REIBA, THE COTTAGE MAID.

[Written for the RECORD-UNION by "The Mountain Girl."]

"Papa, papa!" The sweet childish voice rang through the hall and reached the Earl's ears as he sat alone in his study gazing abstractedly into the fire which burned cheerfully in the grate. Looking at him, as he sits thus, we see a man apparently 50 years of age, his form still upright and his eyes bright; his hair streaked with gray, but the beard of a deep brown, dark as when he was young.

The fire-light played about him, lighting the large room and causing the shadows to play hide-and-seek in the corners and behind the heavy tapestry.

"Poor George," he muttered, "how strange that we have never heard from him. Wayward youth! No doubt he has long since passed the Golden Gate."

As his little daughter's voice reached him he roused himself from his reverie, and opening the door answered, "Here, my darling."

Little Katherine tripped into the room, and, seating herself upon her father's knee, wound her arms lovingly about his neck and chattered away like a young magpie.

No wonder the father loved her. She was all he had. At his death she would be "Lady Katherine Crayton," for the Earl of Crayton had no son, and even had he one the estate always went to the eldest child, whether male or female. The present Earl was not the eldest child, but his older brother, a wild, wayward youth, had left home when a boy, and for twenty years they had heard from him only once, when he had sent a widow lady and her child—a girl—to the Earl, his father, and asked him to befriend her as she had once done him a great service.

Mrs. Lofton had found a steady friend in the old Earl, and now that he was dead, in his son Will, who placed her in one of the cottages near the Hall and watched over her at all times.

Mrs. Lofton was a middle-aged, quiet little woman, and the little child, a year old when she came, he had hardly seen to notice. His own little Kathie was the light of his life, and he had no thought for the little stranger.

When Kathie was 3 years of age, and the little girl at the cottage 4, the Earl's wife died and left him almost broken-hearted. He could not find room in his heart for any beside Kathie, and so the years rolled on until Kathie was 11 and the little maid at the cottage 12.

It is the evening before Kathie's 11th birthday that she is sitting with her father in the large study. At length she speaks very earnestly:

"Papa, I am going to ask a favor, and I want you to promise to let me do as I ask."

Her father laughed and gave the desired promise, thinking she wished for a new frock, or for money for the poor children of the village, never dreaming that that promise so given would change their whole lives.

"You know, papa," said the little girl, "to-morrow is my birthday and Leon is coming to tea."

Now let me explain who Leon is. Opposite the Crayton estates lay another estate fast going to waste for means to care for it; the Earl had always desired to purchase it, but its owner, Sir Leon Humphrey, would no more have parted with it than he would have severed his hand from his wrist.

"But," said he, when talking to the Earl, "you know, Will, my name is as good as yours and my blood as old. A title I could have had had I so desired. If you are willing, and the children are not opposed to one another as they grow older, we will unite our estates by joining their hands."

Thus it was that Leon Humphrey, Jr., and little Kathie Crayton were betrothed almost from their cradle, and thus he was coming on the morrow to take tea, and then the plan was to be made known to the children and their sanction to it asked.

"Well," said the Earl, "Leon is coming to tea and bring his father—"

"And," continued Kathie, "there is just one other person I want to ask to come to tea and stay the night with me."

"Pray, who?" said the Earl.

"Reiba Lofton, the little girl at the cottage," responded Kathie.

Her father stared in amazement for a moment, and then said:

"Sure enough there is a little girl there. I had forgotten her entirely. I must look after her better. But, my child, do you know this little girl?"

"O, yes, papa. I have seen her many times among the flowers in their garden, and she always looks so lonely and sad. She never plays with the village children, and I think her face so sweet. May I, papa? Do say yes."

The Earl gave his consent, reluctantly it is true, but Kathie was satisfied, and danced away to bed that she might be up early the next morning and go for Reiba, the cottage maid.

Let us follow Kathie this bright morning in October. The once green trees are crimson and gold. The leaves rustle under foot, dry and crisp. The sun is bright, and the birds sing in the trees overhead gladdening the ear and heart with their music. Kathie trips along the path till she comes within sight of the cottage gate, and there she pauses to see if Reiba is in sight. Soon she sees her among the flowers along the walk, and then she goes in.

"I've come for you, Reiba," calls Kathie. "I've come to take you up to the Hall to take tea and stay all night with me. Papa said I might."

At these words Reiba's eyes begin to dance and then fill with tears. "O, may I come?" The dream of her life had been to enter the stately Hall.

Having gained Mrs. Lofton's permission the children slowly went their way to the Hall—Kathie happy at having Reiba near her, and Reiba silent in wonder if it all be true, and she was really to enter the grand old Hall.

There is a marked contrast between the Earl's only child and the little cottage girl, Kathie's hair of bright gold and her deep eyes sparkling in the sunlight and happiness of her soul; her beautifully-shaped lips revealing pearly teeth when she smiled; delicately-arched eyebrows and a dainty *retrousse* nose, dimpled hands and exqusitely-shaped feet.

Reiba's hair is a dull red; her eyes, really beautiful, are a dark, wine brown; her complexion pale but freckled; her mouth gracious but large; a nose purely Grecian; her hands finely-shaped and strong, and her feet, well—Kathie herself could not boast of a smaller, more beautifully-shaped foot than Reiba.

