

XI. THE EDUCATION OF BETTY

When Sara Currie married Jack Churchill I was broken-hearted...or believed myself to be so, which, in a boy of twenty-two, amounts to pretty much the same thing. Not that I took the world into my confidence; that was never the Douglas way, and I held myself in honor bound to live up to the family traditions. I thought, then, that nobody but Sara knew; but I dare say, now, that Jack knew it also, for I don't think Sara could have helped telling him. If he did know, however, he did not let me see that he did, and never insulted me by any implied sympathy; on the contrary, he asked me to be his best man. Jack was always a thoroughbred.

I was best man. Jack and I had always been bosom friends, and, although I had lost my sweetheart, I did not intend to lose my friend into the bargain. Sara had made a wise choice, for Jack was twice the man I was; he had had to work for his living, which perhaps accounts for it.

So I danced at Sara's wedding as if my heart were as light as my heels; but, after she and Jack had settled down at Glenby I closed The Maples and went abroad...being, as I have hinted, one of those unfortunate mortals who need consult nothing but their own whims in the matter of time and money. I stayed away for ten years, during which The Maples was given over to moths and rust, while I enjoyed life elsewhere. I did enjoy it hugely, but

always under protest, for I felt that a broken-hearted man ought not to enjoy himself as I did. It jarred on my sense of fitness, and I tried to moderate my zest, and think more of the past than I did. It was no use; the present insisted on being intrusive and pleasant; as for the future...well, there was no future.

Then Jack Churchill, poor fellow, died. A year after his death, I went home and again asked Sara to marry me, as in duty bound. Sara again declined, alleging that her heart was buried in Jack's grave, or words to that effect. I found that it did not much matter...of course, at thirty-two one does not take these things to heart as at twenty-two. I had enough to occupy me in getting The Maples into working order, and beginning to educate Betty.

Betty was Sara's ten year-old daughter, and she had been thoroughly spoiled. That is to say, she had been allowed her own way in everything and, having inherited her father's outdoor tastes, had simply run wild. She was a thorough tomboy, a thin, scrawny little thing with a trace of Sara's beauty. Betty took after her father's dark, tall race and, on the occasion of my first introduction to her, seemed to be all legs and neck. There were points about her, though, which I considered promising. She had fine, almond-shaped, hazel eyes, the smallest and most shapely hands and feet I ever saw, and two enormous braids of thick, nut-brown hair.

For Jack's sake I decided to bring his daughter up properly. Sara couldn't do it, and didn't try. I saw that, if somebody didn't take Betty in hand, wisely and firmly, she would certainly be ruined. There seemed to be nobody except myself at all interested in the matter, so I determined to see what an old bachelor could do as regards bringing up a girl in the way she should go. I might have been her father; as it was, her father had been my best friend. Who had a better right to watch over his daughter? I determined to be a father to Betty, and do all for her that the most devoted parent could do. It was, self-evidently, my duty.

I told Sara I was going to take Betty in hand. Sara sighed one of the plaintive little sighs which I had once thought so charming, but now, to my surprise, found faintly irritating, and said that she would be very much obliged if I would.

"I feel that I am not able to cope with the problem of Betty's education, Stephen," she admitted, "Betty is a strange child...all Churchill. Her poor father indulged her in everything, and she has a will of her own, I assure you. I have really no control over her, whatever. She does as she pleases, and is ruining her complexion by running and galloping out of doors the whole time. Not that she had much complexion to start with. The Churchills never had, you know."...Sara cast a complacent glance at her delicately tinted reflection in the

mirror.... "I tried to make Betty wear a sunbonnet this summer, but I might as well have talked to the wind."

A vision of Betty in a sunbonnet presented itself to my mind, and afforded me so much amusement that I was grateful to Sara for having furnished it. I rewarded her with a compliment.

