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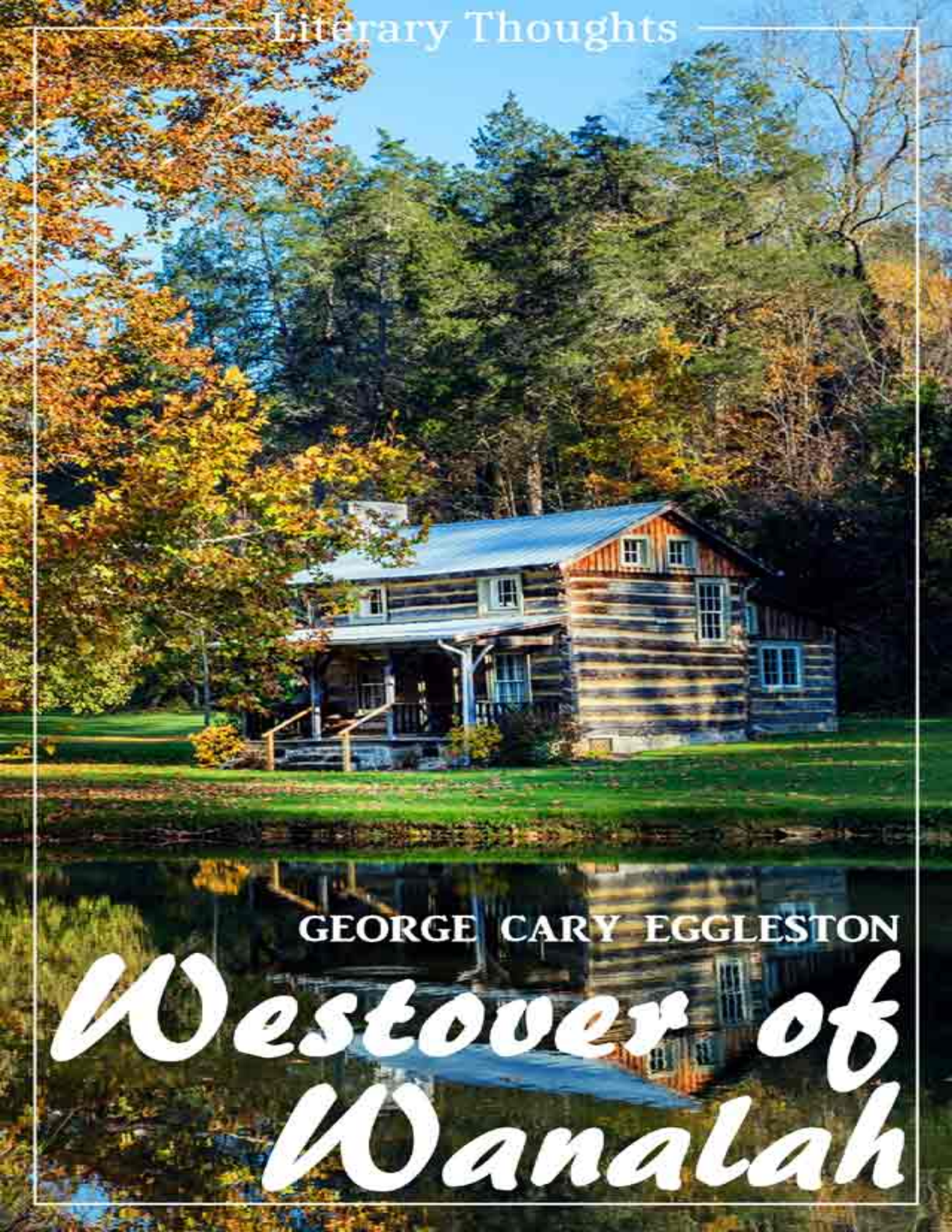

GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON

Westover of Wanalah

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by George Cary Eggleston

Literary Thoughts Edition presents

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CHAPTER I – PERIL AND PASSION

One midsummer morning in the late eighteen-fifties, Boyd Westover of Wanalah was riding along a Virginia plantation road, accompanied by half a dozen hounds, for whose discipline and restraint he carried a long, flexible black-snake whip. The weapon played the part of sceptre rather than that of sword. The young man had no intention of striking the dogs with it, but whenever their exuberance broke bounds he cracked the lash in air, making a report like that of a pistol shot, and the reminder of his authority was quite sufficient for purposes of canine discipline.