On entering the Hall Kathie's first question was:

"Has Leon come?"

"Yes, miss," answered the maid. "He is in the study now with Sir Leon and the Earl, and they are waiting for you."

"What for?" asked the little girl. Then, as if she remembered, she were speaking to a servant, said:

"Come on, Reiba, let us see what my father wants, then I will go up to my room and show you my dolls."

"Perhaps your father would rather I did not go in just yet," stammered Reiba.

"Nonsense," said spoiled Kathie. "Of course he wants you if I want you. Come on;" and Reiba followed her into the Earl's presence.

The Earl sat by the table, and Leon and his father stood by the chimney. They all looked very grave, and as Kathie entered they all raised their eyes to her face as if seeking there an answer to a question.

As Reiba followed her in the elderly gentlemen looked displeased, but Leon greeted her with a quiet, friendly smile, which won her heart at once and forever. He took Kathie up and kissed her, calling her his little wife. Kathie gazed at him in much astonishment, and reminded him that she was a large girl now and could not be treated like a child or talked to in that manner. They all smiled at her assumption of dignity. Then her father at once told her how she must grow to love Leon so she could become his wife when she was older.

"Love him!" she cried in indignation, "as if I do not love him now and always would love him. Be his wife! Pray, whose wife should I be if not Leon's?"

Ah, whose? And she gazed at her father as if defying him to find an answer to her question.

The contract was drawn up and signed by Leon and Kathie, the Earl and Sir Leon and witnesses. Then Kathie would not be satisfied until Reiba must sign, too. Reiba had listened and understood all that had passed, and had looked at Kathie with a smile on her lips, and at Leon with a tear in her eye. There was a wistful look in her large eyes as she placed her name on the paper that bound Leon Humphrey to Katherine Crayton for life.

She never forgot the first day spent in the Hall, though she spent many there afterward; how Leon waited on her in so kindly a fashion at dinner, thinking what a pity that a face, with such beautiful eyes, could be so plain; the night spent with Kathie in the downy bed, sleeping in a silken gown of Kathie's, the like of which she had never dreamed or heard.

The year which followed the betrothal of Leon and Kathie was one always remembered by Reiba. Many a day she spent with Kathie, and many a night laid beside her in her downy couch.

The children came to be united by bonds of love which were never severed during their life time.

The old attic was a favorite place with them among old finery of dead and gone Craytons, and when they were tired of playing there they would steal up to the tower which overlooked the ocean and watch the waters as they seethed and moaned, or danced in glee on the shore. Of a stormy day Kathie would hide her eyes on Reiba's shoulder, and shudder with terror as the dark waves rolled and tossed in pain; but Reiba would watch the angry billows with a sort of fascinated gaze as if compelled against her will to notice the warring elements.

The year passed and Kathie was 12 years old. Her father began thinking of her education and finally concluded to send her to Madame Roche's school for young ladies. Kathie had not thought as yet of having to go to school, and her father could hardly bear to tell her she must leave him even for a short time to fit her for the position she must one day occupy in society. He would say, from day to day, that to-morrow he would tell her, but each day the task became harder. At length it could no longer be kept from her. She must be told. But how to do it! "Ah, I have it. There is Reiba!" So Reiba was sent for, and the Earl explained to her how he wanted her to tell Kathie that it was necessary she should leave him for a time. "She will understand if you explain to her fully and impress upon her mind the absolute necessity of such a step."

There was no thought for the little cottage girl. No one had ever thought or cared for her until Kathie had loved her. No wonder the true heart worshiped the bright-eyed fairy, and the poor heart nearly broke at the thought of parting from the child who had been so kind to her. "But 'tis for the best, and I will try and be brave," she sobbed to herself.

"Go away from you and papa for a long time?" exclaimed Kathie in angry amazement. "I think you don't know what you are talking about, Reiba. I would not go away from you and papa for forty schools."

"But, Kathie, dear, you must be reasonable." And then she told her how she must learn a great deal in order to be ready to marry Leon when he should have finished his travels, and how a great deal was expected of her father's child, and at last Kathie said:

"Well, Reiba, I will go if you can go with me, but if you do not go I shall not go a step."

And so it was arranged finally that to save his little daughter a great grief the Earl sent Reiba with her to Madame Roche's to learn, as Kathie should learn, and be treated in all respects as Kathie was treated, and studying and preparing herself for the society world. Katherine Crayton, heiress to the Crayton estates, passed five years of her life at school, and studying and drilling herself to earn a livelihood. Reiba Lofton, the little cottage maid, went along by Kathie's side, her guide, friend and counselor in all cases. And during these five years of school life let us look in upon them once or twice and peep at the journals of Kathie and Reiba and reveal to the world the heart secrets therein.

Reiba's Journal: "Oct. 13, 18— —. Three days have Kathie and I been installed in this little room which has already grown dear to me. How can I ever be grateful enough to the kind Father for sending me the means of the education I so desired. My life shall be spent in an endeavor to show my gratitude to the Earl and his little daughter. May the time come when I can show to them my appreciation of their goodness. I shall study hard, and when we leave school, and Kathie marries Leon, I shall be ready to go out into the world and take care of Nursie. I am so glad they put Kathie and I together, for I could not bear to be separated from her just now when she misses her father so much."

