

III. HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER

"We must invite your Aunt Jane, of course," said Mrs. Spencer.

Rachel made a protesting movement with her large, white, shapely hands--hands which were so different from the thin, dark, twisted ones folded on the table opposite her. The difference was not caused by hard work or the lack of it; Rachel had worked hard all her life. It was a difference inherent in temperament. The Spencers, no matter what they did, or how hard they labored, all had plump, smooth, white hands, with firm, supple fingers; the Chiswicks, even those who toiled not, neither did they spin, had hard, knotted, twisted ones. Moreover, the contrast went deeper than externals, and twined itself with the innermost fibers of life, and thought, and action.

"I don't see why we must invite Aunt Jane," said Rachel, with as much impatience as her soft, throaty voice could express. "Aunt Jane doesn't like me, and I don't like Aunt Jane."

"I'm sure I don't see why you don't like her," said Mrs. Spencer. "It's ungrateful of you. She has always been very kind to you."

"She has always been very kind with one hand," smiled Rachel. "I remember the first time I ever saw Aunt Jane. I was six years old. She held out to me a small velvet pincushion with beads on

it. And then, because I did not, in my shyness, thank her quite as promptly as I should have done, she rapped my head with her bethimble finger to 'teach me better manners.' It hurt horribly--I've always had a tender head. And that has been Aunt Jane's way ever since. When I grew too big for the thimble treatment she used her tongue instead--and that hurt worse. And you know, mother, how she used to talk about my engagement. She is able to spoil the whole atmosphere if she happens to come in a bad humor. I don't want her."

"She must be invited. People would talk so if she wasn't."

"I don't see why they should. She's only my great-aunt by marriage. I wouldn't mind in the least if people did talk. They'll talk anyway--you know that, mother."

"Oh, we must have her," said Mrs. Spencer, with the indifferent finality that marked all her words and decisions--a finality against which it was seldom of any avail to struggle. People, who knew, rarely attempted it; strangers occasionally did, misled by the deceit of appearances.

Isabella Spencer was a wisp of a woman, with a pale, pretty face, uncertainly-colored, long-lashed grayish eyes, and great masses of dull, soft, silky brown hair. She had delicate aquiline features and a small, babyish red mouth. She looked as if a

breath would sway her. The truth was that a tornado would hardly have caused her to swerve an inch from her chosen path.

For a moment Rachel looked rebellious; then she yielded, as she generally did in all differences of opinion with her mother. It was not worth while to quarrel over the comparatively unimportant matter of Aunt Jane's invitation. A quarrel might be inevitable later on; Rachel wanted to save all her resources for that. She gave her shoulders a shrug, and wrote Aunt Jane's name down on the wedding list in her large, somewhat untidy handwriting--a handwriting which always seemed to irritate her mother. Rachel never could understand this irritation. She could never guess that it was because her writing looked so much like that in a certain packet of faded letters which Mrs. Spencer kept at the bottom of an old horsehair trunk in her bedroom. They were postmarked from seaports all over the world. Mrs. Spencer never read them or looked at them; but she remembered every dash and curve of the handwriting.

Isabella Spencer had overcome many things in her life by the sheer force and persistency of her will. But she could not get the better of heredity. Rachel was her father's daughter at all points, and Isabella Spencer escaped hating her for it only by loving her the more fiercely because of it. Even so, there were many times when she had to avert her eyes from Rachel's face because of the pang of the more subtle remembrances; and never,

since her child was born, could Isabella Spencer bear to gaze on that child's face in sleep.

Rachel was to be married to Frank Bell in a fortnight's time. Mrs. Spencer was pleased with the match. She was very fond of Frank, and his farm was so near to her own that she would not lose Rachel altogether. Rachel fondly believed that her mother would not lose her at all; but Isabella Spencer, wiser by olden experience, knew what her daughter's marriage must mean to her, and steeled her heart to bear it with what fortitude she might.