He was not hunting. He was merely riding to a distant part of the plantation he controlled, to inspect the work of the negroes there and to give directions for its proper doing. But he liked the company of his dogs and enjoyed their mad relish of the morning.

The glory of it gladdened his own spirit in spite of the vexing problems that were never quite absent from his mind.

Boyd Westover, a young man of not more than twenty-three or twenty-four years, had never known a serious care until the spring of that year. Then a burden of responsibility had fallen upon him that threatened to bend even his broad shoulders beneath its weight.

His father had died suddenly in the early spring, leaving a widow and this one son who in the ordinary course of affairs became administrator of the estate and master of the plantation.

Then it was that the burden fell upon him. The plantation was an unusually large one, and its late owner had been accounted the richest man in all the region round about, just as his forbears for generations past had been. Wanalah, the ancestral seat of the family, had been for two hundred years the home of a hospitable, high living, high mettled race of men and women, but during the reign of Boyd Westover's father the hospitality of Wanalah had outdone itself in lavishness. There were always guests in numbers there, and a multitude of servants were withheld from profitable industry to minister to their comfort. There were thoroughbred horses enough in the stables to mount half a company of cavalry, and a like profusion was apparent in the case of every other provision for enjoyment and the unstinted entertainment of guests. In brief the late master of Wanalah had kept open house for all gentlemanly comers.

But when Boyd Westover took his degree at the University in early June and returned to Wanalah to assume his duties as administrator, he learned for the first time that the plantation had not been earning the cost of all this high living. There was not only the hereditary debt upon the place—a debt that so great a plantation, wisely conducted, might have borne comfortably—but added to it was a confused mass of fresh debts accumulated during his father's lifetime and in consequence of his extravagance.

The entertainment of pleasure-seeking guests was suspended now, of course, during the period of mourning, and in view of the ill health into which his mother had fallen since the shock of his father's sudden death, the suspension seemed likely to endure for a long period to come.

In the meantime Boyd Westover was both perplexed and appalled by the magnitude of the problem he was set to solve. For a time he doubted even the solvency of the estate, but later reckonings had shown him that this fear was not justified, though the fact brought small relief to his mind, for peculiar reasons connected with the character of the property itself. If he might have sold out everything, he could have paid off all the debts, leaving a small but sufficient competency for his mother's support. As for himself, he gave no thought for the future. He was young, strong and fit to meet fate unarmed.

But he could not sell the property without unpardonable offence to his own soul and to the sentiment of the community which was to him the world. For by far the greater part of that property and altogether the most salable part of it consisted of the negroes, every one of whom had been born on Wanalah plantation as their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents had been before them. Among the high class Virginians—the class to which Boyd Westover belonged by immemorial inheritance—it was held to be a shamefully impossible thing to sell a negro except for incorrigible crime, or for the purpose of bringing a man and wife together, on one plantation.

"I simply will not sell the servants," the young man said to himself when matters seemed at their worst. "Rather than do that, I'll run them all off north, set them free and let the estate fall into bankruptcy."

Since that time the young man's close study of the situation had convinced him that neither of these courses was necessary. By cutting down the force of house servants to the measure of his own and his mother's modest needs, and putting every able-bodied negro at profitable work in the

crops, he was confident that he could make the plantation carry its load of debt and slowly reduce it.

That was now his task, and in spite of the glory of the midsummer morning his mind was busy planning ways and means, when suddenly a combined baying from the hounds arrested his attention. Looking up he saw a young woman on horseback in a pasture not far ahead—a young woman in difficulty and sore danger.

Streamers of flaming red—the reason for which he could in no wise guess—were flying from her shoulders and a maddened bull of huge bulk was charging her with the fury of a bovine demon.

