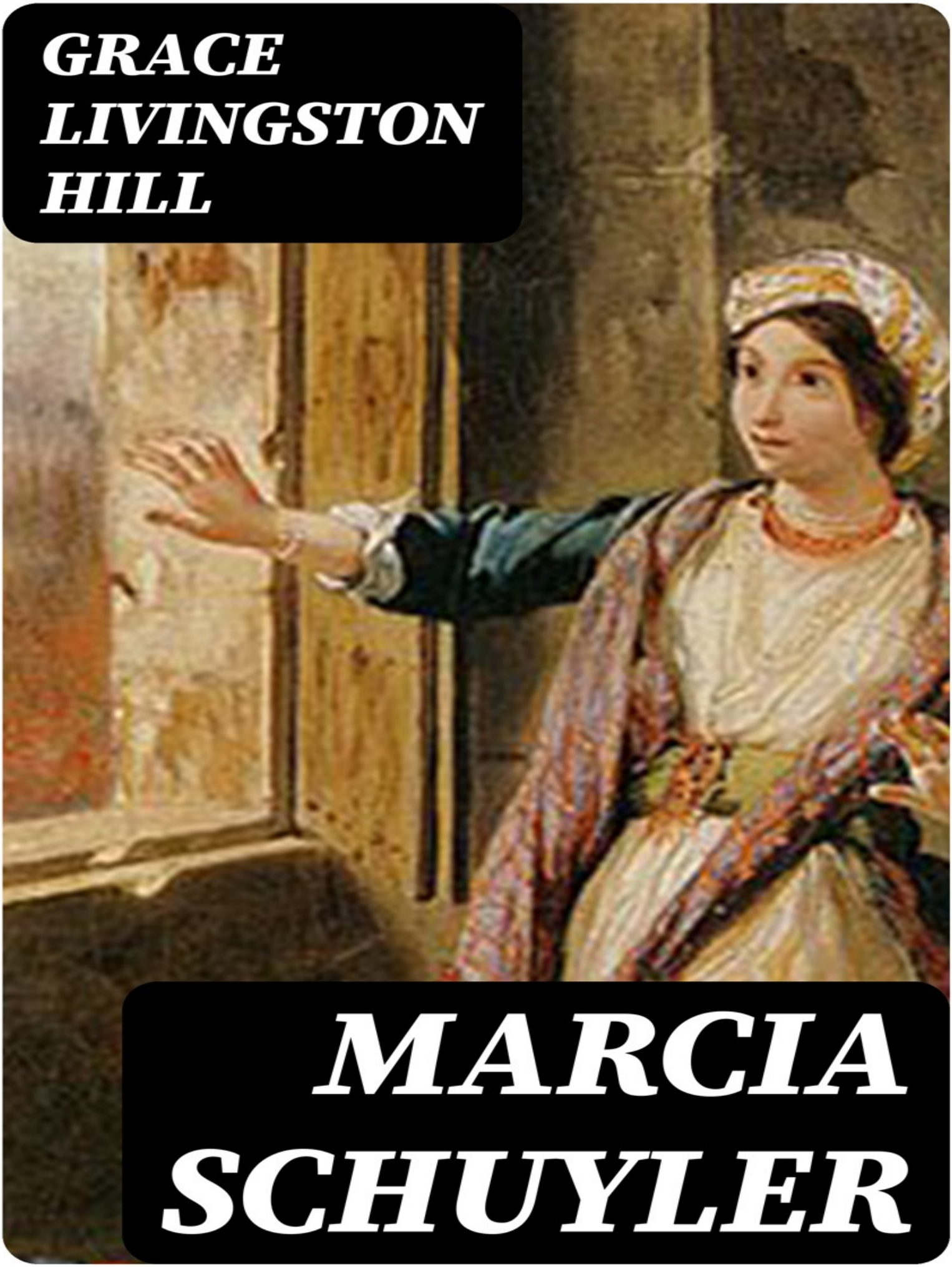
GRACE LIVINGSTON HILL



MARCIA SCHUYLER

Grace Livingston Hill

Marcia Schuyler

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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TO
THE DEAR MEMORY OF
MY FATHER
The Rev. CHARLES MONTGOMERY LIVINGSTON
WHOSE COMPANIONSHIP AND ENCOURAGEMENT
HAVE BEEN MY HELP THROUGH
THE YEARS

CHAPTER I

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The sun was already up and the grass blades were twinkling with sparkles of dew, as Marcia stepped from the kitchen door.