"It is to be regretted that Betty has not inherited her mother's charming color," I said, "but we must do the best we can for her under her limitations. She may have improved vastly by the time she has grown up. And, at least, we must make a lady of her; she is a most alarming tomboy at present, but there is good material to work upon...there must be, in the Churchill and Currie blend. But even the best material may be spoiled by unwise handling. I think I can promise you that I will not spoil it. I feel that Betty is my vocation; and I shall set myself up as a rival of Wordsworth's 'nature,' of whose methods I have always had a decided distrust, in spite of his insidious verses."

Sara did not understand me in the least; but, then, she did not pretend to.

"I confide Betty's education entirely to you, Stephen," she said, with another plaintive sigh. "I feel sure I could not put it into better hands. You have always been a person who could be thoroughly depended on."

Well, that was something by way of reward for a life-long devotion. I felt that I was satisfied with my position as unofficial advisor-in-chief to Sara and self-appointed guardian of Betty. I also felt that, for the furtherance of the cause I had taken to heart, it was a good thing that Sara had again refused to marry me. I had a sixth sense which informed me that a staid old family friend might succeed with Betty where a stepfather would have signally failed. Betty's loyalty to her father's memory was passionate, and vehement; she would view his supplanter with resentment and distrust; but his old familiar comrade was a person to be taken to her heart.

Fortunately for the success of my enterprise, Betty liked me. She told me this with the same engaging candor she would have used in informing me that she hated me, if she had happened to take a bias in that direction, saying frankly:

"You are one of the very nicest old folks I know, Stephen. Yes, you are a ripping good fellow!"

This made my task a comparatively easy one; I sometimes shudder to think what it might have been if Betty had not thought I was a "ripping good fellow." I should have stuck to it, because that is my way; but Betty would have made my life a misery to me. She had startling capacities for tormenting people when she chose to

exert them; I certainly should not have liked to be numbered among Betty's foes.

I rode over to Glenby the next morning after my paternal interview with Sara, intending to have a frank talk with Betty and lay the foundations of a good understanding on both sides. Betty was a sharp child, with a disconcerting knack of seeing straight through grindstones; she would certainly perceive and probably resent any underhanded management. I thought it best to tell her plainly that I was going to look after her.

When, however, I encountered Betty, tearing madly down the beech avenue with a couple of dogs, her loosened hair streaming behind her like a banner of independence, and had lifted her, hatless and breathless, up before me on my mare, I found that Sara had saved me the trouble of an explanation.

"Mother says you are going to take charge of my education, Stephen," said Betty, as soon as she could speak. "I'm glad, because I think that, for an old person, you have a good deal of sense. I suppose my education has to be seen to, some time or other, and I'd rather you'd do it than anybody else I know."

"Thank you, Betty," I said gravely. "I hope I shall deserve your good opinion of my sense. I shall expect you to do as I tell you, and be guided by my advice in everything."

"Yes, I will," said Betty, "because I'm sure you won't tell me to do anything I'd really hate to do. You won't shut me up in a room and make me sew, will you? Because I won't do it."

I assured her I would not.

"Nor send me to a boarding-school," pursued Betty. "Mother's always threatening to send me to one. I suppose she would have done it before this, only she knew I'd run away. You won't send me to a boarding-school, will you, Stephen? Because I won't go."

"No," I said obligingly. "I won't. I should never dream of cooping a wild little thing, like you, up in a boarding-school. You'd fret your heart out like a caged skylark."

"I know you and I are going to get along together splendidly, Stephen," said Betty, rubbing her brown cheek chummily against my shoulder. "You are so good at understanding. Very few people are. Even dad darling didn't understand. He let me do just as I wanted to, just because I wanted to, not because he really understood that I couldn't be tame and play with dolls. I hate dolls! Real live babies are jolly; but dogs and horses are ever so much nicer than dolls."

"But you must have lessons, Betty. I shall select your teachers

and superintend your studies, and I shall expect you to do me credit along that line, as well as along all others."

"I'll try, honest and true, Stephen," declared Betty. And she kept her word.