They were in the sitting-room, deciding on the wedding guests and other details. The September sunshine was coming in through the waving boughs of the apple tree that grew close up to the low window. The glints wavered over Rachel's face, as white as a wood lily, with only a faint dream of rose in the cheeks. She wore her sleek, golden hair in a quaint arch around it. Her forehead was very broad and white. She was fresh and young and hopeful. The mother's heart contracted in a spasm of pain as she looked at her. How like the girl was to--to--to the Spencers! Those easy, curving outlines, those large, mirthful blue eyes, that finely molded chin! Isabella Spencer shut her lips firmly and crushed down some unbidden, unwelcome memories.

"There will be about sixty guests, all told," she said, as if she were thinking of nothing else. "We must move the furniture out

of this room and set the supper-table here. The dining-room is too small. We must borrow Mrs. Bell's forks and spoons. She offered to lend them. I'd never have been willing to ask her. The damask table cloths with the ribbon pattern must be bleached to-morrow. Nobody else in Avonlea has such tablecloths. And we'll put the little dining-room table on the hall landing, upstairs, for the presents."

Rachel was not thinking about the presents, or the housewifely details of the wedding. Her breath was coming quicker, and the faint blush on her smooth cheeks had deepened to crimson. She knew that a critical moment was approaching. With a steady hand she wrote the last name on her list and drew a line under it.

"Well, have you finished?" asked her mother impatiently. "Hand it here and let me look over it to make sure that you haven't left anybody out that should be in."

Rachel passed the paper across the table in silence. The room seemed to her to have grown very still. She could hear the flies buzzing on the panes, the soft purr of the wind about the low eaves and through the apple boughs, the jerky beating of her own heart. She felt frightened and nervous, but resolute.

Mrs. Spencer glanced down the list, murmuring the names aloud and nodding approval at each. But when she came to the last name, she

did not utter it. She cast a black glance at Rachel, and a spark leaped up in the depths of the pale eyes. On her face were anger, amazement, incredulity, the last predominating.

The final name on the list of wedding guests was the name of David Spencer. David Spencer lived alone in a little cottage down at the Cove. He was a combination of sailor and fisherman. He was also Isabella Spencer's husband and Rachel's father.

"Rachel Spencer, have you taken leave of your senses? What do you mean by such nonsense as this?"

"I simply mean that I am going to invite my father to my wedding," answered Rachel quietly.

"Not in my house," cried Mrs. Spencer, her lips as white as if her fiery tone had scathed them.

Rachel leaned forward, folded her large, capable hands deliberately on the table, and gazed unflinchingly into her mother's bitter face. Her fright and nervousness were gone. Now that the conflict was actually on she found herself rather enjoying it. She wondered a little at herself, and thought that she must be wicked. She was not given to self-analysis, or she might have concluded that it was the sudden assertion of her own personality, so long dominated by her mother's, which she was

finding so agreeable.

"Then there will be no wedding, mother," she said. "Frank and I will simply go to the manse, be married, and go home. If I cannot invite my father to see me married, no one else shall be invited."

Her lips narrowed tightly. For the first time in her life Isabella Spencer saw a reflection of herself looking back at her from her daughter's face--a strange, indefinable resemblance that was more of soul and spirit than of flesh and blood. In spite of her anger her heart thrilled to it. As never before, she realized that this girl was her own and her husband's child, a living bond between them wherein their conflicting natures mingled and were reconciled. She realized too, that Rachel, so long sweetly meek and obedient, meant to have her own way in this case--and would have it.

"I must say that I can't see why you are so set on having your father see you married," she said with a bitter sneer. "HE has never remembered that he is your father. He cares nothing about you--never did care."

Rachel took no notice of this taunt. It had no power to hurt her, its venom being neutralized by a secret knowledge of her own in which her mother had no share.

"Either I shall invite my father to my wedding, or I shall not have a wedding," she repeated steadily, adopting her mother's own effective tactics of repetition undistracted by argument.

"Invite him then," snapped Mrs. Spencer, with the ungraceful anger of a woman, long accustomed to having her own way, compelled for once to yield. "It'll be like chips in porridge anyhow--neither good nor harm. He won't come."

Rachel made no response. Now that the battle was over, and the victory won, she found herself tremulously on the verge of tears. She rose quickly and went upstairs to her own room, a dim little place shadowed by the white birches growing thickly outside--a virginal room, where everything bespoke the maiden. She lay down on the blue and white patchwork quilt on her bed, and cried softly and bitterly.

