











"Father," laughed the daughter, "isn't this rather youngish?"



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## ***ILLUSTRATIONS***

"Father," laughed the daughter, "isn't this rather young-ish?" *Frontispiece*

Indeed it was clear that to go away would be unfair.

"Arthur Winslow, I give you five minutes."

"But to know every day and hour that I'm watched."

"I am waiting busily for her slayer."

"Arthur! Arthur! can't you speak?"



## BYLOW HILL

### I

#### RUTH AND GODFREY

The old street, keeping its New England Sabbath afternoon so decently under its majestic elms, was as goodly an example of its sort as the late seventies of the century just gone could show. It lay along a north-and-south ridge, between a number of aged and unsmiling cottages, fronting on cinder sidewalks, and alternating irregularly with about as many larger homesteads that sat back in their well-shaded gardens with kindlier dignity and not so grim a self-assertion. Behind, on the west, these gardens dropped swiftly out of sight to a hidden brook, from the farther shore of which rose the great wooded hill whose shelter from the bitter northwest had invited the old Puritan founders to choose the spot for their farming village of one street, with a Byington and a Winslow for their first town officers. In front, eastward, the land declined gently for a half mile or so, covered, by modern prosperity, with a small, stanch town, and bordered by a pretty river winding among meadows of hay and grain. At the northern end, instead of this gentle decline, was a precipitous cliff side, close to whose brow a wooden bench, that ran half-way round a vast sidewalk tree, commanded a view of the valley embracing nearly three-quarters of the compass.

In civilian's dress, and with only his sea-bronzed face and the polished air of a pivot gun to tell that he was of the navy, Lieutenant Godfrey Winslow was slowly crossing the rural way with Ruth Byington at his side. He had the look of, say, twenty-eight, and she was some four years his junior. From her father's front gate they were passing toward the large grove garden of the young man's own home, on the side next the hill and the sunset. On the front porch, where the two had just left him, sat the war-crippled father

of the girl, taking pride in the placidity of the face she once or twice turned to him in profile, and in the buoyancy of her movements and pose.

His fond, unspoken thought went after her, that she was hiding some care again,—her old, sweet trick, and her mother's before her.

He looked on to Godfrey. "There's endurance," he thought again. "You ought to have taken him long ago, my good girl, if you want him at all." And here his reflections faded into the unworded belief that she would have done so but for his, her own father's, being in the way.

The pair stopped and turned half about to enjoy the green-arched vista of the street, and Godfrey said, in a tone that left his companion no room to overlook its personal intent, "How often, in my long absences, I see this spot!"

"You wouldn't dare confess you didn't," was her blithe reply.

"Oh yes, I should. I've tried not to see it, many a time."

"Why, Godfrey Winslow!" she laughed. "That was very wrong!"

"It was very useless," said the wanderer, "for there was always the same one girl in the midst of the picture; and that's the sort a man can never shut out, you know. I don't try to shut it out any more, Ruth."

The girl spoke more softly. "I wish I could know where Leonard is," she mused aloud.

"Did you hear me, Ruth? I say I don't try any more, now."

"Well, that's right! I wonder where that brother of mine is?"

The baffled lover had to call up his patience. "Well, that's right, too," he laughed; "and I wonder where that brother of mine is? I wonder if they're together?"

They moved on, but at the stately entrance of the Winslow garden they paused again. The girl gave her companion a look of distress, and the young man's brow darkened. "Say it," he said. "I see what it is."

"You speak of Arthur"—she began.

"Well?"

"What did you make out of his sermon this morning?"

"Why, Ruth, I— What did you make out of it?"

"I made out that the poor boy is very, very unhappy."

"Did you? Well, he is; and in a certain way I'm to blame for it."

The girl's smile was tender. "Was there ever anything the matter with Arthur, and you didn't think you were in some way to blame for it?"

"Oh, now, don't confuse me with Leonard. Anyhow, I'm to blame this time! Has Isabel told you anything, Ruth?"

"Yes, Isabel has told me!"

"Told you they are engaged?"

"Told me they are engaged!"

"Well," said the young man, "Arthur told me last night; and I took an elder brother's liberty to tell him he had played Leonard a vile trick."

"Godfrey!"

"That would make a much happier nature than Arthur's unhappy, wouldn't it?"

Ruth was too much pained to reply, but she turned and called cheerily, "Father, do you know where Leonard is?"

The father gathered his voice and answered huskily, laying one hand upon his chest, and with the other gesturing up by the Winslow elm to the grove behind it.

She nodded. "Yes!... With Arthur, you say?... Yes!... Thank you!... Yes!" She passed with Godfrey through the wide gate.