At first I looked upon Betty's education as a duty; in a very short time it had become a pleasure...the deepest and most abiding interest of my life. As I had premised, Betty was good material, and responded to my training with gratifying plasticity. Day by day, week by week, month by month, her character and temperament unfolded naturally under my watchful eye. It was like beholding the gradual development of some rare flower in one's garden. A little checking and pruning here, a careful training of shoot and tendril there, and, lo, the reward of grace and symmetry!

Betty grew up as I would have wished Jack Churchill's girl to grow--spirited and proud, with the fine spirit and gracious pride of pure womanhood, loyal and loving, with the loyalty and love of a frank and unspoiled nature; true to her heart's core, hating falsehood and sham--as crystal-clear a mirror of maidenhood as ever man looked into and saw himself reflected back in such a halo as made him ashamed of not being more worthy of it. Betty was kind enough to say that I had taught her everything she knew. But what had she not taught me? If there were a debt between us,

it was on my side.

Sara was fairly well satisfied. It was not my fault that Betty was not better looking, she said. I had certainly done everything for her mind and character that could be done. Sara's manner implied that these unimportant details did not count for much, balanced against the lack of a pink-and-white skin and dimpled elbows; but she was generous enough not to blame me.

"When Betty is twenty-five," I said patiently--I had grown used to speaking patiently to Sara--"she will be a magnificent woman--far handsomer than you ever were, Sara, in your pinkest and whitest prime. Where are your eyes, my dear lady, that you can't see the promise of loveliness in Betty?"

"Betty is seventeen, and she is as lanky and brown as ever she was," sighed Sara. "When I was seventeen I was the belle of the county and had had five proposals. I don't believe the thought of a lover has ever entered Betty's head."

"I hope not," I said shortly. Somehow, I did not like the suggestion. "Betty is a child yet. For pity's sake, Sara, don't go putting nonsensical ideas into her head."

"I'm afraid I can't," mourned Sara, as if it were something to be regretted. "You have filled it too full of books and things like

that. I've every confidence in your judgment, Stephen--and really you've done wonders with Betty. But don't you think you've made her rather too clever? Men don't like women who are too clever. Her poor father, now--he always said that a woman who liked books better than beaux was an unnatural creature."

I didn't believe Jack had ever said anything so foolish. Sara imagined things. But I resented the aspersion of blue-stockings cast on Betty.

"When the time comes for Betty to be interested in beaux," I said severely, "she will probably give them all due attention. Just at present her head is a great deal better filled with books than with silly premature fancies and sentimentalities. I'm a critical old fellow--but I'm satisfied with Betty, Sara--perfectly satisfied."

Sara sighed.

"Oh, I dare say she is all right, Stephen. And I'm really grateful to you. I'm sure I could have done nothing at all with her. It's not your fault, of course,--but I can't help wishing she were a little more like other girls."

I galloped away from Glenby in a rage. What a blessing Sara had not married me in my absurd youth! She would have driven me wild

with her sighs and her obtuseness and her everlasting pink-and-whiteness. But there--there--there--gently! She was a sweet, good-hearted little woman; she had made Jack happy; and she had contrived, heaven only knew how, to bring a rare creature like Betty into the world. For that, much might be forgiven her. By the time I reached The Maples and had flung myself down in an old, kinky, comfortable chair in my library I had forgiven her and was even paying her the compliment of thinking seriously over what she had said.

Was Betty really unlike other girls? That is to say, unlike them in any respect wherein she should resemble them? I did not wish this; although I was a crusty old bachelor I approved of girls, holding them the sweetest things the good God has made. I wanted Betty to have her full complement of girlhood in all its best and highest manifestation. Was there anything lacking?

I observed Betty very closely during the next week or so, riding over to Glenby every day and riding back at night, meditating upon my observations. Eventually I concluded to do what I had never thought myself in the least likely to do. I would send Betty to a boarding-school for a year. It was necessary that she should learn how to live with other girls.