Two years passed with studies, music and training in all arts. Reiba took more interest in her music every year, and her voice was developing until, in a few years more, she would have no better in the singing world. Katherine was more interested in her studies, and laughingly said that Reiba was musical enough for them both.

The girls were now 14 and 15 years of age. About this time there came to madame's school a young professor of sciences, Phillip Brompton. He came from an impoverished but highly respectable family, and was recommended as an instructor of the highest order.

Before he had been one month at the college he had won the respect of all the teachers, the love and admiration of all the pupils in his class, and was looked upon by the smaller ones as a being from a different world.

Among the latter number was Kathie, who looked at him with her great blue eyes, shining under golden hair, until he grew to call her his little violet, at which she blushed and nervously twisted her fingers till he, pitying her embarrassment, looked away, and immediately she was miserably. Professor Brompton was a handsome man of 30 years, with great, gloomy, soft black eyes, delicate-looking, slender and of a nervous temperament, his hands slender and soft, but strong and firm in their clasp.

For two years he was Kathie's hero, to be worshiped childishly from afar. In her letters to her father she praised him so often and so highly that the Earl almost felt he loved him, though he had never seen him.

At the end of two years Kathie and Reiba were promoted to the class in sciences, and then there came a change in Kathie's manner to Phillip Brompton. One year more and the girls would graduate, and they studied hard and faithfully to pass with honors. Kathie grew cool and distant to the young Professor, and he was often hurt by her actions.

The poor girl was learning what it was to be bound in honor to one man, and love with all her soul another. She ground her teeth and said, "I won't!" But her heart would be almost to bursting when she met his clear, piercing gaze. A peep into her journal now will show her true heart.

Kathie's Journal: "August 15, 18— —For four years Reiba and I have pursued our studies at this dear college. For four years she has been to me what no one could ever have been to me save a mother. For two years I have looked upon Phillip Brompton as a hero to be worshiped by my childish heart, but now I am no longer a child. I felt to-day as I looked into his grand, melancholy eyes that I had passed the gates of childhood. I love him, dear old journal, I love him! I confess to you that my heart is his. But to no other will my secret be revealed, though my heart break keeping it. The oath signed in childhood must be kept. I am bound—bound of my own free will to another, and that other a good, true, honorable man, who will never cause me a moment's sorrow. I will be brave; but oh, how hard!

"September 20th.—For one month have I known of my love for Phillip. For one month have I fought and fought, but 'tis of no use. I cannot drive him from my heart. He is my life—the only man I have ever loved or ever shall love. But I cannot grieve my father—the dear, good, kind father who has always done so much for me! I will be patient and try; but oh! my heart is breaking. Thank God he will never know!"

A Leaf from Reiba's Journal: "November 24, 18— —. What can be troubling Kathie? I have never known her to act so strange before. At times she is gay and bright, almost feverish; at times gloomy and sad, and again pettish and impatient. There must be something on her mind, but what it is I cannot tell. Did I not know she was the soul of honor I would say she loved her young Professor. But bound as she is—oh, heavens! what am I writing? Bound! Has not he been bound for four years, and have I not always worshiped him in my heart? Let me never speak of honor and Katherine.

"December 25th.—Christmas Day, and I am, oh! so miserable and unhappy. My surmise is true and Kathie loves Phillip Brompton. Poor girl! How I pity her. But she must bear it for her father's sake. When I told her, oh! I shall never forget the cry of anguish as she threw her arms about my neck and told me that I was right. 'I do love him, Reiba. I love him with my whole soul! How can I bear it? Poor papa! How grieved he would be to know that the only thing he ever asked of his daughter was the one thing that would break her heart and ruin her life. Help me, Reiba, to keep my sorrow. Promise me you will never tell him!' Of course I could promise her. She will never know my secret, thank God; nor will any one else while there is life and strength in my body to prevent it. God help her! Strengthen her in this her first trial. 'Tis a sad Christmas Day; but in a few months more she can go to her father, and I hope the sight of him may help to give her strength."

From Kathie's Diary: "September 3, 18— —. In one short month my studies will be completed, and I shall go home. On Christmas Day I am to be Leon's bride, and heaven help me. I shall be a loveless bride. I shall leave forever the choice of my heart to wed a man who is good and noble, but whom I can never love as a wife should. My head is throbbing and my brain seems on fire. I can write no more to-night."

Reiba speaks: "September 18th.—I am so troubled about poor Kathie! Her face is so pale and drawn, her eyes so big and sad. What shall I do? I cannot see what my duty is. I shall pray for help, and may God show me what is right and the best for the happiness of my poor girl. Shall I tell her father, or shall I let her marry a man she will never love and ruin her life to unite two estates and gratify a whim? I must think of it more and see how she bears the parting."