"That's like Leonard," said the lover. "He'll tell Arthur he hasn't done a thing he hadn't a perfect right to do."

"And Arthur has not, Godfrey. He has only been less chivalrous than we should have liked him to be. If he had been first in the field, and Leonard had come in and carried her off, you would have counted it a perfect mercy all round."

"Ho-oh! it would have been! Leonard would have made her happy. Arthur never can, and she can never make him so. But what he has done is not all: look how he did it! Leonard was his beloved and best friend" –

"Except his brother Godfrey" –

"Except no one, Ruth, unless it's you. I'm neither persuasive nor kind, nor often with him. Proud of him I was, and never prouder than when I knew him to be furiously in love with her, while yet, for pure, sweet friendship's sake, he kept standing off, standing off."

"I wish you might have seen it, Godfrey. It was so beautiful – and so pitiful!"

"It was manly, – gentlemanly; and that was enough. Then all at once he's taken aback! All control of himself gone, all self-suppression, all conscience" –

"The conscience has returned," said the girl.

"Oh, not to guide him! Only to goad him! Fifty consciences can't honorably undo the mischief now!"

"Did I not write you that there was already, then, a coolness between her and Leonard?"

"Yes; but the whole bigness and littleness of Arthur's small, bad deed lies in the fact that, though he knew that coolness was but a momentary tiff, with Isabel in the wrong, he took advantage of it to push his suit in between and spoil as sweet a match as two hearts were ever making."

"It was more than a tiff, Godfrey; it" –

"Not a bit more! not – a – bit!"

"Yes! – yes – it was a problem! a problem how to harmonize two fine natures keyed utterly unlike. Leonard saw that. That is why he moved so slowly."

"Hmm!" The lover stared away grimly. "I know something about slowness. I suppose it's a virtue – sometimes."

"I think so," said the girl, caressing a flower.

"Ah, well!" responded the other. "She has chosen a nature now that—Oh me!... Ruth, I shall speak to her mother! I am the only one who can. I'll see Mrs. Morris some time this evening, and lay the whole thing out to her as we four see it who have known one another almost from the one cradle."

Ruth smiled sadly. "You will fail. I think the matter will have to go on as it is going. And if it does, you must remember, Godfrey, we do not really know but they may work out the happiest union. At any rate, we must help them to try."

"If they insist on trying, yes; and that will be the best for Leonard."

"The very best. One thing we do know, Godfrey: Arthur will always be a passionate lover, and dear Isabel is as honest and loyal as the day is long."

"The day is not long; this one is not—to me. It's most lamentably short, and to-morrow I must be gone again. I have something to say to you, Ruth, that"—

The maiden gave him a look of sweet protest, which suddenly grew remote as she murmured, "Isabel and her mother are coming out of their front door."



## II

### ISABEL

There were two dwellings in the Winslow garden,—one as far across at the right of the Byington house as the other was at the left. The one on the right may have contained six or eight bedchambers; the other had but three. The larger stood withdrawn from the public way, a well-preserved and very attractive example of colonial architecture, refined to the point of delicacy in the grace and harmony of its details. Here dwelt Arthur Winslow, barely six weeks a clergyman, alone but for two or three domestics and the rare visits of Godfrey, his only living relation. The other and older house, in the garden's southern front corner, was a gray gambrel-roofed cottage, with its threshold at the edge of the sidewalk; and it was from this cottage that Isabel and her mother stepped, gratefully answering the affectionate wave of Ruth's hand,—Mrs. Morris with the dignity of her forty-odd years, and Isabel with a sudden eager fondness. The next moment the two couples were hidden from each other by the umbrageous garden and by the tall white fence, in which was repeated the architectural grace of the larger house.

Mother and daughter conversed quietly, but very busily, as they came along this enclosure; but presently they dropped their subject to bow cordially across to the father of Ruth, and when he endeavored to say something to them Mrs. Morris moved toward him. Isabel took a step or two more in the direction of the Winslow elm and its inviting bench, but then she also turned. She was of a moderate feminine stature and perfect outline, her step elastic, her mien self-contained, and her face so young that a certain mature tone in her mellow voice was often the cause of Ruth's fond laughter. As winsome, too, she was, as she was beautiful, and "as pink as a rose," said the old-time soldier to himself, as he came down his short front walk, throwing half his glances forward to her, quite unaware that he was equally the object of her admiration.

Though white-haired and somewhat bent he was still slender and handsome, a most worthy figure against the background of the red brick house, whose weathered walls contrasted happily with the

blossoming shrubs about their base, and with the green of lawn and trees.

"Good-afternoon, Isabel. I was saying to your mother, I hope such days as this are some offset for the Southern weather and scenery you have had to give up."