Instantly the young man plunged the rowels into the flanks of his horse. An eight-rail fence lay in his way, but there was no time in which to throw off even one of its rails. Without a thought of pause he urged his horse toward it at the top of his speed, determined to force him over it or through it as the case might be. The weight of the steed and the speed at which he was moving would be sufficient, Boyd Westover thought, to crush a way through the barrier. It was likely to cost the beautiful animal his life, but what of that? There was another life at stake, in rescue of which the young man was ready to sacrifice even his own—for the life in peril was that of the woman he loved, the woman who had awakened all the passion, all the tenderness, all the chivalry of his brave young soul. To save her he would have doomed any and every other living thing to cruel death.

The horse he rode seemed to realize the perilous choice his rider was forcing upon him and to choose the safer but far

more difficult course. Putting forth all his superb strength in utmost endeavor, he cleared the barrier at a flying leap.

As he did so his rider saw to his horror that the young woman's mount had faltered in her frightened flight, and in the next instant the beautiful mare was lifted bodily from the ground, impaled upon the sharp horns of the bull and evidently done to death by the goring. As the animal fell the young woman was hurled forward half a dozen yards, and before the wrath-blinded bull could gather himself together for a charge upon her prostrate form, Boyd Westover forced his own horse between the bull and his victim and with three or four rapid swishes of the cruel black-snake whip across the animal's face and eyes, sent him staggering back.

The delay, as the young man knew, would be but for a few seconds, but these proved sufficient for his purpose. Turning his horse toward the unconscious girl, he hooked his left knee around the cantle of his saddle and, hanging almost head downwards, seized her about the waist. Recovering his position, he placed her across the horse's withers. The bull was almost upon him now, but a sharp touch of the spurs caused the horse to spring forward at a full run in time to save himself and his riders, though the escape was so narrow that one of the bull's horns tore an ugly gash in the calf of Boyd Westover's leg.

The body of the girl hung limp across the withers, so that her rescuer knew not whether she lived or had been killed by her fall. Until his horse cleared the fence again—this time scattering the upper rails as he did so—there was no time for inquiry. But once out of the field, the young man reined in the frantic creature, and lifting the girl's head to his shoulder, felt her fluttering breath upon his cheek.

HER RESCUER KNEW NOT WHETHER SHE LIVED.—*Page 8.*

"Thank God she lives!" he exclaimed with reverent fervor, but his efforts to rouse her to consciousness were unavailing.

"It may be only a faint," he thought, but such fainting as he had seen among women had been far less enduring than

this, and the memory of that fact greatly alarmed him.

He reflected that in any case the shock produced by the dashing of water into the face is desirable at such times, and turning his horse's head he rode down a slope into a shaded, grass-carpeted dell, where a bubbling spring arose. Gently laying the girl on the greensward, but resting her head in his lap, he dashed handfuls of water into her face, with the result of arousing her almost at once. When she opened her eyes they were vacant and dreamy, like those of one only half awakened from sleep, but a few moments later the light came back into them, and she spoke.

"Is it you, Boyd? Then you're not dead, as I dreamed you were."

"Oh, no, I'm not hurt," he replied—ignoring his lacerated leg—"but you mustn't talk yet. Lie still till you feel better." And with that he gently passed his hand over her eyes, closing them.

She lay quiet for a minute or two seemingly asleep, and he, moved by a sudden impulse—whether of passion or pity he knew not—bent over and pressed his lips to hers—gently uttering her name—"Margaret."

Instantly he repented, as she opened her eyes and with a flushing face tried to raise herself to a sitting posture, saying as she made the effort.

"I reckon you mustn't do that."

But the effort to rise was futile. Sharp pain caused her to grow pale again and she sank back as she had been.

"Where are you hurt, Margaret?" Boyd asked in sympathetic distress.

"I don't know; all over I reckon."

"Are any of your bones broken? Feel of them and see."

"I reckon not. I can't tell. The pains are all over me—mostly inside. I reckon I'm going to faint."