I went over to Glenby the next day and found Betty under the beeches on the lawn, just back from a canter. She was sitting on

the dappled mare I had given her on her last birthday, and was laughing at the antics of her rejoicing dogs around her. I looked at her with much pleasure; it gladdened me to see how much, nay, how totally a child she still was, despite her Churchill height. Her hair, under her velvet cap, still hung over her shoulders in the same thick plaits; her face had the firm leanness of early youth, but its curves were very fine and delicate. The brown skin, that worried Sara so, was flushed through with dusky color from her gallop; her long, dark eyes were filled with the beautiful unconsciousness of childhood. More than all, the soul in her was still the soul of a child. I found myself wishing that it could always remain so. But I knew it could not; the woman must blossom out some day; it was my duty to see that the flower fulfilled the promise of the bud.

When I told Betty that she must go away to a school for a year, she shrugged, frowned and consented. Betty had learned that she must consent to what I decreed, even when my decrees were opposed to her likings, as she had once fondly believed they never would be. But Betty had acquired confidence in me to the beautiful extent of acquiescing in everything I commanded.

"I'll go, of course, since you wish it, Stephen," she said. "But why do you want me to go? You must have a reason--you always have a reason for anything you do. What is it?"

"That is for you to find out, Betty," I said. "By the time you come back you will have discovered it, I think. If not, it will not have proved itself a good reason and shall be forgotten."

When Betty went away I bade her good-by without burdening her with any useless words of advice.

"Write to me every week, and remember that you are Betty Churchill," I said.

Betty was standing on the steps above, among her dogs. She came down a step and put her arms about my neck.

"I'll remember that you are my friend and that I must live up to you," she said. "Good-by, Stephen."

She kissed me two or three times--good, hearty smacks! did I not say she was still a child?--and stood waving her hand to me as I rode away. I looked back at the end of the avenue and saw her standing there, short-skirted and hatless, fronting the lowering sun with those fearless eyes of hers. So I looked my last on the child Betty.

That was a lonely year. My occupation was gone and I began to fear that I had outlived my usefulness. Life seemed flat, stale, and unprofitable. Betty's weekly letters were all that lent it

any savor. They were spicy and piquant enough. Betty was discovered to have unsuspected talents in the epistolary line. At first she was dolefully homesick, and begged me to let her come home. When I refused--it was amazingly hard to refuse--she sulked through three letters, then cheered up and began to enjoy herself. But it was nearly the end of the year when she wrote:

"I've found out why you sent me here, Stephen--and I'm glad you did."

I had to be away from home on unavoidable business the day Betty returned to Glenby. But the next afternoon I went over. I found Betty out and Sara in. The latter was beaming. Betty was so much improved, she declared delightedly. I would hardly know "the dear child."

This alarmed me terribly. What on earth had they done to Betty? I found that she had gone up to the pineland for a walk, and thither I betook myself speedily. When I saw her coming down a long, golden-brown alley I stepped behind a tree to watch her--I wished to see her, myself unseen. As she drew near I gazed at her with pride, and admiration and amazement--and, under it all, a strange, dreadful, heart-sinking, which I could not understand and which I had never in all my life experienced before--no, not even when Sara had refused me.

Betty was a woman! Not by virtue of the simple white dress that clung to her tall, slender figure, revealing lines of exquisite grace and liveness; not by virtue of the glossy masses of dark brown hair heaped high on her head and held there in wonderful shining coils; not by virtue of added softness of curve and daintiness of outline; not because of all these, but because of the dream and wonder and seeking in her eyes. She was a woman, looking, all unconscious of her quest, for love.

The understanding of the change in her came home to me with a shock that must have left me, I think, something white about the lips. I was glad. She was what I had wished her to become. But I wanted the child Betty back; this womanly Betty seemed far away from me.

I stepped out into the path and she saw me, with a brightening of her whole face. She did not rush forward and fling herself into my arms as she would have done a year ago; but she came towards me swiftly, holding out her hand. I had thought her slightly pale when I had first seen her; but now I concluded I had been mistaken, for there was a wonderful sunrise of color in her face. I took her hand--there were no kisses this time.

