying him a proportion of rent.

"I wish you would *pay* me up what is *due*," was the cutting reply.

"I am paying you as fast as I can. And, therefore, running to the store after me won't bring your rent any faster."

"Something else may," returned the landlord, significantly. "But I deprecate *last resorts*."

George looked his landlord in the face with a bewildered air. He could hardly believe that his ears had heard aright the sentence just uttered.

He made no reply. The landlord put the money he had received, into his pocket, and, bowing formally, withdrew.

This *threat* was only intended by the landlord as a spur to his tardy tenant. Still, he meant to do all he threatened, if, in his view, *necessity* required it.

"I think we ought to have a new set of chairs, George," his mother said, about six months after he had arrived at the age of maturity. "All our furniture begins to look shabby and poor."

"But we can't yet *afford* new chairs," George objected.

"I don't see why we can't. Your salary has been advanced; and will, no doubt, go up to a thousand at the end of this year."

"I am not at all sure of that. But, one thing I know. I am now in *debt* for rent nearly a hundred dollars."

"A hundred dollars!"

"Yes, fully that sum."

"How in the world did that happen?"

"It happened naturally enough. We have been *living beyond our means*."

"Wouldn't your aunt lend you enough to payoff Mr. Langston?"

"Aunt Este! I wouldn't ask her if I were to starve. What *right* have I to ask her for money. She has supported her whole family upon less than it has cost *us* to live."

"She might do it easily enough; that's all I can say. And if she had a particle of *true feeling*, she would do it without being asked."

"For one, I do not wish her to do it. Let us *take care of ourselves* — as she has done."

Mrs. Ashton made some *angry, unreasonable* reply to this. George seeing no use that could possibly arise from opposing her, said nothing.

Another rent day came round. In a moment of weakness, George had yielded to his mother's importunities, and bought a new set of chairs, for which he paid thirty-five dollars. But, for his eyes, they had no beauty. He never looked at them, that he did not think of his landlord, and of the pain and mortification that the money spent for the chairs, would have saved him, if it had been appropriated for the liquidation of rent.

"Indeed, my son, we must have a new set of *window blinds*," his mother said to him, as he sat musing on what he would say to the landlord when he called for his rent that day. "The old things in the parlor are not fit to look at. They are actually, not decent."

"It's out of the question, just now," George replied, firmly. "We cannot, we must not expend another dollar for furniture — until our rent is paid up. It is not *just* to our landlord, nor *prudent* for ourselves."

The tone and manner of George silenced, if it did not convince, his mother. At dinner time he was visited, as he expected would be the case, by Mr. Langston, his landlord.

"I can *only* pay you thirty-seven dollars and a half, or the amount of last quarter's bill," George said, as he handed over the sum specified.

“And not a cent on the *back* rent?”

“Not now. But in a few weeks, I will pay you something.”

“In a few weeks! O yes! I’ve heard of that *few weeks* until I’m tired. But it won’t do, young man. I must have that rent paid up, or proceed to extremities. Look here!” glancing round the room as he spoke. “A new set of *chairs* — as I live! and yet you can’t pay a *dollar* on the back claim. If this is the way you are going on, I might just as well, for your good and mine too, put a stop to it!”

Saying this, the landlord strode out of the room, fully resolved to obtain the amount due him by *constraint*.

George returned to the store with a heavy heart. He had been there only a little while, when his employer called him aside, and said, with evident reluctance —

“Mr. Ashton, I am sorry it is so, but the great falling off in my business, and the necessity there is, likewise, to take two of *my sons* into the store, requires me to *dispense with your services*. I wish I could retain you. But I cannot. All that lies in my power, shall be done towards getting you another job.”

George grew instantly pale. He could only stammer out a confused reply.

“Be assured, sir, that nothing but *necessity* causes me to do what I am now doing.”

“It is all right, of course,” George said, more calmly. “I hope I shall be able to get another job soon.”

“I am sure you will, Mr. Ashton. I can, and will, speak of you in the warmest terms.”