Boyd Westover was now seriously alarmed. He vaguely remembered hearing of persons dying of "internal injuries," though externally showing no hurt. Instantly he lifted the girl again and, mounting with her in his arms, set off at a gallop toward the great house at Wanalah.

The sharp prick of a pin, as he adjusted his burden on the withers, attracted his attention to the two flaming red bandana kerchiefs, pinned by their corners to Margaret's shoulders, and in the midst of his apprehensions for her life he found time to wonder why she had decorated herself in that extraordinary way. He was too full of anxious concern to question her on so trivial a matter, but she, recovering herself, volunteered an explanation, after asking him to reduce the horse's gait to a walk.

"I reckon I was right foolish," she said, laughing in spite of her pain. "You see this is one of old Aunt Sally's birthdays.

She has one every three or four months now, and she's rapidly adding to her ninety years—a year at each birthday. She was my Mammy you know, and so I always take her a present on her birthdays."

The girl paused in her speech as some sharp twinge of pain changed her smile into a grimace. It was only for a moment, and she continued:

"On her last birthday, two or three months ago, she told me I would some day be an angel with red wings, and so when I set out this morning to take her these two turban kerchiefs, the foolish whim came to me to pin them to my shoulders and make red wings of them."

Again an access of severe pain silenced speech and she closed her eyes while her lips grew pale. Evidently the effort to chatter had been too much for her, and Boyd rightly guessed that she had been forcing herself to talk of her little prank by way of preventing him from saying more serious things which she did not wish just then to hear.

He in his turn resolved to say those more serious things at the earliest opportunity. He felt that in caressing her as he had done, down there by the spring, he had placed himself under a binding obligation to explain at the first possible opportunity, and the explanation could take but one form—a full and free declaration of his yet unspoken passion. This, he felt, he had no right to delay one moment longer than he must, but as she lay still with closed eyes, her head upon his shoulder and his arm about her, he realized that his present and very pressing task was to place her as soon as possible in the tender care of his mother and her maids.

The rest must wait.

CHAPTER II – A SONG WITHOUT WORDS

The physician for whom Boyd Westover sent a young negro at breakneck speed, while his mother's maids were getting Margaret Conway to bed, reported that she had "sustained painful contusions" and was additionally "suffering from shock," but that no bones were broken and, so far as he could determine, no serious internal injuries had befallen. He directed that she should remain in bed for a few days, and then stay quietly at Wanalah, without attempting a homeward journey until he should himself give permission.

"Above all," he said to Boyd, "she must not be excited in any way—pleasurably or the reverse—lest hysteria supervene."

Boyd smiled a little over the medical man's stilted diction, and rejoiced in the assurance of Margaret's safety which the ponderous phraseology gave him. But upon reflection he chafed a good deal over the restraint the doctor's instructions required him to put upon himself. He was impatient now to put into words the declaration of love which his caresses had implied and promised. He was still more impatient for her reply to that declaration, for, like the modest young lover that he was, he gravely feared his fate and was annoyed by the necessity of waiting before putting it to the test.

Her words, spoken half consciously when she had received or repelled his embraces—for he could not determine in his own mind whether she had meant to do the one or the other—in no wise encouraged his self-confidence. He recalled those words:—"I reckon you mustn't do that"—and questioned them closely as to their significance, but no

satisfactory answer came. The utterance might mean anything or nothing. And what did the suddenly flushing face that accompanied it suggest? Was it joy or sorrow, pleasure or resentment that had sent the blood to her cheeks in that way, and prompted her attempt to escape him by rising? Wonder as he might he could not tell, and as he paced the colonnaded porch that night after all the house was asleep, he succeeded only in working himself into a passionate fury of impatience and maddening perplexity.

He tried to reason with himself, only to find himself utterly unreasonable. Doubtless Margaret would be enjoying the air in the porch within a few days, resting and perhaps interestingly helpless still. The attentions he must lavish upon her in that case promised abundant opportunity for a tenderness of care which would open the way for his passionate declaration. At that point in his planning another and a very annoying thought obtruded itself.