Kathie's Journal: "October 10th.—To-morrow the examinations take place, then Reiba and I go back to our old home. To-morrow I take leave of my teachers and all things which have grown dear to me during five years. Can it be that I will look my last on his dear face? Ah, well, this life is filled with sorrows, meetings and farewells and heartbreaks, and scattered along with these are a few joys so brief, so fleet, as to seem like a passing dream of hea— Here I was called to the schoolroom to receive some instructions for to-morrow. Can I write all the joy and heartbreaks crowded into one brief half-hour? We stood alone for one sweet moment, my love and I, and then I knew of the silent agony my love had also borne during that year of sorrow. He loves me even as I love him? Kind Heaven, that though we are parted, our souls will ever be one. I could not bear to know he would ever forget me, although I can never be to him what I would wish. 'Kathie,' pushing the hair from my forehead and looking tenderly and sorrowfully into my eyes, 'Kathie, you must keep your word! But promise me you will never forget me; that you will always keep in your heart a tender thought for him who would gladly have died to give you happiness.'

"Did I promise? Can you ask? Would I ever forget him?

"It was all over at last, and with a tender embrace and a parting caress I fled to my room and—"

Reiba speaks: "October 10th.—Well, it is decided. I know my duty. To-night Kathie was called from the room, and while she was gone I went for a walk in the garden. An hour later I returned and found her in a dead faint on the floor, her journal clasped tightly in her hands, and on her face such a look of pain and suffering as I pray I may never see on human face again.

"When she was herself once more she told me what had occurred. Poor Kathie! But I decided at once, that even though I must break a solemn promise, I would tell her father. I know his kind heart too well to think that he would condemn the idol of his heart to a life of misery. Would I be a true mother and friend to allow her to sacrifice three lives? She must not marry Leon Humphreys! There must be a sacrifice on my part. I must prevent this marriage, though I love him myself. No one knows my secret, and no one shall. I will tell Kathie's father, and she shall have her heart's choice. Phillip Brompton's name is old and honorable, and Kathie has money for them both. Now I must say good night, as to-morrow will be a very trying day. If Kathie can only bear up until after examination all will be well.

"October 11th.—It is all finished at last. This evening we say good-by to all, and under Leon's care we travel back to our old home. Yes, Leon came to-day in the Earl's place to hear the exercises and see us safely home. He looked at me very strangely. I think there was reproach in his glance on account of Kathie's white face, I suppose. But if he only knew he would reproach himself instead of me. In a few short days he shall know all from my own lips. I shall tell the story in the presence of the Earl, Sir Leon and his son. Then we shall see whether he loves Kathie or not. I pray heaven he does not, as I could not bear to give him pain, and the story must be told. Good-by, journal. God only knows when I may open these leaves again."

The next morning early Reiba and Kathie, with Leon for their escort, seated themselves comfortably in the carriage, sent to meet them, and started for home. During the journey Kathie was silent and abstracted, gazing from the carriage window, and starting guiltily whenever spoken to. To keep Leon's attention from Kathie, Reiba kept up a fire of remarks, often causing Leon to stare at her in amazement. But somehow she noticed he did not seem to be impatient, though she was sure her constant chatter must weary him.

As for Leon he could only wonder that the shy stranger, with a freckled face, could have blossomed into so glorious a creature. The hair a beautiful auburn, the skin a clear olive with no color save in the lips, and the eyes—where shall there be found words to paint those glorious orbs, so speaking, so soulful, so tender; great liquid brown lights shining with tender love as they rested on Kathie's face and sparkling with intellect and feeling while talking. What could be more beautiful? thought Leon. Then he shook himself impatiently and forgot her.

At length the Hall was reached, and the Earl met them at the door. Catching sight of his daughter's pale face and sad, heavy eyes, he forgot all else; forgot that Reiba and Leon were waiting to be welcomed; forgot all save his daughter's unhappy face and piteous eyes.

"Kathie, my darling child, what is it, Kathie? I am so shocked. Are you not well?"

"Too much study, papa; but oh! I am so glad to be home with you. Oh, papa, papa!" and she sobbed convulsively in his arms, ending with:

"Don't mind me, father, I am tired, that is all, and so very glad to see you again."

After greeting the Earl, Reiba said good night to all, kissed Kathie and walked on to the cottage, promising to come back in the morning.

"Do not leave me long, Reiba, dear," pleaded Kathie. "I could not bear it just now!"

"I will come soon," she replied, and went away.

How different were the dreams of those in the Hall that night. The Earl was dreaming of the time when two vast estates should be made one, and troubling as to the cause of Kathie's pale face and changed manner. Leon thought of what a bore it was to have to marry so soon; wondered about Kathie's white face, and wished himself in some shady nook where game was plenty and fish would bite. Never a thought for the brown-eyed girl who loved him so dearly. And Kathie—poor lassie! Her dreams were all of her black-eyed lover, so lonely and sad, who loved her so fondly, and whose life could never be cheered by woman's presence.

Her night was spent in tears for her blighted life, and prayers for strength and endurance to carry out her father's wishes and make him happy.

But Reiba, the cottage maid, in her little room—God bless her—was thinking how she could prevent such a sorrow coming to Kathie, and wondering how she could soften the blow for the Earl.

Her brown eyes were still open wide when she was startled by a low moan which came from her nurse's room. On reaching the bedside she found the nurse in a swoon. About daylight she had become conscious, and told Reiba of a heart affection which had troubled her for several years.

"I shall not live long now, Reiba, but before I die there is a confession which I must leave in your hands."