She wore a chocolate calico with little sprigs of red and white scattered over it, her hair was in smooth brown braids down her back, and there was a flush on her round cheeks that might have been but the reflection of the rosy light in the East. Her face was as untroubled as the summer morning, in its freshness, and her eyes as dreamy as the soft clouds that hovered upon the horizon uncertain where they were to be sent for the day.

Marcia walked lightly through the grass, and the way behind her sparkled again like that of the girl in the fairy-tale who left jewels wherever she passed.

A rail fence stopped her, which she mounted as though it had been a steed to carry her onward, and sat a moment looking at the beauty of the morning, her eyes taking on that far-away look that annoyed her stepmother when she wanted her to hurry with the dishes, or finish a long seam before it was time to get supper.

She loitered but a moment, for her mind was full of business, and she wished to accomplish much before the day was done. Swinging easily down to the other side of the fence she moved on through the meadow, over another fence, and another meadow, skirting the edge of a cool little strip of woods which lured her with its green mysterious shadows, its whispering leaves, and twittering birds. One wistful glance she gave into the sweet silence, seeing a clump of maiden-hair ferns rippling their feathery locks in the breeze. Then resolutely turning away she sped on to the slope of Blackberry Hill.

It was not a long climb to where the blackberries grew, and she was soon at work, the great luscious berries dropping into her pail almost with a touch. But while she worked the vision of the hills, the sheep meadow below, the river winding between the neighboring farms, melted away, and she did not even see the ripe fruit before her, because she was planning the new frock she was to buy with these berries she had come to pick.

Pink and white it was to be; she had seen it in the store the last time she went for sugar and spice. There were dainty sprigs of pink over the white ground, and every berry that dropped into her bright pail was no longer a berry but a sprig of pink chintz. While she worked she went over her plans for the day.

There had been busy times at the old house during the past weeks. Kate, her elder sister, was to be married. It was only a few days now to the wedding.

There had been a whole year of preparation: spinning and weaving and fine sewing. The smooth white linen lay ready, packed between rose leaves and lavender. There had been yards and yards of tatting and embroidery made by the two girls for the trousseau, and the village dressmaker had spent days at the house, cutting, fitting, shirring, till now there was a goodly array of gorgeous apparel piled high upon bed, and chairs, and hanging in the closets of the great spare bedroom. The outfit was as fine as that made for Patience Hartrandt six months before, and Mr. Hartrandt had given his one daughter all she had asked for in the way of a “setting out.” Kate had seen to it that her things were as fine as Patience’s,—but, they were all for Kate!

Of course, that was right! Kate was to be married, not Marcia, and everything must make way for that. Marcia was scarcely more than a child as yet, barely seventeen. No one thought of anything new for her just then, and she did not expect it. But into her heart there had stolen a longing for a new frock herself amid all this finery for Kate. She had her

best one of course. That was good, and pretty, and quite nice enough to wear to the wedding, and her stepmother had taken much relief in the thought that Marcia would need nothing during the rush of getting Kate ready.

But there were people coming to the house every day, especially in the afternoons, friends of Kate, and of her stepmother, to be shown Kate's wardrobe, and to talk things over curiously. Marcia could not wear her best dress all the time. And *he* was coming! That was the way Marcia always denominated the prospective bridegroom in her mind.

His name was David Spafford, and Kate often called him Dave, but Marcia, even to herself, could never bring herself to breathe the name so familiarly. She held him in great awe. He was so fine and strong and good, with a face like a young saint in some old picture, she thought. She often wondered how her wild, sparkling sister Kate dared to be so familiar with him. She had ventured the thought once when she watched Kate dressing to go out with some young people and preening herself like a bird of Paradise before the glass. It all came over her, the vanity and frivolousness of the life that Kate loved, and she spoke out with conviction:

"Kate, you'll have to be very different when you're married." Kate had faced about amusedly and asked why.

"Because *he* is so good," Marcia had replied, unable to explain further.

"Oh, is that all?" said the daring sister, wheeling back to the glass. "Don't you worry; I'll soon take that out of him."