"Confound it!" he muttered, "Colonel Conway is a stickler for all the conventions of our artificial social life. He will insist upon the idiotic rule that a young man mustn't address a girl in his own house or at any time when she is under his protection. What utter nonsense it is, anyhow! But I suppose I must obey it or bring down Colonel Conway's wrath upon my head. I must let all my opportunities slip away, and restrain my impulses during all the time she's here, making myself seem to her a cold-blooded brute who has taken advantage of her helplessness to force caresses upon her and then doesn't think enough of her dignity to explain himself."

Perhaps Boyd Westover's mood was playing tricks with his logical faculties. It is certain that if he had been asked at any ordinary time his opinion of the social requirement

which he now scorned as an idiotic convention, he would have answered that it was eminently right and reasonable, that it was imperatively necessary indeed, for the protection of the young woman in the case against the embarrassment of having to accept hospitality or escort or favor of other kind from a man whose proffer of love she has just rejected.

But who expects an impatient lover to be reasonable—who that has ever been himself a lover? Reasonable or unreasonable, Boyd Westover felt himself bound to observe the rule that imposed so annoying a restraint upon him. He might fret and fume in revolt against it, but he must bend to the custom. He resolved to wait with what grace he could until Margaret's return to her own home. He worked out in his mind all the situations that were likely to occur during her convalescence at Wanalah, and framed all the conversations to fit the embarrassing circumstances.

Of course the situations that actually arose were totally different from those he had imagined, and the dialogues he had rehearsed proved to be as unfit for use as the text of a Greek tragedy would be on a modern comedy stage.

Colonel Conway, who happened to be in Richmond when his daughter's mishap occurred, returned at once and, after learning the details, delivered his thanks and commendations in a way that overwhelmed her rescuer with embarrassment. It was in vain that Boyd protested, disclaimed any right or title to the Colonel's extravagant eulogies of his conduct, and declared that he had done no more than any other man would have done under like circumstances. Colonel Conway would not have it so.

"You gravely imperilled your own life, sir," he replied in his peremptory way. "You went to the rescue of a damsel in distress as only a gallant knight would do, with reckless disregard of all consequences to yourself. That's what I call heroism, sir, heroism worthy of the name you bear and the proud race from which you are sprung. Now don't protest, don't contradict, don't argue, don't answer. It is only your modesty that shrinks from the recognition of your gallantry"—and so on with what Boyd felt to be "damnable iteration."

But when the old gentleman had gone back to Richmond, leaving his daughter to the care of Boyd Westover's mother, the young man reflected that the Colonel's enthusiasm would probably stand him in good stead if ever Margaret should smile upon his suit and give him leave to ask her father for her hand.

Thus in meditations sometimes hopeful and joyous, sometimes perplexed and desponding, Boyd Westover worried through the days until the glad morning came when Margaret Conway rebelled against her physician's orders and made her appearance in the porch. She was still weak enough and enough distressed by her bruises to be treated as a convalescent to whom solicitous attention was due, and of course Boyd elected himself her "gentleman in waiting."

These two, brought up on adjoining plantations, had known each other from their earliest childhood, but in later years they had seen little of each other. Boyd had been away, first at boarding-school and afterwards at the University, while the motherless girl had been slowly and awkwardly growing to womanhood, under care of her aunt and the tutelage of an accomplished governess. It was only during vacations that the two had met, and during the last two summers they

had not met at all, for the reason that Margaret, with her father, had been travelling in the North and Canada and in what was then the great West during both those seasons.

It was with surprise, therefore, not unmixed with the awe of strangeness, that on his return from the University this year he had found his little playmate grown into a beautiful and very dignified womanhood. She presided now at The Oaks, her father's plantation, with all the gracious ease that enabled Virginia women of that time to make of plantation houses delightful centres of unruffled hospitality, where the coming and going of guests was in no way a matter of previous arrangement and where neither the coming nor the going created the smallest ripple in the placid self-composure of the well-ordered life of the mansion.