"Welcome home, Betty," I said.

"Oh, Stephen, it is so good to be back," she breathed, her eyes

shining.

She did not say it was good to see me again, as I had hoped she would do. Indeed, after the first minute of greeting, she seemed a trifle cool and distant. We walked for an hour in the pine wood and talked. Betty was brilliant, witty, self-possessed, altogether charming. I thought her perfect and yet my heart ached. What a glorious young thing she was, in that splendid youth of hers! What a prize for some lucky man--confound the obtrusive thought! No doubt we should soon be overrun at Glenby with lovers. I should stumble over some forlorn youth at every step! Well, what of it? Betty would marry, of course. It would be my duty to see that she got a good husband, worthy of her as men go. I thought I preferred the old duty of superintending her studies. But there, it was all the same thing--merely a post-graduate course in applied knowledge. When she began to learn life's greatest lesson of love, I, the tried and true old family friend and mentor, must be on hand to see that the teacher was what I would have him be, even as I had formerly selected her instructor in French and botany. Then, and not until then, would Betty's education be complete.

I rode home very soberly. When I reached The Maples I did what I had not done for years...looked critically at myself in the mirror. The realization that I had grown older came home to me with a new and unpleasant force. There were marked lines on my

lean face, and silver glints in the dark hair over my temples. When Betty was ten she had thought me "an old person." Now, at eighteen, she probably thought me a veritable ancient of days. Pshaw, what did it matter? And yet...I thought of her as I had seen her, standing under the pines, and something cold and painful laid its hand on my heart.

My premonitions as to lovers proved correct. Glenby was soon infested with them. Heaven knows where they all came from. I had not supposed there was a quarter as many young men in the whole county; but there they were. Sara was in the seventh heaven of delight. Was not Betty at last a belle? As for the proposals...well, Betty never counted her scalps in public; but every once in a while a visiting youth dropped out and was seen no more at Glenby. One could guess what that meant.

Betty apparently enjoyed all this. I grieve to say that she was a bit of a coquette. I tried to cure her of this serious defect, but for once I found that I had undertaken something I could not accomplish. In vain I lectured, Betty only laughed; in vain I gravely rebuked, Betty only flirted more vivaciously than before. Men might come and men might go, but Betty went on forever. I endured this sort of thing for a year and then I decided that it was time to interfere seriously. I must find a husband for Betty...my fatherly duty would not be fulfilled until I had...nor, indeed, my duty to society. She was not a safe person

to have running at large.

None of the men who haunted Glenby was good enough for her. I decided that my nephew, Frank, would do very well. He was a capital young fellow, handsome, clean-souled, and whole-hearted. From a worldly point of view he was what Sara would have termed an excellent match; he had money, social standing and a rising reputation as a clever young lawyer. Yes, he should have Betty, confound him!

They had never met. I set the wheels going at once. The sooner all the fuss was over the better. I hated fuss and there was bound to be a good deal of it. But I went about the business like an accomplished matchmaker. I invited Frank to visit The Maples and, before he came, I talked much...but not too much...of him to Betty, mingling judicious praise and still more judicious blame together. Women never like a paragon. Betty heard me with more gravity than she usually accorded to my dissertations on young men. She even condescended to ask several questions about him. This I thought a good sign.

To Frank I had said not a word about Betty; when he came to The Maples I took him over to Glenby and, coming upon Betty wandering about among the beeches in the sunset, I introduced him without any warning.

He would have been more than mortal if he had not fallen in love with her upon the spot. It was not in the heart of man to resist her...that dainty, alluring bit of womanhood. She was all in white, with flowers in her hair, and, for a moment, I could have murdered Frank or any other man who dared to commit the sacrilege of loving her.

Then I pulled myself together and left them alone. I might have gone in and talked to Sara...two old folks gently reviewing their youth while the young folks courted outside...but I did not. I prowled about the pine wood, and tried to forget how blithe and handsome that curly-headed boy, Frank, was, and what a flash had sprung into his eyes when he had seen Betty. Well, what of it? Was not that what I had brought him there for? And was I not pleased at the success of my scheme? Certainly I was! Delighted!