But Kate's indifference had never lessened her young sister's awe of her prospective brother-in-law. She had listened to his conversations with her father during the brief visits he had made, and she had watched his face at church while he and Kate sang together as the minister lined it out: "Rock of Ages cleft for me, Let me hide myself in Thee," a new song which had just been written. And she had mused upon the charmed life Kate would lead. It was wonderful to

be a woman and be loved as Kate was loved, thought Marcia.

So in all the hurry no one seemed to think much about Marcia, and she was not satisfied with her brown delaine afternoon dress. Truth to tell, it needed letting down, and there was no more left to let down. It made her feel like last year to go about in it with her slender ankles so plainly revealed. So she set her heart upon the new chintz.

Now, with Marcia, to decide was to do. She did not speak to her stepmother about it, for she knew it would be useless; neither did she think it worth while to go to her father, for she knew that both his wife and Kate would find it out and charge her with useless expense just now when there were so many other uses for money, and they were anxious to have it all flow their way. She had an independent spirit, so she took the time that belonged to herself, and went to the blackberry patch which belonged to everybody.

Marcia’s fingers were nimble and accustomed, and the sun was not very high in the heavens when she had finished her task and turned happily toward the village. The pails would not hold another berry.

Her cheeks were glowing with the sun and exercise, and little wisps of wavy curls had escaped about her brow, damp with perspiration. Her eyes were shining with her purpose, half fulfilled, as she hastened down the hill.

Crossing a field she met Hanford Weston with a rake over his shoulder and a wide-brimmed straw hat like a small shed over him. He was on his way to the South meadow. He blushed and greeted her as she passed shyly by. When she had passed he paused and looked admiringly after her. They had been in the same classes at school all winter, the girl at the head, the boy at the foot. But Hanford Weston’s father owned the largest farm in all the country round about, and he felt that did not so much matter. He would rather see Marcia at the head anyway, though there never had been

the slightest danger that he would take her place. He felt a sudden desire now to follow her. It would be a pleasure to carry those pails that she bore as if they were mere featherweights.

He watched her long, elastic step for a moment, considered the sun in the sky, and his father's command about the South meadow, and then strode after her.

It did not take long to reach her side, swiftly as she had gone.

As well as he could, with the sudden hotness in his face and the tremor in his throat, he made out to ask if he might carry her burden for her. Marcia stopped annoyed. She had forgotten all about him, though he was an attractive fellow, sometimes called by the girls "handsome Hanford."

She had been planning exactly how that pink sprigged chintz was to be made, and which parts she would cut first in order to save time and material. She did not wish to be interrupted. The importance of the matter was too great to be marred by the appearance of just a schoolmate whom she might meet every day, and whom she could so easily "spell down." She summoned her thoughts from the details of mutton-leg sleeves and looked the boy over, to his great confusion. She did not want him along, and she was considering how best to get rid of him.

"Weren't you going somewhere else?" she asked sweetly. "Wasn't there a rake over your shoulder? What have you done with it?"

The culprit blushed deeper.

"Where were you going?" she demanded.

"To the South meadow," he stammered out.

"Oh, well, then you must go back. I shall do quite well, thank you. Your father will not be pleased to have you neglect your work for me, though I'm much obliged I'm sure."

Was there some foreshadowing of her womanhood in the decided way she spoke, and the quaint, prim set of her head

as she bowed him good morning and went on her way once more? The boy did not understand. He only felt abashed, and half angry that she had ordered him back to work; and, too, in a tone that forbade him to take her memory with him as he went. Nevertheless her image lingered by the way, and haunted the South meadow all day long as he worked.

Marcia, unconscious of the admiration she had stirred in the boyish heart, went her way on fleet feet, her spirit one with the sunny morning, her body light with anticipation, for a new frock of her own choice was yet an event in her life.

She had thought many times, as she spent long hours putting delicate stitches into her sister's wedding garments, how it would seem if they were being made for her. She had whiled away many a dreary seam by thinking out, in a sort of dream-story, how she would put on this or that at will if it were her own, and go here or there, and have people love and admire her as they did Kate. It would never come true, of course. She never expected to be admired and loved like Kate. Kate was beautiful, bright and gay. Everybody loved her, no matter how she treated them. It was a matter of course for Kate to have everything she wanted. Marcia felt that she never could attain to such heights. In the first place she considered her own sweet serious face with its pure brown eyes as exceedingly plain. She could not catch the lights that played at hide and seek in her eyes when she talked with animation. Indeed few saw her at her best, because she seldom talked freely. It was only with certain people that she could forget herself.