So great was the change in her, or so great did it seem to Boyd, that at first he hesitated and faltered over the old familiar form of address. It did not seem possible to him to call this dignified and almost stately young woman "Margaret" as he had always called the little girl that she had been. He could not address her as "Miss Conway" but he thought he might compromise on the form "Miss Margaret." The first time he addressed her in that fashion was the only time. She looked at him in dignified surprise for a moment; then with a rippling little laugh that seemed to him singularly charming, she said:

"If we have become such strangers, Boyd, that you must put a handle to my name, I'll give you all your honors and address you as 'Boyd Westover, Esq., M. A., University of Virginia.' You are to call me just 'Margaret,' please, as you've always done, if you wish to be just 'Boyd' to me."

As she spoke the words all the winsomeness he remembered in the girl came back again, but it did not dissipate the stately dignity that had grown upon her with her ripening womanhood. It was perhaps at that moment that he fell in love with her. Of that he could never be sure, but he knew now that his love for her was the one supreme passion of his life. That knowledge had come to him at the moment when he first realized her danger out there in the pasture. He recalled now the impulse that had prompted him in his half mad determination to let no obstacle stand in the way of his reaching her in time for rescue. He remembered the horror that had rended his very soul as he saw the maddened bull lift the mare and her rider and fling them from his gory horns. He knew now that he had done and dared in those maddening moments, not with the humane impulse to save an imperilled life that must come to every man with blood in his veins, but actuated by his passionate love's instinct of self-preservation.

As he ministered to her after her return to the porch, all these memories were awakened in him by a certain change that had come over her, a shyness that was not quite reserve, but yet resembled it. He was too little acquainted with the ways of women to understand this or to estimate it aright. It did not occur to him that the revelation he had made to her by his passionate caress as she lay half conscious in his arms might explain her impulse of reserve. He was too scantily versed in the impulses of womanhood to understand that after such a manifestation of his love womanly modesty must stand upon its defence until such time as he should see fit to give more formal and definite expression to his purpose.

Yet to that caress he attributed the change. It was only that he misinterpreted its meaning. The thought came to him

that he had mortally offended her, that she resented his act in the only way possible to her so long as she must remain a guest in his mother's house, and that upon her release from that restraint she would banish him forever from her presence and her acquaintance.

So severely did all this torture him that on the second day of her convalescence the impulse to make an end of suspense overcame him, banishing for the moment all considerations of prudence and all regard for conventionalities. He had read to her for an hour, and when the book was finished, he observed a certain restlessness on her part, for which he suggested one or two remedies, only to have his suggestions negatived. Presently she said:

"It is only that I need exercise, I reckon. I think I'll try to walk a little, up and down the porch." She rose with some difficulty, he taking her hand in assistance. But no sooner was she on her feet than she relaxed her grasp upon his hand, and, as he did not relax his own so readily, she seemed to shake it off. The act was not an impatient one, but he mistook it for such. Instantly he faced her, asking:

"Why did you do that, Margaret? Why have you tried in every way to show me that my presence is disagreeable to you? What have I done to offend you? Tell me, and I'll quit the plantation at once and stay away so long as you remain. I have a right to know. Tell me!"

For answer the young woman looked at him in silence but with tear drops glistening in her eyes. At last she said:

"You have done nothing that you ought not, I reckon—nothing to offend me. Oh, Boyd, I'm not angry with you—I can never feel that way. I owe my life to you, but that isn't it. I don't know what it is. May be it's just because I'm weak—or may be just because."

With that the tears released themselves and trickled down her cheeks. She could not restrain them and she made no effort to hide them. She simply stood there facing him and letting the honest tears flow unrestrained.

There was no need of second sight to foretell the result. Nothing in all the world so unseats a man's resolution as the vision of the woman he loves in tears. Boyd Westover was a full-blooded young man and he acted after his kind. He took the unresisting girl in his arms and passionately embraced her. Words on either side were unnecessary. Love is quick to understand. But the words came also, after a space—words of love beyond recalling, words of the kind that make or mar human lives and set Destiny its tasks.