Next day Frank went to Glenby without even making the poor pretense of asking me to accompany him. I spent the time of his absence overseeing the construction of a new greenhouse I was having built. I was conscientious in my supervision; but I felt no interest in it. The place was intended for roses, and roses made me think of the pale yellow ones Betty had worn at her breast one evening the week before, when, all lovers being unaccountably absent, we had wandered together under the pines and talked as in the old days before her young womanhood and my

gray hairs had risen up to divide us. She had dropped a rose on the brown floor, and I had sneaked back, after I had left her the house, to get it, before I went home. I had it now in my pocket-book. Confound it, mightn't a future uncle cherish a family affection for his prospective niece?

Frank's wooing seemed to prosper. The other young sparks, who had haunted Glenby, faded away after his advent. Betty treated him with most encouraging sweetness; Sara smiled on him; I stood in the background, like a benevolent god of the machine, and flattered myself that I pulled the strings.

At the end of a month something went wrong. Frank came home from Glenby one day in the dumps, and moped for two whole days. I rode down myself on the third. I had not gone much to Glenby that month; but, if there were trouble Bettyward, it was my duty to make smooth the rough places.

As usual, I found Betty in the pineland. I thought she looked rather pale and dull...fretting about Frank no doubt. She brightened up when she saw me, evidently expecting that I had come to straighten matters out; but she pretended to be haughty and indifferent.

"I am glad you haven't forgotten us altogether, Stephen," she said coolly. "You haven't been down for a week."

"I'm flattered that you noticed it," I said, sitting down on a fallen tree and looking up at her as she stood, tall and lithe, against an old pine, with her eyes averted. "I shouldn't have supposed you'd want an old foggy like myself poking about and spoiling the idyllic moments of love's young dream."

"Why do you always speak of yourself as old?" said Betty, crossly, ignoring my reference to Frank.

"Because I am old, my dear. Witness these gray hairs."

I pushed up my hat to show them the more recklessly.

Betty barely glanced at them.

"You have just enough to give you a distinguished look," she said, "and you are only forty. A man is in his prime at forty. He never has any sense until he is forty--and sometimes he doesn't seem to have any even then," she concluded impertinently.

My heart beat. Did Betty suspect? Was that last sentence meant to inform me that she was aware of my secret folly, and laughed at it?

"I came over to see what has gone wrong between you and Frank," I

said gravely.

Betty bit her lips.

"Nothing," she said.

"Betty," I said reproachfully, "I brought you up...or endeavored to bring you up...to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Don't tell me I have failed. I'll give you another chance. Have you quarreled with Frank?"

"No," said the maddening Betty, "HE quarreled with me. He went away in a temper and I do not care if he never comes back!"

I shook my head.

"This won't do, Betty. As your old family friend I still claim the right to scold you until you have a husband to do the scolding. You mustn't torment Frank. He is too fine a fellow. You must marry him, Betty."

"Must I?" said Betty, a dusky red flaming out on her cheek. She turned her eyes on me in a most disconcerting fashion. "Do YOU wish me to marry Frank, Stephen?"

Betty had a wretched habit of emphasizing pronouns in a fashion

calculated to rattle anybody.

"Yes, I do wish it, because I think it will be best for you," I replied, without looking at her. "You must marry some time, Betty, and Frank is the only man I know to whom I could trust you. As your guardian, I have an interest in seeing you well and wisely settled for life. You have always taken my advice and obeyed my wishes; and you've always found my way the best, in the long run, haven't you, Betty? You won't prove rebellious now, I'm sure. You know quite well that I am advising you for your own good. Frank is a splendid young fellow, who loves you with all his heart. Marry him, Betty. Mind, I don't COMMAND. I have no right to do that, and you are too old to be ordered about, if I had. But I wish and advise it. Isn't that enough, Betty?"

