

## CHAPTER XXXV

### THE TOOTHACRE COTTAGE

Aunt Roxy and Aunt Ruey Toothacre lived in a little one-story gambrel-roofed cottage, on the side of Harpswell Bay, just at the head of the long cove which we have already described. The windows on two sides commanded the beautiful bay and the opposite shores, and on the other they looked out into the dense forest, through whose deep shadows of white birch and pine the silver rise and fall of the sea daily revealed itself.

The house itself was a miracle of neatness within, for the two thrifty sisters were worshipers of soap and sand, and these two tutelary deities had kept every board of the house-floor white and smooth, and also every table and bench and tub of household use. There was a sacred care over each article, however small and insignificant, which composed their slender household stock. The loss or breakage of one of them would have made a visible crack in the hearts of the worthy sisters,--for every plate, knife, fork, spoon, cup, or glass was as intimate with them, as instinct with home feeling, as if it had a soul; each defect or spot had its history, and a cracked dish or article of furniture received as tender and considerate medical treatment as if it were capable of understanding and feeling the attention.

It was now a warm, spicy day in June,--one of those which bring out the pineapple fragrance from the fir-shoots, and cause the spruce and hemlocks to exude a warm, resinous perfume. The two sisters, for a wonder, were having a day to themselves, free from the numerous calls of the vicinity for twelve miles round. The room in which they were sitting was bestrewn with fragments of dresses and bonnets, which were being torn to pieces in a most wholesale way, with a view to a general rejuvenescence. A person of unsympathetic temperament, and disposed to take sarcastic views of life, might perhaps wonder what possible object these two battered and weather-beaten old bodies proposed to themselves in this process,--whether Miss Roxy's gaunt black-straw helmet, which she had worn defiantly all winter, was likely to receive much lustre from being pressed over and trimmed with an old green ribbon which that energetic female had colored black by a domestic recipe; and whether Miss Roxy's rusty bombazette would really seem to the world any fresher for being ripped, and washed, and turned, for the second or third time, and made over with every breadth in a different situation. Probably after a week of efficient labor, busily expended in bleaching, dyeing, pressing, sewing, and ripping, an unenlightened spectator, seeing them come into the meeting-house, would simply think, "There are those two old frights with the same old things on they have worn these fifty years." Happily the weird sisters were contentedly ignorant of any such remarks, for no duchesses could have enjoyed a more quiet belief in their own social position, and their semi-annual spring and fall rehabilitation was therefore entered into with the most simple-hearted satisfaction.

"I'm a-thinkin', Roxy," said Aunt Ruey, considerately turning and turning on her hand an old straw bonnet, on which were streaked all the marks of the former trimming in lighter lines, which revealed too clearly the effects of wind and weather,--"I'm a-thinkin' whether or no this 'ere mightn't as well be dyed and done with it as try to bleach it out. I've had it ten years last May, and it's kind o' losin' its freshness, you know. I don't believe these 'ere streaks will bleach out."

"Never mind, Ruey," said Miss Roxy, authoritatively, "I'm goin' to do Mis' Badger's leg'orn, and it won't cost nothin'; so hang your'n in the barrel along with it,--the same smoke'll do 'em both. Mis' Badger she finds the brimstone, and next fall you can put it in the dye when we do the yarn."

"That ar straw is a beautiful straw!" said Miss Ruey, in a plaintive tone, tenderly examining the battered old head-piece,--"I braided every stroke on it myself, and I don't know as I could do it ag'in. My fingers ain't quite so limber as they was! I don't think I shall put green ribbon on it ag'in; 'cause green is such a color to ruin, if a body gets caught out in a shower! There's these green streaks come that day I left my amberil at Captain Broad's, and went to meetin'. Mis' Broad she says to me, 'Aunt Ruey, it won't rain.' And says I to her, 'Well, Mis' Broad, I'll try it; though I never did leave my amberil at home but what it rained.' And so I went, and sure enough it rained cats and dogs, and

streaked my bonnet all up; and them ar streaks won't bleach out, I'm feared."

"How long is it Mis' Badger has had that ar leg'orn?"

"Why, you know, the Cap'n he brought it home when he came from his voyage from Marseilles. That ar was when Phebe Ann was born, and she's fifteen year old. It was a most elegant thing when he brought it; but I think it kind o' led Mis' Badger on to extravagant ways,--for gettin' new trimmin' spring and fall so uses up money as fast as new bonnets; but Mis' Badger's got the money, and she's got a right to use it if she pleases; but if I'd a-had new trimmin's spring and fall, I shouldn't a-put away what I have in the bank."

"Have you seen the straw Sally Kittridge is braidin' for Mara Lincoln's weddin' bonnet?" said Miss Ruey. "It's jist the finest thing ever you did see,--and the whitest. I was a-tellin' Sally that I could do as well once myself, but my mantle was a-fallin' on her. Sally don't seem to act a bit like a disap'inted gal. She is as chipper as she can be about Mara's weddin', and seems like she couldn't do too much. But laws, everybody seems to want to be a-doin' for her. Miss Emily was a-showin' me a fine double damask tablecloth that she was goin' to give her; and Mis' Pennel, she's been a-spinnin' and layin' up sheets and towels and tablecloths all her life,--and then she has all Naomi's things. Mis' Pennel was talkin' to me the other day about bleachin' 'em out 'cause they'd got yellow a-lyin'. I kind o' felt as if 'twas unlucky to be

a-fittin' out a bride with her dead mother's things, but I didn't like to say nothin'."

"Ruey," said Miss Roxy impressively, "I hain't never had but jist one mind about Mara Lincoln's weddin',--it's to be,--but it won't be the way people think. I hain't nussed and watched and sot up nights sixty years for nothin'. I can see beyond what most folks can,--her weddin' garments is bought and paid for, and she'll wear 'em, but she won't be Moses Pennel's wife,--now you see."

"Why, whose wife will she be then?" said Miss Ruey; "'cause that ar Mr. Adams is married. I saw it in the paper last week when I was up to Mis' Badger's."

Miss Roxy shut her lips with oracular sternness and went on with her sewing.

"Who's that comin' in the back door?" said Miss Ruey, as the sound of a footstep fell upon her ear. "Bless me," she added, as she started up to look, "if folks ain't always nearest when you're talkin' about 'em. Why, Mara; you come down here and catched us in all our dirt! Well now, we're glad to see you, if we be," said Miss Ruey.