Her heart, at this crisis in her life, yearned for her father, who was almost a stranger to her. She knew that her mother had probably spoken the truth when she said that he would not come. Rachel felt that her marriage vows would be lacking in some indefinable sacredness if her father were not by to hear them spoken.

Twenty-five years before this, David Spencer and Isabella

Chiswick had been married. Spiteful people said there could be no doubt that Isabella had married David for love, since he had neither lands nor money to tempt her into a match of bargain and sale. David was a handsome fellow, with the blood of a seafaring race in his veins.

He had been a sailor, like his father and grandfather before him; but, when he married Isabella, she induced him to give up the sea and settle down with her on a snug farm her father had left her. Isabella liked farming, and loved her fertile acres and opulent orchards. She abhorred the sea and all that pertained to it, less from any dread of its dangers than from an inbred conviction that sailors were "low" in the social scale--a species of necessary vagabonds. In her eyes there was a taint of disgrace in such a calling. David must be transformed into a respectable, home-abiding tiller of broad lands.

For five years all went well enough. If, at times, David's longing for the sea troubled him, he stifled it, and listened not to its luring voice. He and Isabella were very happy; the only drawback to their happiness lay in the regretted fact that they were childless.

Then, in the sixth year, came a crisis and a change. Captain Barrett, an old crony of David's, wanted him to go with him on a voyage as mate. At the suggestion all David's long-repressed

craving for the wide blue wastes of the ocean, and the wind whistling through the spars with the salt foam in its breath, broke forth with a passion all the more intense for that very repression. He must go on that voyage with James Barrett--he MUST! That over, he would be contented again; but go he must. His soul struggled within him like a fettered thing.

Isabella opposed the scheme vehemently and unwisely, with mordant sarcasm and unjust reproaches. The latent obstinacy of David's character came to the support of his longing--a longing which Isabella, with five generations of land-loving ancestry behind her, could not understand at all.

He was determined to go, and he told Isabella so.

"I'm sick of plowing and milking cows," he said hotly.

"You mean that you are sick of a respectable life," sneered Isabella.

"Perhaps," said David, with a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "Anyway, I'm going."

"If you go on this voyage, David Spencer, you need never come back here," said Isabella resolutely.

David had gone; he did not believe that she meant it. Isabella believed that he did not care whether she meant it or not. David Spencer left behind him a woman, calm outwardly, inwardly a seething volcano of anger, wounded pride, and thwarted will.

He found precisely the same woman when he came home, tanned, joyous, tamed for a while of his wanderlust, ready, with something of real affection, to go back to the farm fields and the stock-yard.

Isabella met him at the door, smileless, cold-eyed, set-lipped.

"What do you want here?" she said, in the tone she was accustomed to use to tramps and Syrian peddlers.

"Want!" David's surprise left him at a loss for words. "Want! Why, I--I--want my wife. I've come home."

"This is not your home. I'm no wife of yours. You made your choice when you went away," Isabella had replied. Then she had gone in, shut the door, and locked it in his face.

David had stood there for a few minutes like a man stunned. Then he had turned and walked away up the lane under the birches. He said nothing--then or at any other time. From that day no reference to his wife or her concerns ever crossed his lips.

He went directly to the harbor, and shipped with Captain Barrett for another voyage. When he came back from that in a month's time, he bought a small house and had it hauled to the "Cove," a lonely inlet from which no other human habitation was visible. Between his sea voyages he lived there the life of a recluse; fishing and playing his violin were his only employments. He went nowhere and encouraged no visitors.

Isabella Spencer also had adopted the tactics of silence. When the scandalized Chiswicks, Aunt Jane at their head, tried to patch up the matter with argument and entreaty, Isabella met them stonily, seeming not to hear what they said, and making no response. She worsted them totally. As Aunt Jane said in disgust, "What can you do with a woman who won't even TALK?"

Five months after David Spencer had been turned from his wife's door, Rachel was born. Perhaps, if David had come to them then, with due penitence and humility, Isabella's heart, softened by the pain and joy of her long and ardently desired motherhood might have cast out the rankling venom of resentment that had poisoned it and taken him back into it. But David had not come; he gave no sign of knowing or caring that his once longed-for child had been born.