She did not envy Kate. She was proud of her sister, and loved her, though there was an element of anxiety in the love. But she never thought of her many faults. She felt that they were excusable because Kate was Kate. It was as if you should find fault with a wild rose because it carried a thorn. Kate was set about with many a thorn, but amid them all she bloomed, her fragrant pink self, as apparently

unconscious of the many pricks she gave, and as unconcerned, as the flower itself.

So Marcia never thought to be jealous that Kate had so many lovely things, and was going out into the world to do just as she pleased, and lead a charmed life with a man who was greater in the eyes of this girl than any prince that ever walked in fairy-tale. But she saw no harm in playing a delightful little dream-game of “pretend” now and then, and letting her imagination make herself the beautiful, admired, elder sister instead of the plain younger one.

But this morning on her way to the village store with her berries she thought no more of her sister’s things, for her mind was upon her own little frock which she would purchase with the price of the berries, and then go home and make.

A whole long day she had to herself, for Kate and her stepmother were gone up to the neighboring town on the packet to make a few last purchases.

She had told no one of her plans, and was awake betimes in the morning to see the travellers off, eager to have them gone that she might begin to carry out her plan.

Just at the edge of the village Marcia put down the pails of berries by a large flat stone and sat down for a moment to tidy herself. The lacing of one shoe had come untied, and her hair was rumpled by exercise. But she could not sit long to rest, and taking up her burdens was soon upon the way again.

Mary Ann Fothergill stepped from her own gate lingering till Marcia should come up, and the two girls walked along side by side. Mary Ann had stiff, straight, light hair, and high cheek bones. Her eyes were light and her eyelashes almost white. They did not show up well beneath her checked sunbonnet. Her complexion was dull and tanned. She was a contrast to Marcia with her clear red and white skin. She was tall and awkward and wore a linsey-woolsey frock as though it were a meal sack temporarily appropriated. She

had the air of always trying to hide her feet and hands. Mary Ann had some fine qualities, but beauty was not one of them. Beside her Marcia's delicate features showed clear-cut like a cameo, and her every movement spoke of patrician blood.

Mary Ann regarded Marcia's smooth brown braids enviously. Her own sparse hair barely reached to her shoulders, and straggled about her neck helplessly and hopelessly, in spite of her constant efforts.

"It must be lots of fun at your house these days," said Mary Ann wistfully. "Are you most ready for the wedding?"

Marcia nodded. Her eyes were bright. She could see the sign of the village store just ahead and knew the bolts of new chintz were displaying their charms in the window.

"My, but your cheeks do look pretty," admired Mary Ann impulsively. "Say, how many of each has your sister got?"

"Two dozens," said Marcia conscious of a little swelling of pride in her breast. It was not every girl that had such a setting out as her sister.

"My!" sighed Mary Ann. "And outside things, too. I 'spose she's got one of every color. What are her frocks? Tell me about them. I've been up to Dutchess county and just got back last night, but Ma wrote Aunt Tilly that Mis' Hotchkiss said her frocks was the prettiest Miss Hancock's ever sewed on."

"We think they are pretty," admitted Marcia modestly. "There's a sprigged chin—" here she caught herself, remembering, and laughed. "I mean muslin-de-laine, and a blue delaine, and a blue silk——"

"My! silk!" breathed Mary Ann in an ecstasy of wonder. "And what's she going to be married in?"

"White," answered Marcia, "white satin. And the veil was mother's—our own mother's, you know."

Marcia spoke it reverently, her eyes shining with something far away that made Mary Ann think she looked like an angel.

“Oh, my! Don’t you just envy her?”

“No,” said Marcia slowly; “I think not. At least—I hope not. It wouldn’t be right, you know. And then she’s my sister and I love her dearly, and it’s nearly as nice to have one’s sister have nice things and a good time as to have them one’s self.”