CHAPTER III – A WOMAN'S WORD

Those were halcyon days that followed, while Margaret lingered at Wanalah. The barriers were broken down now between these two; the vexing suspense was over and the most precious certainty that human kind can know had taken its place.

And there was not the embarrassment of others' knowing. No word of their awakened love had been spoken, or could be spoken until Margaret's return to The Oaks should impose upon her lover the duty of announcing their understanding to her father and invoking his sanction of their troth. Until that time should come they were not "engaged" and might pass their days and nights under one roof without offending even Virginian propriety. Convention had no claim to control over them in those blissful intervening days.

But the shadow of it fell on the morning of the day when Margaret was to journey homewards in company with her maid.

"I will visit Colonel Conway at The Oaks to-morrow," Boyd promised as the pair strolled through the garden during the morning hours that alone remained to them now.

"I wonder how he will receive the news—our news, Margaret?"

"How he will receive it? Why, of course he—"

"He's rather rigid, you know, in his views of propriety, and I've sinned against light in that respect. You see I addressed you in my own home, and not only so, but at a time when you were not able to run away."

Margaret laughed half below her breath.

"That was very terrible of course," she said in an amused tone. "But I see a way out of it, Boyd."

"Of course you do. That's feminine instinct. But tell me about it."

"Why, it's simple enough. If Father finds fault with that, you can take it all back and say it all over again at The Oaks."

Boyd smiled over the conceit, but he was not reassured by it. The case was one in which the least shadow of uncertainty seemed more than he could endure.

"Oh I forgot," the girl went on, teasingly; "perhaps it wouldn't be agreeable to you to rehearse the scene."

Boyd said not a word in reply, but he managed in another way to convince her that her doubt on that point was unfounded. When she had readjusted the "flat" that she wore as headgear—it had somehow become disarranged—she put jest aside, saying:

"I think we needn't fear anything of that sort, Boyd. My father is apt to make distinctions, just as other people are. If he disliked you or disapproved of you, he would make trouble of course; but as it is I reckon he will brush the thing aside and scold about the idiocy that makes such silly rules."

She paused in her speech for a space. Then she added, in a tone which the young man afterwards recalled in doubt and distress:

"At any rate it makes no difference. Nothing can make any difference—now."

"Tell me, please," he said gently, "just what you mean by that."

"I am not a women to love lightly, or lightly to forget. Love seems to me a holy thing and to trifle with it is blasphemy. I have given you my love, Boyd, and there is no power in all the universe that can make me take it back. Even you could not do that. Nothing you might do—even if it were crime itself—could alter the fact that my love is all yours, now and forever."

He drew her to him in a tender embrace, but spoke no word in reply. Speech in such a case must be an impertinence. Presently she went on:

"That is what I meant, Boyd. I have promised to be your wife. I shall keep that promise if the stars fall. I have no doubt my father will cordially give his consent; but if it

should be otherwise, it will make no difference—I shall keep my promise."

How those words came back in after time to Boyd Westover! And how he pondered them in amazement and bitterness of soul!

CHAPTER IV – THE BEST LAID PLANS

Margaret was right in her anticipations regarding Colonel Conway's attitude. He highly approved of the young man upon whose gallantry in rescue he had enthusiastically and incessantly descanted in all companies. He was in no mood to find fault with the slight lapse of Boyd Westover from conventional propriety. He liked the way in which Boyd presented his case, neither justifying his conduct by argument nor offering excuses for it, but treating it as a matter of manhood necessity.

"I suppose I should not have addressed Margaret when I did," he said in manly fashion; "I ought to have waited, but under the circumstances I couldn't help myself. Hang it, Colonel, there are times when a man must do things he ought not."