When Isabella was able to be about again, her pale face was

harder than ever; and, had there been about her any one discerning enough to notice it, there was a subtle change in her bearing and manner. A certain nervous expectancy, a fluttering restlessness was gone. Isabella had ceased to hope secretly that her husband would yet come back. She had in her secret soul thought he would; and she had meant to forgive him when she had humbled him sufficiently, and when he had abased himself as she considered he should. But now she knew that he did not mean to sue for her forgiveness; and the hate that sprang out of her old love was a rank and speedy and persistent growth.

Rachel, from her earliest recollection, had been vaguely conscious of a difference between her own life and the lives of her playmates. For a long time it puzzled her childish brain. Finally, she reasoned it out that the difference consisted in the fact that they had fathers and she, Rachel Spencer, had none--not even in the graveyard, as Carrie Bell and Lilian Boulter had. Why was this? Rachel went straight to her mother, put one little dimpled hand on Isabella Spencer's knee, looked up with great searching blue eyes, and said gravely,

"Mother, why haven't I got a father like the other little girls?"

Isabella Spencer laid aside her work, took the seven year old child on her lap, and told her the whole story in a few direct and bitter words that imprinted themselves indelibly on Rachel's

remembrance. She understood clearly and hopelessly that she could never have a father--that, in this respect, she must always be unlike other people.

"Your father cares nothing for you," said Isabella Spencer in conclusion. "He never did care. You must never speak of him to anybody again."

Rachel slipped silently from her mother's knee and ran out to the Springtime garden with a full heart. There she cried passionately over her mother's last words. It seemed to her a terrible thing that her father should not love her, and a cruel thing that she must never talk of him.

Oddly enough, Rachel's sympathies were all with her father, in as far as she could understand the old quarrel. She did not dream of disobeying her mother and she did not disobey her. Never again did the child speak of her father; but Isabella had not forbidden her to think of him, and thenceforth Rachel thought of him constantly--so constantly that, in some strange way, he seemed to become an unguessed-of part of her inner life--the unseen, ever-present companion in all her experiences.

She was an imaginative child, and in fancy she made the acquaintance of her father. She had never seen him, but he was more real to her than most of the people she had seen. He played

and talked with her as her mother never did; he walked with her in the orchard and field and garden; he sat by her pillow in the twilight; to him she whispered secrets she told to none other.

Once her mother asked her impatiently why she talked so much to herself.

"I am not talking to myself. I am talking to a very dear friend of mine," Rachel answered gravely.

"Silly child," laughed her mother, half tolerantly, half disapprovingly.

Two years later something wonderful had happened to Rachel. One summer afternoon she had gone to the harbor with several of her little playmates. Such a jaunt was a rare treat to the child, for Isabella Spencer seldom allowed her to go from home with anybody but herself. And Isabella was not an entertaining companion. Rachel never particularly enjoyed an outing with her mother.

The children wandered far along the shore; at last they came to a place that Rachel had never seen before. It was a shallow cove where the waters purred on the yellow sands. Beyond it, the sea was laughing and flashing and preening and alluring, like a beautiful, coquettish woman. Outside, the wind was boisterous

and rollicking; here, it was reverent and gentle. A white boat was hauled up on the skids, and there was a queer little house close down to the sands, like a big shell tossed up by the waves. Rachel looked on it all with secret delight; she, too, loved the lonely places of sea and shore, as her father had done. She wanted to linger awhile in this dear spot and revel in it.

"I'm tired, girls," she announced. "I'm going to stay here and rest for a spell. I don't want to go to Gull Point. You go on yourselves; I'll wait for you here."

"All alone?" asked Carrie Bell, wonderingly.

"I'm not so afraid of being alone as some people are," said Rachel, with dignity.

The other girls went on, leaving Rachel sitting on the skids, in the shadow of the big white boat. She sat there for a time dreaming happily, with her blue eyes on the far, pearly horizon, and her golden head leaning against the boat.