“You’re good,” said Mary Ann decidedly as if that were a foregone conclusion. “But I should envy her, I just should. Mis’ Hotchkiss told Ma there wa’nt many lots in life so all honey-and-dew-prepared like your sister’s. All the money she wanted to spend on clo’es, and a nice set out, and a man as handsome as you’ll find anywhere, and he’s well off too, ain’t he? Ma said she heard he kept a horse and lived right in the village too, not as how he needed to keep one to get anywhere, either. That’s what I call luxury—a horse to ride around with. And then Mr. What’s-his-name? I can’t remember. Oh, yes, Spafford. He’s good, and everybody says he won’t make a bit of fuss if Kate does go around and have a good time. He’ll just let her do as she pleases. Only old Grandma Doolittle says she doesn’t believe it. She thinks every man, no matter how good he is, wants to manage his wife, just for the name of it. She says your sister’ll have to change her ways or else there’ll be trouble. But that’s Grandma! Everybody knows her. She croaks! Ma says Kate’s got her nest feathered well if ever a girl had. My! I only wish I had the same chance!”

Marcia held her head a trifle high when Mary Ann touched upon her sister’s personal character, but they were nearing the store, and everybody knew Mary Ann was blunt. Poor Mary Ann! She meant no harm. She was but repeating the village gossip. Besides, Marcia must give her mind to sprigged chintz. There was no time for discussions if she would accomplish her purpose before the folks came home that night.

“Mary Ann,” she said in her sweet, prim way that always made the other girl stand a little in awe of her, “you mustn’t

listen to gossip. It isn’t worth while. I’m sure my sister Kate will be very happy. I’m going in the store now, are you?” And the conversation was suddenly concluded.

Mary Ann followed meekly watching with wonder and envy as Marcia made her bargain with the kindly merchant, and selected her chintz. What a delicious swish the scissors made as they went through the width of cloth, and how delightfully the paper crackled as the bundle was being wrapped! Mary Ann did not know whether Kate or Marcia was more to be envied.

“Did you say you were going to make it up yourself?” asked Mary Ann.

Marcia nodded.

“Oh, my! Ain’t you afraid? I would be. It’s the prettiest I ever saw. Don’t you go and cut both sleeves for one arm. That’s what I did the only time Ma ever let me try.” And Mary Ann touched the package under Marcia’s arm with wistful fingers.

They had reached the turn of the road and Mary Ann hoped that Marcia would ask her out to “help,” but Marcia had no such purpose.

“Well, good-bye! Will you wear it next Sunday?” she asked.

“Perhaps,” answered Marcia breathlessly, and sped on her homeward way, her cheeks bright with excitement.

In her own room she spread the chintz out upon the bed and with trembling fingers set about her task. The bright shears clipped the edge and tore off the lengths exultantly as if in league with the girl. The bees hummed outside in the clover, and now and again buzzed between the muslin curtains of the open window, looked in and grumbled out again. The birds sang across the meadows and the sun mounted to the zenith and began its downward march, but still the busy fingers worked on. Well for Marcia’s scheme that the fashion of the day was simple, wherein were few

puckers and plaits and tucks, and little trimming required, else her task would have been impossible.

Her heart beat high as she tried it on at last, the new chintz that she had made. She went into the spare room and stood before the long mirror in its wide gilt frame that rested on two gilt knobs standing out from the wall like giant rosettes. She had dared to make the skirt a little longer than that of her best frock. It was almost as long as Kate's, and for a moment she lingered, sweeping backward and forward before the glass and admiring herself in the long graceful folds. She caught up her braids in the fashion that Kate wore her hair and smiled at the reflection of herself in the mirror. How funny it seemed to think she would soon be a woman like Kate. When Kate was gone they would begin to call her "Miss" sometimes. Somehow she did not care to look ahead. The present seemed enough. She had so wrapped her thoughts in her sister's new life that her own seemed flat and stale in comparison.

The sound of a distant hay wagon on the road reminded her that the sun was near to setting. The family carryall would soon be coming up the lane from the evening packet. She must hurry and take off her frock and be dressed before they arrived.

Marcia was so tired that night after supper that she was glad to slip away to bed, without waiting to hear Kate's voluble account of her day in town, the beauties she had seen and the friends she had met.

She lay down and dreamed of the morrow, and of the next day, and the next. In strange bewilderment she awoke in the night and found the moonlight streaming full into her face. Then she laughed and rubbed her eyes and tried to go to sleep again; but she could not, for she had dreamed that she was the bride herself, and the words of Mary Ann kept going over and over in her mind. "Oh, don't you envy her?" *Did* she envy her sister? But that was wicked. It troubled her

to think of it, and she tried to banish the dream, but it would come again and again with a strange sweet pleasure.