From her neck she drew a narrow black cord, to which was attached a small key. This she placed in Reiba's hands, saying:

"This will unlock the small tin box which has always sat on the shelf by the old clock. In it you will find the papers and letters concerning your mother's marriage and your birth, telling you what you will be surprised to learn, that you are the only child of George—Earl of Crayton—and Miss Reiba Forsyth. Therefore you are the heiress of the Crayton estates and should occupy the position Katherine now fills."

Mrs. Lofton paused from exhaustion, and Reiba closed her hand tightly over her mouth to keep back the moan which arose to her lips. Was she dreaming? Could it really be? That she—she—Reiba was the heiress of the Crayton estates? She started for the little tin box in an agony of impatience, but a groan from the bed brought her to herself and duty.

For three days and nights, assisted by Katherine, she was a faithful watcher by the bedside of the sufferer—then the quiet little soul passed to rest.

Ah, the agony of those hours. Longing to see if the nurse's words were true, yet knowing in her heart they were true, she went about with Katherine in a sort of daze. At length the last sad rites were over, and Reiba was at liberty to search the tin box and to look her position squarely in the face. She was to go to Kathie on the morrow until such a time as she could made arrangements for her future.

With fingers which trembled and heart beating almost to suffocation, she opened the little tin box and took therefrom letters and papers which had been placed there years before. Reverently she opened them and read of her mother's love, her marriage and finally of her own birth. There was the certificate of marriage between George, Earl of Crayton, and Miss Reiba Forsyth, and on the back the date of her birth. There could be no doubt. She was really Katherine's cousin. She could really claim her love and the love of her Uncle Will. But stop! She buried her face in her hands and thought and thought, and when she raised her head she thought it all out, and an old, careworn look had stolen into her face. "I will wait until to-morrow and then I shall be better able to decide," she thought, and she was right in so doing.

That night in Kathie's room they spoke of Phillip Brompton, and with a bitter cry Kathie buried her face in her hands and sobbed aloud:

"How shall I bear it, Reiba? How shall I bear all my life apart from my love? I shall be brave, Reiba; but in the end I shall surely die. I have tried so hard to conquer my repugnance to this marriage with another, but I cannot but think I shall just die in a short time."

Reiba smothered her own grief and pain, and comforted Kathie as well as such grief could be comforted. She would tell the Earl before telling Kathie of her intention. To-morrow Leon and his father would be there and then they should know all.

Through the long, weary night Kathie tossed on her bed, never resting until day streamed through the window. Then she slept a restless slumber from exhaustion. Leaving her asleep Reiba slipped from her bed, and dressing herself in some soft clinging material went down stairs.

At 10 o'clock Leon and his father arrived, and Reiba stealing softly up stairs found Kathie resting and this time quietly. Kissing her gently she left her again.

"Now is my time," she thought, and, with a pale face and beating heart, she walked into the study where the gentlemen were seated.

Leon was strolling about the room whistling strangely out of tune, Reiba thought. Sir Leon and the Earl were trying to keep up a conversation, but evidently expected the girls in any moment, as they looked up with one accord as she entered and asked, with their eyes, "Where is Katherine?"

"Kathie did not rest at all last night, Sir William, and is now resting quietly."

The Earl looked anxiously and Leon inquiringly at Reiba who went on:

"And I thought I would let her rest a few hours, particularly as I have an important communication to make, which it is necessary she should not hear."

They all looked anxiously at the cottage maid.

Reiba folded her hands, one over the other, to give her support; thought of her first day in that room, and related her story. Bravely she maintained her composure until she told of the parting of the lovers, Phillip's loyalty to Katherine and Kathie's determination to do as her father wished. "I may be wrong in telling you this, but I could not see Kathie killing herself in this manner, and do nothing to make her happier. Sir William, you will not force her to a marriage which must be hateful to her, despite the respect she bears the man she would marry; and you," turning to Leon, "would forever rue the day you took a bride who loved another. If I have grieved you, believe me, 'twas for your own sake and the love I bear Kathie."

There were no tears in her eyes, but in her voice, and the beautiful speaking windows of her soul were misty with pain and sorrow.

Sir Leon looked grieved and disappointed; Leon himself relieved, but the Earl's face was pale from grief and rage. "It is well," he said, in stern, angry tones, "that my daughter has a fortune; for never would I give my consent to her marriage with a man penniless and nameless, no matter how worthy or how much they loved."

Then Reiba knew how much the Earl wished for Katherine's marriage with Leon, and she knew also that she had done no good by breaking her promise to Kathie, unless she sacrificed also her estates and name for Kathie's sake. She must always remain Reiba the Cottage Maid.

The Earl took her hand, and there was no unkindness toward her in his face. She clasped his hand in both her own and held it fast. "I have one more speech to make, and that is to ask a favor. Do not tell Kathie of the change, but write with your own hand the letter which will bring her lover. Let his coming be a surprise to her; let the arrangements for her marriage go on, but instead of Leon Humphreys give her to the man of her love. By doing so you will insure her happiness and win the life-long gratitude of Reiba."

The Earl stroked her hand. "You are a noble woman. It shall be as you wish."

The subdued excitement in her speech and manner had conquered the Earl, and that night the letter was written which brought gladness to Phillip's face, tears of joy to his eyes and gave Kathie the husband she loved.