Suddenly she heard a step behind her. When she turned her head a man was standing beside her, looking down at her with big, merry, blue eyes. Rachel was quite sure that she had never seen him before; yet those eyes seemed to her to have a strangely familiar look. She liked him. She felt no shyness nor timidity, such as

usually afflicted her in the presence of strangers.

He was a tall, stout man, dressed in a rough fishing suit, and wearing an oilskin cap on his head. His hair was very thick and curly and fair; his cheeks were tanned and red; his teeth, when he smiled, were very even and white. Rachel thought he must be quite old, because there was a good deal of gray mixed with his fair hair.

"Are you watching for the mermaids?" he said.

Rachel nodded gravely. From any one else she would have scrupulously hidden such a thought.

"Yes, I am," she said. "Mother says there is no such thing as a mermaid, but I like to think there is. Have you ever seen one?"

The big man sat down on a bleached log of driftwood and smiled at her.

"No, I'm sorry to say that I haven't. But I have seen many other very wonderful things. I might tell you about some of them, if you would come over here and sit by me."

Rachel went unhesitatingly. When she reached him he pulled her down on his knee, and she liked it.

"What a nice little craft you are," he said. "Do you suppose, now, that you could give me a kiss?"

As a rule, Rachel hated kissing. She could seldom be prevailed upon to kiss even her uncles--who knew it and liked to tease her for kisses until they aggravated her so terribly that she told them she couldn't bear men. But now she promptly put her arms about this strange man's neck and gave him a hearty smack.

"I like you," she said frankly.

She felt his arms tighten suddenly about her. The blue eyes looking into hers grew misty and very tender. Then, all at once, Rachel knew who he was. He was her father. She did not say anything, but she laid her curly head down on his shoulder and felt a great happiness, as of one who had come into some longed-for haven.

If David Spencer realized that she understood he said nothing. Instead, he began to tell her fascinating stories of far lands he had visited, and strange things he had seen. Rachel listened entranced, as if she were hearkening to a fairy tale. Yes, he was just as she had dreamed him. She had always been sure he could tell beautiful stories.

"Come up to the house and I'll show you some pretty things," he said finally.

Then followed a wonderful hour. The little low-ceilinged room, with its square window, into which he took her, was filled with the flotsam and jetsam of his roving life--things beautiful and odd and strange beyond all telling. The things that pleased Rachel most were two huge shells on the chimney piece--pale pink shells with big crimson and purple spots.

"Oh, I didn't know there could be such pretty things in the world," she exclaimed.

"If you would like," began the big man; then he paused for a moment. "I'll show you something prettier still."

Rachel felt vaguely that he meant to say something else when he began; but she forgot to wonder what it was when she saw what he brought out of a little corner cupboard. It was a teapot of some fine, glistening purple ware, coiled over by golden dragons with gilded claws and scales. The lid looked like a beautiful golden flower and the handle was a coil of a dragon's tail. Rachel sat and looked at it rapt-eyed.

"That's the only thing of any value I have in the world--now," he said.

Rachel knew there was something very sad in his eyes and voice. She longed to kiss him again and comfort him. But suddenly he began to laugh, and then he rummaged out some goodies for her to eat, sweetmeats more delicious than she had ever imagined. While she nibbled them he took down an old violin and played music that made her want to dance and sing. Rachel was perfectly happy. She wished she might stay forever in that low, dim room with all its treasures.

"I see your little friends coming around the point," he said, finally. "I suppose you must go. Put the rest of the goodies in your pocket."

He took her up in his arms and held her tightly against his breast for a single moment. She felt him kissing her hair.

"There, run along, little girl. Good-by," he said gently.

"Why don't you ask me to come and see you again?" cried Rachel, half in tears. "I'm coming ANYHOW."

"If you can come, COME," he said. "If you don't come, I shall know it is because you can't--and that is much to know. I'm very, very, VERY glad, little woman, that you have come once."

Rachel was sitting demurely on the skids when her companions came back. They had not seen her leaving the house, and she said not a word to them of her experiences. She only smiled mysteriously when they asked her if she had been lonesome.

That night, for the first time, she mentioned her father's name in her prayers. She never forgot to do so afterwards. She always said, "bless mother--and father," with an instinctive pause between the two names--a pause which indicated new realization of the tragedy which had sundered them. And the tone in which she said "father" was softer and more tender than the one which voiced "mother."