"Right, my boy, altogether right, absolutely right, eternally right," was the enthusiastic response. "It's blood that flows in your veins—hot blood—and not tepid milk and water. Why, sir, I courted Margaret's mother as we hung to the gunwale of a capsized sailboat, and I've been proud of it all my life, sir. A mollycoddle would have waited for her to comb her hair and put on dry clothes while he was making up pretty speeches for the occasion. That's the mollycoddle's way. The man's way is to tell the girl he loves her, whenever the right moment comes, and leave the dry clothes and the pretty speeches for another time. So don't apologize, don't fret, don't give the thing another thought. You shall have Margaret's hand with her father's blessing whenever you and she choose to fix upon the day. I'll pack The Oaks with the best of good company; there shall be feasting and—oh, by the way, there's one little formality I

suppose you'll have to go through. There's Margaret's aunt,—my sister Betsy, you know. It'll be best all around if you treat her with distinguished consideration. She's apt to stand upon her dignity, and I've always found it best to recognize the fact, gracefully. It ministers to peace and comfort. I think you and Margaret had better present yourselves to her together, and do the thing up with all the formalities. It will not be necessary to mention to her the little slip you've been confessing to me. She'd probably take it seriously. It's a way she has. You can just let her think the thing occurred here to-day. You and Margaret can go out into the garden after dinner, and when you return present yourselves to Betsy and tell her about it as if it had just happened."

With the reassurance of the solemn words Margaret had spoken the day before, Boyd Westover had no great fear of anything "Aunt Betsy" might say, but he was disposed to humor Colonel Conway, and besides he foresaw that life at The Oaks might be pleasanter for Margaret with the old lady's approval than without it. So the little diplomatic stratagem was carried out so successfully that Aunt Betsy—always chary in the bestowal of praise—said to Margaret that night:

"If you must marry,—and I suppose you must,—I'm glad you're to marry a young gentleman who observes the courtesies of life and knows how to treat his elders with proper respect. I rather approve of Mr. Boyd Westover."

"Thank you, Aunt Betsy," Margaret answered, concealing a smile. "You don't often say so much in praise of a young man."

"Of course not. In these days it's not easy to find young gentlemen who deserve any praise at all. Manners are so dreadfully lax nowadays. Even you shock and distress me frequently, in spite of the pains I've taken to train you properly."

"Why, Aunt Betsy, what have I been doing now? Is it something dreadful?"

"From my point of view it is. You spoke of Mr. Boyd Westover just now, by implication at least, as a 'young man.' A young lady doesn't associate with 'young men'; those whom she recognizes are young gentlemen."

"If you'd seen him encounter that bull and snatch me from under his horns, Aunt Betsy, I reckon you'd have thought him a good deal of a man."

"No—a good deal of a gentleman rather. The distinction is important, my dear, though I can't make you see it. And besides he's so polite to his elders, especially ladies. I was never more respectfully treated in my life. He's just like the young gentlemen of my time. Of course when he addressed you he sank upon his knees—"

"He certainly did nothing of the kind," Margaret answered hotly. "If he had I should have spurned him with contempt. No man who respects himself would bend his knee to any woman."

"I wish you would say 'gentleman' and 'lady'—and especially wouldn't call yourself a 'woman,' Margaret. It's positively

shocking. But it's so with everybody in these degenerate days—even well-bred young girls, and Heaven is my witness that I've tried hard, to raise you well. When did he address you the first time?"

"There was only this one time," Margaret answered, dreamily, as she recalled the scene on the porch.

"Do you mean, Margaret, that you accepted him the first time he asked you?"

"Yes, Aunt Betsy, why not? I loved him."

"Margaret, you shock me; worse than that, your conduct grieves and afflicts me. Haven't I told you a thousand times that no lady ever forgets her dignity so far as that?"

"I haven't counted the times, Aunt Betsy, but probably your estimate of a thousand isn't far wrong. It is more than five hundred at any rate."

"Margaret, you trifle, and I'm not accustomed to be trifled with."

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Betsy. I didn't mean to trifle. Listen to me seriously now. I hold the love of a man and a woman to be the holiest thing on earth. I regard all trifling with it as blasphemy, and I think all your rules and conventionalities concerning it silly and sinful nonsense. If there is ever a time when a woman should be honest and truthful it is when the man she loves tells her of his love and asks for hers in