Reiba's strength was almost gone as she left the room and Leon's eyes followed her with a strange gleam in their depths. "No thought but for Kathie," he thought, yet knew, somehow, that it pained Reiba to give him pain.

"What a grand looking woman she was," he thought. "How beautiful and noble. Her head set so proudly and covered with such magnificent auburn hair. Surely any man would be proud to have such a wife." He pulled himself together with a start, and taking his hat went into the garden to think and smoke.

"Cause me grief," he muttered, "well I am almost ashamed to say I am glad of it. I am free again. Poor Kathie! how she has suffered; yet she would have married me, and both would have repented ever after. I am infinitely obliged to the cottage maid."

Up in her room Reiba paced up and down until the bell ringing told her 'twas time for dinner. She had fought her fight and conquered. She had sacrificed all for the girl she loved, and would go out into the world and battle for herself. But she must not break down now; she must be brave until after Katherine's marriage. When she saw her happy once more nothing would matter. She would be willing to go away.

She dressed with care, and going to Kathie's room found her ready for dinner. Kathie had spared no pains and looked very beautiful, but could not hide the pale, tired, wistful look of her sweet face. The dinner was an ordeal for all, and they were all glad when it was over.

The Earl watched Kathie closely, and was much grieved by the look of pain in her eyes, and the drawn look about her mouth. After dinner Leon and his father went home, Leon promising to come again soon, and it was a sad party left at the Hall. But Reiba was the one who talked about bright things; it was Reiba who read to the Earl, and who opened the grand piano and played and sang until Kathie was calmer than for months before, and the Earl felt happier and better reconciled to the coming marriage.

"If I can keep Reiba with me," he thought, "I shall not mind so much." Poor girl! he could not know that to stay at the Hall and know that she was the rightful owner, yet never say a word, would soon have killed the cottage maid. She was capable of great sacrifice, but could not live in its presence and make no sign. She must leave as soon as Kate was happily married.

Day by day the Earl saw his daughter grow more languid, pale and morbid, and he knew that Reiba had spoken truly, and that to keep her from the man she loved would kill her. At last the day came when Phillip was expected. The Earl had taken the carriage under pretext of going for a drive and gone to the train to meet him.

Kathie lay on the sofa in the drawing-room while Reiba sat near reading to her. The autumn sun shone through the window, warm and bright, touching the dark silken head caressingly and lingering with greatest love on Kathie's golden locks. There was a sound of carriage wheels. "Papa's coming," murmured Kathie. Reiba closed her book, walked to the window, looked out, then left the room, and Kathie turned her face to the wall with a tired sigh. She always looked toward the wall in those days. Ah, Kathie! happier days are coming.

There were steps in the hall now; papa was coming to talk to her. She did not turn her head. The door opened and the steps came into the room. Some one bent over her; she opened her eyes.

"Phillip!"

"Katherine!"

"Oh, my darling!" and Kathie was in her lover's arms; his kisses on her face, her eyes wet with happy tears.

Of course, it was all smooth after this. There were explanations all round, and every one was happy. Every one? What of Reiba? Did she feel happy? She felt repaid a thousand times for her sacrifice, but happy she could not be. Kathie was so happy, and she and her father loved her so much she would force herself to be contented.

So on Christmas Day Katherine Drayton was married to the man she loved, attended by Leon Humphreys and Reiba Lofton. What use to go into detail concerning the wedding. Every one knows what a wedding is like. There were flowers, of course. There are always flowers where there is love. There were happy faces and happier hearts, and only Reiba knew at what a price it had all been bought. How lovely was the bride; but how grandly beautiful was the bridesmaid. Her beauty and grace were a nine-days' wonder with the fashion and wealth gathered there. On this night Leon felt he almost loved her; but he shook the feeling off and in three days was away on his wanderings. But go where he would he never forgot the beautiful woman who bade him good-bye with such a despairing face, and such sorrow in her voice.

And now Reiba was going. In vain Kathie wept and begged. In vain the old Earl pleaded. She was firm. She would ever remember their goodness with gratitude, but could not be content to live dependent on their bounty. And while the Earl grieved to part with her, he could not but admire her more for her independence. So, in the first days of January, Reiba started for the New World, leaving behind her all this life contained for her. She took with her the little tin box.

Away over the ocean went Reiba, leaving all behind her. Name, home, wealth and friends, all were sacrificed to her love for Kathie. She must forever remain unknown, save for her goodness; forever remain poor, save what she earned by hard toil. Well, she must bear it, and not complain, since it had all been done of her own free will and because she thought it her duty.

On board the ship which carried Reiba away were passengers of all descriptions and ages. There were young men and old men and boys. There were young ladies, old ladies, girls and babies. There were rough seamen and polished gentlemen. Ladies with titles, and serving-women. But one and all bowed down to Reiba's beauty and sweetness, and many were the compassionate glances and sympathetic remarks which her sad face occasioned. The sympathy was never expressed to Reiba, for there was something about her which said: "Sympathy I do not need. I am alone, because I desire to be."

Among the passengers were an old couple from Yankee land who had been to England with their only child, a son, and left him behind in a consumptive's grave. They grew to love Reiba as their own, and her heart went out to them, for she knew and could understand their loneliness.