Rachel never visited the Cove again. Isabella Spencer discovered that the children had been there, and, although she knew nothing of Rachel's interview with her father, she told the child that she must never again go to that part of the shore.

Rachel shed many a bitter tear in secret over this command; but she obeyed it. Thenceforth there had been no communication between her and her father, save the unworded messages of soul to soul across whatever may divide them.

David Spencer's invitation to his daughter's wedding was sent with the others, and the remaining days of Rachel's maidenhood slipped away in a whirl of preparation and excitement in which

her mother reveled, but which was distasteful to the girl.

The wedding day came at last, breaking softly and fairly over the great sea in a sheen of silver and pearl and rose, a September day, as mild and beautiful as June.

The ceremony was to be performed at eight o'clock in the evening. At seven Rachel stood in her room, fully dressed and alone. She had no bridesmaid, and she had asked her cousins to leave her to herself in this last solemn hour of girlhood. She looked very fair and sweet in the sunset-light that showered through the birches. Her wedding gown was a fine, sheer organdie, simply and daintily made. In the loose waves of her bright hair she wore her bridegroom's flowers, roses as white as a virgin's dream. She was very happy; but her happiness was faintly threaded with the sorrow inseparable from all change.

Presently her mother came in, carrying a small basket.

"Here is something for you, Rachel. One of the boys from the harbor brought it up. He was bound to give it into your own hands--said that was his orders. I just took it and sent him to the right-about--told him I'd give it to you at once, and that that was all that was necessary."

She spoke coldly. She knew quite well who had sent the basket,

and she resented it; but her resentment was not quite strong enough to overcome her curiosity. She stood silently by while Rachel unpacked the basket.

Rachel's hands trembled as she took off the cover. Two huge pink-spotted shells came first. How well she remembered them! Beneath them, carefully wrapped up in a square of foreign-looking, strangely scented silk, was the dragon teapot. She held it in her hands and gazed at it with tears gathering thickly in her eyes.

"Your father sent that," said Isabella Spencer with an odd sound in her voice. "I remember it well. It was among the things I packed up and sent after him. His father had brought it home from China fifty years ago, and he prized it beyond anything. They used to say it was worth a lot of money."

"Mother, please leave me alone for a little while," said Rachel, imploringly. She had caught sight of a little note at the bottom of the basket, and she felt that she could not read it under her mother's eyes.

Mrs. Spencer went out with unaccustomed acquiescence, and Rachel went quickly to the window, where she read her letter by the fading gleams of twilight. It was very brief, and the writing was that of a man who holds a pen but seldom.

"My dear little girl," it ran, "I'm sorry I can't go to your wedding. It was like you to ask me--for I know it was your doing. I wish I could see you married, but I can't go to the house I was turned out of. I hope you will be very happy. I am sending you the shells and teapot you liked so much. Do you remember that day we had such a good time? I would liked to have seen you again before you were married, but it can't be.

"Your loving father,
"DAVID SPENCER."

Rachel resolutely blinked away the tears that filled her eyes. A fierce desire for her father sprang up in her heart--an insistent hunger that would not be denied. She MUST see her father; she MUST have his blessing on her new life. A sudden determination took possession of her whole being--a determination to sweep aside all conventionalities and objections as if they had not been.

It was now almost dark. The guests would not be coming for half an hour yet. It was only fifteen minutes' walk over the hill to the Cove. Hastily Rachel shrouded herself in her new raincoat, and drew a dark, protecting hood over her gay head. She opened the door and slipped noiselessly downstairs. Mrs. Spencer and her assistants were all busy in the back part of the house. In a

moment Rachel was out in the dewy garden. She would go straight over the fields. Nobody would see her.

It was quite dark when she reached the Cove. In the crystal cup of the sky over her the stars were blinking. Flying flakes of foam were scurrying over the sand like elfin things. A soft little wind was crooning about the eaves of the little gray house where David Spencer was sitting, alone in the twilight, his violin on his knee. He had been trying to play, but could not. His heart yearned after his daughter--yes, and after a long-estranged bride of his youth. His love of the sea was sated forever; his love for wife and child still cried for its own under all his old anger and stubbornness.