She lay wondering if such a time of joy would ever come to her as had come to Kate, and whether the spare bed would ever be piled high with clothes and fittings for her new life. What a wonderful thing it was anyway to be a woman and be loved!

Then her dreams blended again with the soft perfume of the honeysuckle at the window, and the hooting of a young owl.

The moon dropped lower, the bright stars paled, dawn stole up through the edges of the woods far away and awakened a day that was to bring a strange transformation over Marcia’s life.

CHAPTER II

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As a natural consequence of her hard work and her midnight awakening, Marcia overslept the next morning. Her stepmother called her sharply and she dressed in haste, not even taking time to glance toward the new folds of chintz that drew her thoughts closetward. She dared not say anything about it yet. There was much to be done, and not even Kate had time for an idle word with her. Marcia was called upon to run errands, to do odds and ends of things, to fill in vacant places, to sew on lost buttons, to do everything for which nobody else had time. The household had suddenly become aware that there was now but one more intervening day between them and the wedding.

It was not until late in the afternoon that Marcia ventured to put on her frock. Even then she felt shy about appearing in it.

Madam Schuyler was busy in the parlor with callers, and Kate was locked in her own room whither she had gone to rest. There was no one to notice if Marcia should “dress up,” and it was not unlikely that she might escape much notice even at the supper table, as everybody was so absorbed in other things.

She lingered before her own little glass looking wistfully at herself. She was pleased with the frock she had made and liked her appearance in it, but yet there was something disappointing about it. It had none of the style of her sister’s garments, newly come from the hand of the village mantua-maker. It was girlish, and showed her slip of a form prettily in the fashion of the day, but she felt too young. She wanted to look older. She searched her drawer and found a bit of black velvet which she pinned about her throat with a pin containing the miniature of her mother, then with a second

thought she drew the long braids up in loops and fastened them about her head in older fashion. It suited her well, and the change it made astonished her. She decided to wear them so and see if others would notice. Surely, some day she would be a young woman, and perhaps then she would be allowed to have a will of her own occasionally.

She drew a quick breath as she descended the stairs and found her stepmother and the visitor just coming into the hall from the parlor.

They both involuntarily ceased their talk and looked at her in surprise. Over Madam Schuyler's face there came a look as if she had received a revelation. Marcia was no longer a child, but had suddenly blossomed into young womanhood. It was not the time she would have chosen for such an event. There was enough going on, and Marcia was still in school. She had no desire to steer another young soul through the various dangers and follies that beset a pretty girl from the time she puts up her hair until she is safely married to the right man—or the wrong one. She had just begun to look forward with relief to having Kate well settled in life. Kate had been a hard one to manage. She had too much will of her own and a pretty way of always having it. She had no deep sense of reverence for old, staid manners and customs. Many a long lecture had Madam Schuyler delivered to Kate upon her unseemly ways. It did not please her to think of having to go through it all so soon again, therefore upon her usually complacent brow there came a look of dismay.

"Why!" exclaimed the visitor, "is this the bride? How tall she looks! No! Bless me! it isn't, is it? Yes,—Well! I'll declare. It's just Marsh! What have you got on, child? How old you look!"

Marcia flushed. It was not pleasant to have her young womanhood questioned, and in a tone so familiar and patronizing. She disliked the name of "Marsh" exceedingly, especially upon the lips of this woman, a sort of second

cousin of her stepmother's. She would rather have chosen the new frock to pass under inspection of her stepmother without witnesses, but it was too late to turn back now. She must face it.

Though Madam Schuyler's equilibrium was a trifle disturbed, she was not one to show it before a visitor. Instantly she recovered her balance, and perhaps Marcia's ordeal was less trying than if there had been no third person present.

"That looks very well, child!" she said critically with a shade of complacence in her voice. It is true that Marcia had gone beyond orders in purchasing and making garments unknown to her, yet the neatness and fit could but reflect well upon her training. It did no harm for cousin Maria to see what a child of her training could do. It was, on the whole, a very creditable piece of work, and Madam Schuyler grew more reconciled to it as Marcia came down toward them.