Half the journey was over, when a squall came up. The night grew darker and darker, the wind roared, the lurid lightning painted the sky with fire; the waters seethed and moaned as if in agony, and the good ship was tossed about like a feather in a hurricane.

"She leaks!" cried the seamen in terror, and there was the sound of human cries, the hoarse shouting of the officers in command, the roaring waters and pealing thunder, all combining to make night hideous.

Through it all Ruba went about speaking words of comfort, and many a poor mother's heart was cheered by her bright words of the home beyond, "where sorrow nor storms never come."

As for herself she may be pardoned for thinking for a moment of all her sorrows, and rejoicing that they would soon be over. But she put the thought from her with horror, and waited and prayed in patience. It was soon found that the ship could not be saved, and the boats were lowered and all made ready to leave the sinking vessel.

Reiba would gladly have yielded her place to some one with home and dear ones, but she found herself being carried along with the human tide, and before she could remonstrate was lowered into the boat.

They were none too soon. Scarcely had they pushed off when the ship, groaning every timber, settled, sunk lower and lower, and all at once disappeared, carrying down many passengers and her gallant crew. For many days Reiba thought of those who were buried 'neath the blue waters of the Atlantic, and many a night started from her sleep with the human death cry ringing in her ears.

Some days later, worn with hunger and fatigue, and sick from want of sleep, they were picked up by a commercial vessel bound for New York, and found themselves landed safely.

Mr. and Mrs. Higgins pursuaded Reiba to go home with them for a few days' rest. Worn and ill with her long voyage and many trials, Reiba finally consented, and in a few days found herself on one of those breezy, sunlit farms in Maine, where the wind brings the scent of pine and green fields meet the eye at every turn.

How thankful our heroine was to reach this spot where she could rest and forget her troubles for a time. For a few weeks she enjoyed her rest, and then she began to think of going out into the wide world to earn her daily bread. Something of her past life she told to her new friends, always touching lightly upon her own trials, and forgetting to mention her "sacrifice." They knew why she had come to the New World, and loved her the better for her courage.

A few days after Reiba had told them she must go Mr. Higgins came in, and in an abrupt and earnest manner asked her if she could "teach skule?" "We've bin thinkin' fur quite a spell of gittin' up a class fur the gals and bys, and you might as well hev the money ez eny one, an' I reckon you kin teach 'em."

And so it was arranged. Reiba was to undertake to teach the children that lived near enough to go to school, and was allowed the sum of sixty dollars and her board for her trouble. 'Twas an ample sum for all her wants, and she could live on with the old folks who had proved such kind friends to her. An old barn was arranged and fixed up for the purpose until such a time as a new one could be built, and here, on a fine Monday morning in April, Reiba Crayton, heiress to the Crayton estates, began her sway as a "country school ma'am" in a small district in Maine.

Things went on smoothly, the children grew to love their teacher, and took an interest in their studies. The parents thought there was no one like Reiba, and to Reiba they all came in their trouble, for they were sure of comfort.

There were many tourists from the large cities to the woods of Maine during the summer months, hunting in the woods and fishing in the numerous streams. The "school marm" made many friends among these, and many a gentleman of wealth and culture would have given much to have her share his home. But for all these there was a gentle nay. There always came before her the deep, blue eyes of Leon Humphreys, and the kind smile he always gave her. The white brow and golden hair, the tender mouth, shaded by its fair, silky mustache, always shone before Reiba's eyes, and she felt that to none other could her promise to "love, honor and obey" be given.

Three years passed, and Reiba's life was becoming almost unbearable, when a little incident occurred which stirred her into life.

The little tin box she guarded so carefully was always kept sitting on the little mantel over the fire-place. One night the inmates of the Higgins' household were aroused by the cry of fire. When Reiba awoke her room was all ablaze. She had only time to snatch her clothing lying on a chair, catch the little box from the mantel and make her escape. In going down the stairs her foot caught in the matting and she stumbled and fell, dropping the little box on the stairs. In her hurry and excitement she forgot the box and left it. When she thought of it in the morning and looked among the ruins it was gone.

The girl who did the cooking for Mrs. Higgins had often cared for Reiba's room, and noticed the little tin box. She knew Reiba had money somewhere, and concluded it must be there. She had been on the ground early after the fire, and seeing the little box lying there sound as when 'twas dropped, picked it up and carried it away with her. Upon opening it she found nothing but papers, and not being able to read these closed the box and put it away for future reference, and Reiba concluded it was lost in the fire, nor knew for many months that it was in the hands of Sally Brown.

The house was rebuilt, school went on and Reiba's life was much the same as before. She grew restless and dissatisfied. She felt she could not stand her own life, and longed for a change in the monotony of her path. She little knew how soon a change was to come.

It was October now. The grass was golden; the bleak winds swept the leaves of crimson and gold from the trees and left their branches naked and shivering. The birds were beginning to talk to their mates of seeking a warmer climate.

The children had nodded a good night to their teacher, and had trooped home, leaving her alone. The tiny clock on the desk gazed at her with a countenance almost sympathetic; its little hands pointed to 4, and its silvery voice chimed the hour.