The door opened suddenly and the very Rachel of whom he was dreaming came suddenly in, flinging off her wraps and standing forth in her young beauty and bridal adornments, a splendid creature, almost lighting up the gloom with her radiance.

"Father," she cried, brokenly, and her father's eager arms closed around her.

Back in the house she had left, the guests were coming to the wedding. There were jests and laughter and friendly greeting. The bridegroom came, too, a slim, dark-eyed lad who tiptoed bashfully upstairs to the spare room, from which he presently

emerged to confront Mrs. Spencer on the landing.

"I want to see Rachel before we go down," he said, blushing.

Mrs. Spencer deposited a wedding present of linen on the table which was already laden with gifts, opening the door of Rachel's room, and called her. There was no reply; the room was dark and still. In sudden alarm, Isabella Spencer snatched the lamp from the hall table and held it up. The little white room was empty. No blushing, white-clad bride tenanted it. But David Spencer's letter was lying on the stand. She caught it up and read it.

"Rachel is gone," she gasped. A flash of intuition had revealed to her where and why the girl had gone.

"Gone!" echoed Frank, his face blanching. His pallid dismay recalled Mrs. Spencer to herself. She gave a bitter, ugly little laugh.

"Oh, you needn't look so scared, Frank. She hasn't run away from you. Hush; come in here--shut the door. Nobody must know of this. Nice gossip it would make! That little fool has gone to the Cove to see her--her father. I know she has. It's just like what she would do. He sent her those presents--look--and this letter. Read it. She has gone to coax him to come and see her married. She was crazy about it. And the minister is here and

it is half-past seven. She'll ruin her dress and shoes in the dust and dew. And what if some one has seen her! Was there ever such a little fool?"

Frank's presence of mind had returned to him. He knew all about Rachel and her father. She had told him everything.

"I'll go after her," he said gently. "Get me my hat and coat. I'll slip down the back stairs and over to the Cove."

"You must get out of the pantry window, then," said Mrs. Spencer firmly, mingling comedy and tragedy after her characteristic fashion. "The kitchen is full of women. I won't have this known and talked about if it can possibly be helped."

The bridegroom, wise beyond his years in the knowledge that it was well to yield to women in little things, crawled obediently out of the pantry window and darted through the birch wood. Mrs. Spencer had stood quakingly on guard until he had disappeared.

So Rachel had gone to her father! Like had broken the fetters of years and fled to like.

"It isn't much use fighting against nature, I guess," she thought grimly. "I'm beat. He must have thought something of her, after all, when he sent her that teapot and letter. And what does he

mean about the 'day they had such a good time'? Well, it just means that she's been to see him before, sometime, I suppose, and kept me in ignorance of it all."

Mrs. Spencer shut down the pantry window with a vicious thud.

"If only she'll come quietly back with Frank in time to prevent gossip I'll forgive her," she said, as she turned to the kitchen.

Rachel was sitting on her father's knee, with both her white arms around his neck, when Frank came in. She sprang up, her face flushed and appealing, her eyes bright and dewy with tears. Frank thought he had never seen her look so lovely.

"Oh, Frank, is it very late? Oh, are you angry?" she exclaimed timidly.

"No, no, dear. Of course I'm not angry. But don't you think you'd better come back now? It's nearly eight and everybody is waiting."

"I've been trying to coax father to come up and see me married," said Rachel. "Help me, Frank."

"You'd better come, sir," said Frank, heartily, "I'd like it as much as Rachel would."

David Spencer shook his head stubbornly.

"No, I can't go to that house. I was locked out of it. Never mind me. I've had my happiness in this half hour with my little girl. I'd like to see her married, but it isn't to be."

"Yes, it is to be--it shall be," said Rachel resolutely. "You SHALL see me married. Frank, I'm going to be married here in my father's house! That is the right place for a girl to be married. Go back and tell the guests so, and bring them all down."

Frank looked rather dismayed. David Spencer said deprecatingly:

"Little girl, don't you think it would be--"

"I'm going to have my own way in this," said Rachel, with a sort of tender finality. "Go, Frank. I'll obey you all my life after, but you must do this for me. Try to understand," she added beseechingly.