I had been looking away from her all the time I was talking, gazing determinedly down a sunlit vista of pines. Every word I said seemed to tear my heart, and come from my lips stained with life-blood. Yes, Betty should marry Frank! But, good God, what would become of me!

Betty left her station under the pine tree, and walked around me until she got right in front of my face. I couldn't help looking at her, for if I moved my eyes she moved too. There was nothing meek or submissive about her; her head was held high, her eyes

were blazing, and her cheeks were crimson. But her words were meek enough.

"I will marry Frank if you wish it, Stephen," she said. "You are my friend. I have never crossed your wishes, and, as you say, I have never regretted being guided by them. I will do exactly as you wish in this case also, I promise you that. But, in so solemn a question, I must be very certain what you DO wish. There must be no doubt in my mind or heart. Look me squarely in the eyes, Stephen--as you haven't done once to-day, no, nor once since I came home from school--and, so looking, tell me that you wish me to marry Frank Douglas and I will do it! DO you, Stephen?"

I had to look her in the eyes, since nothing else would do her; and, as I did so, all the might of manhood in me rose up in hot revolt against the lie I would have told her. That unfaltering, impelling gaze of hers drew the truth from my lips in spite of myself.

"No, I don't wish you to marry Frank Douglas, a thousand times no!" I said passionately. "I don't wish you to marry any man on earth but myself. I love you--I love you, Betty. You are dearer to me than life--dearer to me than my own happiness. It was your happiness I thought of--and so I asked you to marry Frank because I believed he would make you a happy woman. That is all!"

Betty's defiance went from her like a flame blown out. She turned away and drooped her proud head.

"It could not have made me a happy woman to marry one man, loving another," she said, in a whisper.

I got up and went over to her.

"Betty, whom do you love?" I asked, also in a whisper.

"You," she murmured meekly--oh, so meekly, my proud little girl!

"Betty," I said brokenly, "I'm old--too old for you--I'm more than twenty years your senior--I'm--"

"Oh!" Betty wheeled around on me and stamped her foot. "Don't mention your age to me again. I don't care if you're as old as Methuselah. But I'm not going to coax you to marry me, sir! If you won't, I'll never marry anybody--I'll live and die an old maid. You can please yourself, of course!"

She turned away, half-laughing, half-crying; but I caught her in my arms and crushed her sweet lips against mine.

"Betty, I'm the happiest man in the world--and I was the most

miserable when I came here."

"You deserved to be," said Betty cruelly. "I'm glad you were. Any man as stupid as you deserves to be unhappy. What do you think I felt like, loving you with all my heart, and seeing you simply throwing me at another man's head. Why, I've always loved you, Stephen; but I didn't know it until I went to that detestable school. Then I found out--and I thought that was why you had sent me. But, when I came home, you almost broke my heart. That was why I flirted so with all those poor, nice boys --I wanted to hurt you but I never thought I succeeded. You just went on being FATHERLY. Then, when you brought Frank here, I almost gave up hope; and I tried to make up my mind to marry him; I should have done it if you had insisted. But I had to have one more try for happiness first. I had just one little hope to inspire me with sufficient boldness. I saw you, that night, when you came back here and picked up my rose! I had come back, myself, to be alone and unhappy."

"It is the most wonderful thing that ever happened--that you should love me," I said.

"It's not--I couldn't help it," said Betty, nestling her brown head on my shoulder. "You taught me everything else, Stephen, so nobody but you could teach me how to love. You've made a thorough thing of educating me."

"When will you marry me, Betty?" I asked.

"As soon as I can fully forgive you for trying to make me marry somebody else," said Betty.

It was rather hard lines on Frank, when you come to think of it. But, such is the selfishness of human nature that we didn't think much about Frank. The young fellow behaved like the Douglas he was. Went a little white about the lips when I told him, wished me all happiness, and went quietly away, "gentleman unafraid."

He has since married and is, I understand, very happy. Not as happy as I am, of course; that is impossible, because there is only one Betty in the world, and she is my wife.