Reiba's eyes stared softly and sadly at it for a moment, then her face was bowed on the desk. She thought it all over then. All her life since she had known Kathie. Before that she had not lived at all. She thought of the many days spent at the old Hall; the first birthday dinner; would she ever forget that, or the many days of joy and sorrow at the Hall, crowded into her life since then? She thought of those days at school; of her earnest work and Kathie's passionate grief and misery. She wondered if Kathie was happy now; surely she was. It would be terrible to think her sacrifice had been for naught.

She thought of their return to the Hall, and of Kathie's marriage. She thought of the nurse's death and her discovery—finally of her departure. But most of all she thought of Leon Humphreys, and her own wasted, passionate, longing love for him. The tears were streaming through her fingers now; her form was shaking with convulsive sobs.

Down the road a solitary horseman was riding shivering in the bleak wind. He came up the road to the little schoolhouse, his head bowed on his chest, his eyes sad and thoughtful.

The wind whistled around the corner; the fire in the stove died out; Reiba was quiet now and prayed for strength. The solitary horseman rode on.

The tiny clock ticked slower now—the hands moved wearily. There was a step on the porch; the little clock stopped as Reiba rose with suspended breath and turned her eyes toward the door.

On the threshold stood a bronzed and bearded stranger. Reiba's face was white as death, but, with an indescribable longing, she stretched her hands toward him. In another instant they were taken; then she was gathered close, close to his throbbing heart.

When she would have withdrawn he clasped her closer—"This is your place, my darling. Here, here close to my heart;" and then he told her how since he had left her he had thought constantly of her. How at first he would not allow himself to dream of happiness with her, but his heart turned to her more and more. "You are the one woman for me, Reiba; and now that I know you love me I can not be content until you are mine. You must come with me to England where you shall bless my life with your sweet presence."

"But, Leon, do you know you are marrying a woman without home or money; without even a name?" and she hung her head while the crimson flooded neck and face.

"Never mind about friends, home and money. All that I have shall be yours. As for name—a spotless name is the one the angels write in the Golden Book," and he kissed her face reverently.

The wind had ceased moaning, and did not blow so cold; the fire in the stove blazed brightly, and the little clock sprung into life and ticked merrily on. The loneliness was dying out of Reiba's life, and her face was transfigured with happiness, and so they walked home hand in hand, their faces toward the sun.

What need to dwell upon the sorrowful farewell of Reiba and her warm friends—the happiness of once more being on English soil.

They were married in the Little Church in Maine, where Reiba had so long worshiped, and two months later were welcomed by Kathie and Phillip, while the Earl clasped her in his arms with a fervent "Thank God."

Why was it that, in the midst of her happiness, Reiba's thoughts flew to the little tin box, and she shuddered at the thought of its ever having been found. Kathie was so happy, and she could not bear to think she should know what she had done, and with Leon's love she had no need for the Crayton estates. Had she not her husband's love? Let Kathie keep the money. They would manage some way to live.

And Reiba was installed as mistress of the Humphreys' ancient home, and surely no proud Lady Humphrey before her had ever been more beautiful or gracious; and day by day her husband loved her more dearly, and Sir Leon grew to worship his son's lovely wife.

The months passed on, and Reiba's happiness knew no bounds; but one day looking from her chamber window she saw a strange figure coming up to the entrance. Was it? Could it be? Yes, surely it was Sally Brown; but Reiba's eyes dilated, and her face turned ghastly pale as she saw in the girl's hand a little tin box.

She pressed her hand tightly over her eyes as she waited. Would she summon her? No. The bell rang and the girl asked for the master. Could she find some way to reach her before he could see her? She rushed to the door. No! She was too late! The girl had entered the library. Heaven help her! What could she do? She closed her eyes and leaned her head wearily on her hands.

Five—ten minutes passed—twenty. Would she never go? She paced the room in a frenzy of impatience. Ten minutes more—the hall door opened and shut. The girl was gone. She was regaining her composure now. She heard her husband's step outside the door. She forced a smile to her lips and met him with a brave heart.

"Reiba, darling"—his voice was as caressing as ever—"here is a little—but you are ill, my darling. Your face is ghastly and your hand like ice. What is it, dear?"

Could she believe her own ears? Had he read what was in the box, and yet spoken to her so? He spoke on.

"Here is a little tin box which was brought to me by a Yankee girl, and which, she said, belonged to you. I have not looked at the contents, thinking did you desire me to know them you would show them to me yourself."

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him passionately. Surprised him, for she was not given to caressing him with all her love.

"You shall know, my husband. I have too long kept it from you. But promise me you will not despise me. I thought it was for the best."

He stared at her in amazement, but gave the desired promise, saying:

"I could not despise you whatever you did."

She then opened the box with unsteady fingers, and taking out the papers held them, clasped tightly in her hand, while she told her story.

"I did it to make Kathie happy, Leon; and you shall judge whether I have been right or wrong."

And when Leon had read those papers he came and knelt at his wife's feet, and looking into her face said:

"I am puzzled to know whether you are an angel or a mortal."

"And we need never tell her," asked the happy wife.

"Never, my treasure, unless you desire."

And they sat hand in hand and watched the fire devour the papers which made Leon Humphrey's wife heiress to the Crayton estates, and to the end she was Reiba, the cottage maid—to her husband, the sweet, pure woman of his love.

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