"Make it herself?" asked cousin Maria. "Why, Marsh, you did real well. My Matilda does all her own clothes now. It's time you were learning. It's a trifle longish to what you've been wearing them, isn't it? But you'll grow into it, I dare say. Got your hair a new way too. I thought you were Kate when you first started down stairs. You'll make a good-looking young lady when you grow up; only don't be in too much hurry. Take your girlhood while you've got it, is what I always tell Matilda."

Matilda was well on to thirty and showed no signs of taking anything else.

Madam Schuyler smoothed an imaginary pucker across the shoulders and again pronounced the work good.

"I picked berries and got the cloth," confessed Marcia.

Madam Schuyler smiled benevolently and patted Marcia's cheek.

"You needn't have done that, child. Why didn't you come to me for money? You needed something new, and that is a very good purchase, a little light, perhaps, but very pretty.

We’ve been so busy with Kate’s things you have been neglected.”

Marcia smiled with pleasure and passed into the dining room wondering what power the visitor had over her stepmother to make her pass over this digression from her rules so sweetly,—nay, even with praise.

At supper they all rallied Marcia upon her changed appearance. Her father jokingly said that when the bridegroom arrived he would hardly know which sister to choose, and he looked from one comely daughter to the other with fatherly pride. He praised Marcia for doing the work so neatly, and inwardly admired the courage and independence that prompted her to get the money by her own unaided efforts rather than to ask for it, and later, as he passed through the room where she was helping to remove the dishes from the table, he paused and handed her a crisp five-dollar note. It had occurred to him that one daughter was getting all the good things and the other was having nothing. There was a pleasant tenderness in his eyes, a recognition of her rights as a young woman, that made Marcia’s heart exceedingly light. There was something strange about the influence this little new frock seemed to have upon people.

Even Kate had taken a new tone with her. Much of the time at supper she had sat staring at her sister. Marcia wondered about it as she walked down toward the gate after her work was done. Kate had never seemed so quiet. Was she just beginning to realize that she was leaving home forever, and was she thinking how the home would be after she had left it? How she, Marcia, would take the place of elder sister, with only little Harriet and the boys, their stepsister and brothers, left? Was Kate sad over the thought of going so far away from them, or was she feeling suddenly the responsibility of the new position she was to occupy and the duties that would be hers? No, that could not be it, for surely that would bring a softening of expression, a

sweetness of anticipation, and Kate's expression had been wondering, perplexed, almost troubled. If she had not been her own sister Marcia would have added, "hard," but she stopped short at that.

It was a lovely evening. The twilight was not yet over as she stepped from the low piazza that ran the length of the house bearing another above it on great white pillars. A drapery of wistaria in full bloom festooned across one end and half over the front. Marcia stepped back across the stone flagging and driveway to look up the purple clusters of graceful fairy-like shape that embowered the house, and thought how beautiful it would look when the wedding guests should arrive the day after the morrow. Then she turned into the little gravel path, box-bordered, that led to the gate. Here and there on either side luxuriant blooms of dahlias, peonies and roses leaned over into the night and peered at her. The yard had never looked so pretty. The flowers truly had done their best for the occasion, and they seemed to be asking some word of commendation from her.

They nodded their dewy heads sleepily as she went on.

To-morrow the children would be coming back from Aunt Eliza's, where they had been sent safely out of the way for a few days, and the last things would arrive,—and *he* would come. Not later than three in the afternoon he ought to arrive, Kate had said, though there was a possibility that he might come in the morning, but Kate was not counting upon it. He was to drive from his home to Schenectady and, leaving his own horse there to rest, come on by coach. Then he and Kate would go back in fine style to Schenectady in a coach and pair, with a colored coachman, and at Schenectady take their own horse and drive on to their home, a long beautiful ride, so thought Marcia half enviously. How beautiful it would be! What endless delightful talks they might have about the trees and birds and things they saw in passing only Kate did not love to talk about such things. But then she would be with David, and

he talked beautifully about nature or anything else. Kate would learn to love it if she loved him. Did Kate love David? Of course she must or why should she marry him? Marcia resented the thought that Kate might have other objects in view, such as Mary Ann Fothergill had suggested for instance. Of course Kate would never marry any man unless she loved him. That would be a dreadful thing to do. Love was the greatest thing in the world. Marcia looked up to the stars, her young soul thrilling with awe and reverence for the great mysteries of life. She wondered again if life would open sometime for her in some such great way, and if she would ever know better than now what it meant. Would some one come and love her? Some one whom she could love in return with all the fervor of her nature?