Only a few weeks remained before the end of George’s quarter. That time passed, and no new place of employment was found. He was deeply distressed in mind, as he well might be. Not wishing unnecessarily to distress the mind of his sister, he had said nothing to her about the loss of his place. He hoped that before the arrival of the time when he would have to leave his job, that another could be obtained. Then he would only have to announce the *change*. But it did not so turn out. No new place could be found, and he finally returned home from the store in which he had been for several years, for the last time. He found Jane half sick from fatigue, and much dispirited. He could not find it in his heart, to pain her by an announcement of the truth.

The night that followed was passed, not in refreshing, but in a *troubled sleep*. He sat down at the breakfast table on the next morning, but he had no relish for food. He could not bear to look either his mother or sister in the face. It seemed to him, as if he were guilty of wrong to them.

After breakfast, he went out and wandered through the streets, a prey to the most gloomy feelings. It was near eleven o’clock when he returned. Jane met him as he entered. The unusual time for him to come home and his unusual appearance, alarmed her.

“Are you *sick*, brother?” she asked, with an anxious look.

“Yes,” he faintly murmured. “Sick at heart!”

“O, George! What is the matter?” Jane now eagerly said.

“I am no longer at Mr. Thompson’s,” he forced himself to say.

The words came forth huskily.

“George!” was the surprised ejaculation.

“It is true, Jane. Mr. Thompson has taken two of his sons into the store. He could not afford to keep me any longer. He told me this two or three weeks ago, and ever since then, I have been trying to get a new place. But in vain.”

“What are we going to do, George?” Jane said in a calm, serious, desponding tone, looking steadily into his face, her own very pale.

“Heaven only knows, sister! If we had prudently continued to live under our means, we might now be able to meet this difficulty, and keep up until a new situation offered. But there is little hope for us. Our landlord will be down upon us in a day or two, and seize and sell our furniture for rent. What we shall then do — where we shall then turn — I know not.”

“Do not give up to entire despondency, George,” Jane said. “Even if that should take place, we shall not be left without a friend. Aunt Este — ”

“Don’t speak of *her*, Jane. We have no claim upon her. To become dependent upon aunt Este, I would deprecate above all things. We have already been compelled to receive too much from her hands. I would more gladly make her some *return*.”

Jane felt about this as did her brother. She had only spoken of her aunt in the hope of buoying up his mind. While they were conversing, the one dreaded visitor was announced — the *landlord*. We will not dwell upon the interview that passed between him and George Ashton. Suffice it to say that he avowed, on leaving, his determination to proceed forthwith to *extremities*.

Fully satisfied that this threat was not an idle one, George awaited in a kind of mental stupor the result. Mrs. Ashton was half frantic when the painful truth was communicated to her. She insisted upon her children going immediately to see Mrs. Este, and informing her of their situation, with a request from her to *lend* them enough to pay off the landlord’s bill.

But this they both positively declined doing. She could not conquer her own *pride* sufficiently to do so, even in this extremity.

CHAPTER 17.

“Just look at this, mother!” said William Este, a couple of days after George Ashton, as has been seen, left his situation. “As I live, aunt Ashton’s things are advertised to be sold at Constable’s sale, under constraint for rent.”

“O, no, William, that cannot certainly be,” the mother replied, but in a surprised and anxious tone of voice.

“It is true,” William returned. “Here is the advertisement,” and he read a particular description of Mrs. Ashton’s furniture advertised to be sold for rent on the next day.

“I can hardly wonder at it,” Mrs. Este said, after sitting in thoughtful silence for some moments. “Your aunt has been living at an expense *beyond* what George’s income would warrant. But their furniture must not be sold. I will go at once and see them.”

“Why will it not do as well for me to go?” William interposed, “Aunt Ashton has never yet been to see you.”

“When *duty* calls, William — we should never be restrained by *personal feelings*,” his mother said. “I believe that it would do your aunt *no good* for me to visit her, and that is the only reason I have had for not continuing to go there. Now I think my going will do good.”

The day preceding the sale of their furniture had nearly drawn to a close, and George Ashton sat, as he had remained seated for a full two hours, in a kind of stupor. Jane, whose mind was calmer than that of either her mother or brother, had made several attempts to rouse George from his state of mental paralysis, but in vain. She had just turned from him, after a fruitless attempt to inspire him with some degree of hope, when the door opened, and her aunt entered.