"You shouldn't tempt our Southern boastfulness, General," Isabel replied, with an air of meek chiding. She had a pretty way of skirmishing with men which always brought an apologetic laugh from her mother, but which the General had discovered she never used in a company of less than three.

"Oh! ho, ho!" laughed Mrs. Morris, who was just short, plump, and pretty enough to laugh to advantage. "Why, General,"—she sobered abruptly, and she was just pretty and plump and short enough to do this well, also,— "my recovered health is offset enough for me."

"For *us*, my dear," said the daughter. "My mother's restored health is offset enough for us, General. Indeed, for me"—addressing the distant view—"there is no call for off-set; any landscape or climate is perfect that has such friends in it as—as this one has."

"Oh! ho, ho!" laughed the mother again. Nobody ever told the Morrises they had a delicious Southern accent, and their words are given here exactly as they thought they spoke them.

"My dear," persisted Isabel, rebukingly, "I mean such friends as Ruth Byington."

Mrs. Morris let go her little Southern laugh once more. "Don't you believe her, General—don't you believe her. She means you every bit as much as she means Ruth. She means everybody on Bylow Hill."

"I'm at the mercy of my interpreter," said Isabel. "But I thought"—her eyes went out upon the skyline again—"I thought that men—that men—I thought that men—My dear, you've made me forget what I thought!"

They laughed, all three. Isabel, with a playful sigh, clutched her mother's hand, and the pair drew off and moved away to the bench.

"He puts you in good spirits," said the mother, breaking a silence.

"Good spirits! He puts me in pure heartache. Oh, why did you tell him?"

"Tell him? My child! I have not told him!"

"Oh, mother, do you not see you've told him point-blank that it's all settled?"

"No, dearie, no! I only see that your distress is making you fanciful. But why should he not be told, Isabel?"

"I'm not ready! Oh, I'm not ready! It may suit him well enough to hear it, for he knows Leonard is too fine and great for me; but I'm not ready to tell him."

"My darling, he knows you are good enough for any Leonard he can bring."

"Oh yes, on the plane of the Ten Commandments." The girl smiled unhappily.

"But precious, he loves Arthur deeply, and thinks the world of him."

"Mother, what is it like, to love deeply?"

The query was ignored. "And the old gentleman is fond of you, sweetheart."

"Oh, he likes me. What a tame old invalid that word 'fond' has grown to be! You can be fond of two or three persons at once, nowadays. My soul! I wish I were fond of Arthur Winslow in the old mad way the word meant when it was young!"

"Pshaw, dearie! you'll be fond enough of him, once you're his. He's brilliant, upright, loving and lovable. You see, and say, he is so, and I know your fondness will grow with every day and every experience, happy or bitter."

"Yes.... Yes, I could not endure not to give my love bountifully wherever it rightly belongs. But oh, I wish I had it ready to-day,—a fondness to match his!"

"Now, Isabel! Why, pet, thousands of happy and loving wives will tell you"—

"Oh, I know what they will tell me."

"They'll not tell you they get along without love, dearie. But ten years from now, my daughter, not how fond you were when you first joined hands, but what you have" —

"Oh yes,—been to each other, done for each other, borne from each other, will be the true measure. Oh, of course it will; but there's so much in the right start!"

"Beyond doubt! Understand me, precious: if you have the least ground to fear" —

"Mother! mother! No! no! What! afraid I may love some one else? Never! never! Oh, without boasting, and knowing what I am as well as Leonard Byington knows" —

"Oh, pshaw! Leonard Byington!"

"He knows me, mother,—as if he lived at a higher window that looked down into my back yard." The speaker smiled.

"Then he knows," exclaimed the mother, "you're true gold!"

"Yes, but a light coin."

"My pet! He knows you're the tenderest, gentlest dear he ever saw."

"But neither brave nor strong."

"Oh, you not brave! you not strong! You're the lovingest, truest" —

"Only inclined to be a bit too hungry after sympathy, dear."

"You never bid for it, love, never."

"Well, no matter; I shall never love any one but myself too much. I think I shall some day love Arthur as I wish I could love him now. I never did really love Leonard,—I couldn't; I haven't the stature. That was my trouble, dearie: I hadn't the stature. I never shall have; and if it's he you are thinking of, you are wasting your dear, sweet care. But he's going to be our best and nearest friend, mother,—he and Ruth and Godfrey, together and alike. We've so agreed, Arthur and I. Oh, I'm not going to come in here and turn the sweet old nickname of this happy spot into a sneer."

"Then why are you not happy, precious?"

"Happy? Why, my dear, I am happy!"