"Oh, I understand," Frank reassured her. "Besides, I think you are right. But I was thinking of your mother. She won't come."

"Then you tell her that if she doesn't come I shan't be married at all," said Rachel. She was betraying unsuspected ability to

manage people. She knew that ultimatum would urge Frank to his best endeavors.

Frank, much to Mrs. Spencer's dismay, marched boldly in at the front door upon his return. She pounced on him and whisked him out of sight into the supper room.

"Where's Rachel? What made you come that way? Everybody saw you!"

"It makes no difference. They will all have to know, anyway. Rachel says she is going to be married from her father's house, or not at all. I've come back to tell you so."

Isabella's face turned crimson.

"Rachel has gone crazy. I wash my hands of this affair. Do as you please. Take the guests--the supper, too, if you can carry it."

"We'll all come back here for supper," said Frank, ignoring the sarcasm. "Come, Mrs. Spencer, let's make the best of it."

"Do you suppose that I am going to David Spencer's house?" said Isabella Spencer violently.

"Oh you MUST come, Mrs. Spencer," cried poor Frank desperately. He began to fear that he would lose his bride past all finding in this maze of triple stubbornness. "Rachel says she won't be married at all if you don't go, too. Think what a talk it will make. You know she will keep her word."

Isabella Spencer knew it. Amid all the conflict of anger and revolt in her soul was a strong desire not to make a worse scandal than must of necessity be made. The desire subdued and tamed her, as nothing else could have done.

"I will go, since I have to," she said icily. "What can't be cured must be endured. Go and tell them."

Five minutes later the sixty wedding guests were all walking over the fields to the Cove, with the minister and the bridegroom in the front of the procession. They were too amazed even to talk about the strange happening. Isabella Spencer walked behind, fiercely alone.

They all crowded into the little room of the house at the Cove, and a solemn hush fell over it, broken only by the purr of the sea-wind around it and the croon of the waves on the shore. David Spencer gave his daughter away; but, when the ceremony was concluded, Isabella was the first to take the girl in her arms. She clasped her and kissed her, with tears streaming down her

pale face, all her nature melted in a mother's tenderness.

"Rachel! Rachel! My child, I hope and pray that you may be happy," she said brokenly.

In the surge of the suddenly merry crowd of well-wishers around the bride and groom, Isabella was pushed back into a shadowy corner behind a heap of sails and ropes. Looking up, she found herself crushed against David Spencer. For the first time in twenty years the eyes of husband and wife met. A strange thrill shot to Isabella's heart; she felt herself trembling.

"Isabella." It was David's voice in her ear--a voice full of tenderness and pleading--the voice of the young wooer of her girlhood--"Is it too late to ask you to forgive me? I've been a stubborn fool--but there hasn't been an hour in all these years that I haven't thought about you and our baby and longed for you."

Isabella Spencer had hated this man; yet her hate had been but a parasite growth on a nobler stem, with no abiding roots of its own. It withered under his words, and lo, there was the old love, fair and strong and beautiful as ever.

"Oh--David--I--was--all--to--blame," she murmured brokenly.

Further words were lost on her husband's lips.

When the hubbub of handshaking and congratulating had subsided, Isabella Spencer stepped out before the company. She looked almost girlish and bridal herself, with her flushed cheeks and bright eyes.

"Let's go back now and have supper, and be sensible," she said crisply. "Rachel, your father is coming, too. He is coming to STAY,"--with a defiant glance around the circle. "Come, everybody."

They went back with laughter and raillery over the quiet autumn fields, faintly silvered now by the moon that was rising over the hills. The young bride and groom lagged behind; they were very happy, but they were not so happy, after all, as the old bride and groom who walked swiftly in front. Isabella's hand was in her husband's and sometimes she could not see the moonlit hills for a mist of glorified tears.

"David," she whispered, as he helped her over the fence, "how can you ever forgive me?"

"There's nothing to forgive," he said. "We're only just married. Who ever heard of a bridegroom talking of forgiveness?"

Everything is beginning over new for us, my girl."