Jane’s heart was just full enough to gush over at the slightest touch — even a breath upon its brimming surface. The sight of her aunt was enough. She took her hand, held it a moment in silence, and then bowing her head upon her bosom, gave free vent to her overcharged feelings. After she had wept herself into repose, and after Mrs. Este had met both her sister and nephew, minute inquiries were made into the condition of affairs — these were fully explained.

Mrs. Este felt it her duty to point out where the *defect* had been. This was fully acknowledged by George, but not by his mother.

“Would you have had us live like *pigs*?” the latter asked.

“No, Anna. But like *rational* beings, who wisely economize their resources, and provide for the time to come.”

To this, of course, Mrs. Ashton had *objections* to make. These need not be stated here. The reader knows her well enough to guess at their nature.

“Give yourself no further trouble, George,” Mrs. Este said, after some conversation, in which the young man said but little. His tone and manner, however, showed him to be suffering most acutely. “Your furniture need not be sold. I will take care of that.”

“For that kind assurance, I thank you, my good aunt — for the sake of my mother and sister,” the young man returned, fervently. “But I am out of a job, and see no immediate chance of getting another. How to take care of them, I know not. To throw them upon you, I cannot and will not. It would be unjust.”

“Don’t make any rash assertions, George,” his aunt said, smiling. “I have my own plans in regard to you, and shall not readily consent to be thwarted in them. Hear what I have to propose. I am now, I find, worth thirty-five thousand dollars.”

“What?” exclaimed Mrs. Ashton, half rising from her chair.

“Most all of this money I have determined to place in the bank for William, as the capital upon which he is to start a business. I think I may safely confide in you *both* for prudence, integrity, and business energy. Fifteen thousand dollars will, I think, be ample. Are you ready to join with William in opening a store at once?”

George looked at his aunt for some moments, as if he could not apprehend what she was saying. The whole truth gradually came to his perception. Taking her hand in his, he *looked* his assent and gratitude. He dared not trust himself to speak them.

Three years after the time in which the last mentioned incidents occurred, might be seen in a principal business street, a sign with “*Este & Ashton*”. The young men were prudent, cautious, industrious and attentive, and were making money fast.

We will look in, with the reader, once more upon *Mrs. Ashton*, before taking a final leave of her. She was living, with her son and daughter, in a pleasant house, furnished. That beautiful young lady, dressed in white, patiently engaged in a piece of embroidery, is Jane Ashton. Her mother, with a white turban on her head, and dressed in black satin, is seated on a high-backed, cushioned chair, looking as dignified as a queen. She is engaged in the hard employment of *doing nothing*. George Ashton has been reading, but has laid his book down to listen to something which his mother is saying.

“It is high time, now, George, that we began to move in a more elegant style. You have been in business two years, and can easily furnish a house elegantly. There is a beautiful three story house just finished in Elm Street, that will just suit us. Suppose you see about it tomorrow. If you do not speak quick, somebody else may secure it.”

“Indeed, mother, I cannot afford a different style from that in which we now live. You must remember, that we are young beginners, and that the capital upon which we do business, is *loaned* to us by aunt Este.”

“Fiddlestick on aunt Este! What would your cousin William do without you. If I couldn’t live as I chose, I’d rather die!”

“Why, the fact is, mother, it is I that can’t do without William. He has access to the capital, and is a far better salesman than I am.”

“O mother,” Jane said, looking up with a pleasant smile, that just concealed a troubled expression; “we live well enough. When I think how hard I used to have to work, and sometimes even not be able to get work, though willing to do it — I cannot be thankful enough for our present happy change of condition. I would feel condemned, were we to affect a style and appearance *beyond* our means, and cease to be as happy as I now am.”

“Jane is right, mother,” said George calmly, and distinctly, “and so long as I can keep a sober mind, and an honest intention, I will not indulge in an *extravagant style of living*. I would do anything to make you happy, mother — except commit a wrong action.”

“Children of this generation are wiser than their parents,” said Mrs. Ashton, with irony.

In this instance, the reader will approve her remark.

And there, the curtain closes.

THE END.