She had dreamed such dreams before many times, as girls will, while lovers and future are all in one dreamy, sweet blending of rosy tints and joyous mystery, but never had they come to her with such vividness as that night. Perhaps it was because the household had recognized the woman in her for the first time that evening. Perhaps because the vision she had seen reflected in her mirror before she left her room that afternoon had opened the door of the future a little wider than it had ever opened before.

She stood by the gate where the syringa and lilac bushes leaned over and arched the way, and the honeysuckle climbed about the fence in a wild pretty way of its own and flung sweetness on the air in vivid, erratic whiffs.

The sidewalk outside was brick, and whenever she heard footsteps coming she stepped back into the shadow of the syringa and was hidden from view. She was in no mood to talk with any one.

She could look out into the dusty road and see dimly the horses and carryalls as they passed, and recognize an occasional laughing voice of some village maiden out with her best young man for a ride. Others strolled along the sidewalk, and fragments of talk floated back. Almost every

one had a word to say about the wedding as they neared the gate, and if Marcia had been in another mood it would have been interesting and gratifying to her pride. Every one had a good word for Kate, though many disapproved of her in a general way for principle's sake.

Hanford Weston passed, with long, slouching gait, hands in his trousers pockets, and a frightened, hasty, sideways glance toward the lights of the house beyond. He would have gone in boldly to call if he had dared, and told Marcia that he had done her bidding and now wanted a reward, but John Middleton had joined him at the corner and he dared not make the attempt. John would have done it in a minute if he had wished. He was brazen by nature, but Hanford knew that he would as readily laugh at another for doing it. Hanford shrank from a laugh more than from the cannon's mouth, so he slouched on, not knowing that his goddess held her breath behind a lilac bush not three feet away, her heart beating in annoyed taps to be again interrupted by him in her pleasant thoughts.

Merry, laughing voices mingling with many footsteps came sounding down the street and paused beside the gate. Marcia knew the voices and again slid behind the shrubbery that bordered all the way to the house, and not even a gleam of her light frock was visible. They trooped in, three or four girl friends of Kate's and a couple of young men.

Marcia watched them pass up the box-bordered path from her shadowy retreat, and thought how they would miss Kate, and wondered if the young men who had been coming there so constantly to see her had no pangs of heart that their friend and leader was about to leave them. Then she smiled at herself in the dark. She seemed to be doing the retrospect for Kate, taking leave of all the old friends, home, and life, in Kate's place. It was not her life anyway, and why should she bother herself and sigh and feel this sadness creeping over her for some one else? Was it that she was going to lose her sister? No, for Kate had never been much

of a companion to her. She had always put her down as a little girl and made distinct and clear the difference in their ages. Marcia had been the little maid to fetch and carry, the errand girl, and unselfish, devoted slave in Kate's life. There had been nothing protective and elder-sisterly in her manner toward Marcia. At times Marcia had felt this keenly, but no expression of this lack had ever crossed her lips, and afterwards her devotion to her sister had been the greater, to in a measure compensate for this reproachful thought.

But Marcia could not shake the sadness off. She stole in further among the trees to think about it till the callers should go away. She felt no desire to meet any of them.

She began again to wonder how she would feel if day after to-morrow were her wedding day, and she were going away from home and friends and all the scenes with which she had been familiar since babyhood. Would she mind very much leaving them all? Father? Yes, father had been good to her, and loved her and was proud of her in a way. But one does not lose one's father no matter how far one goes. A father is a father always; and Mr. Schuyler was not a demonstrative man. Marcia felt that her father would not miss her deeply, and she was not sure she would miss him so very much. She had read to him a great deal and talked politics with him whenever he had no one better by, but aside from that her life had been lived much apart from him. Her stepmother? Yes, she would miss her as one misses a perfect mentor and guide. She had been used to looking to her for direction. She was thoroughly conscious that she had a will of her own and would like a chance to exercise it, still, she knew that in many cases without her stepmother she would be like a rudderless ship, a guideless traveller. And she loved her stepmother too, as a young girl can love a good woman who has been her guide and helper, even though there never has been great tenderness between them. Yes, she would miss her stepmother, but she would not feel so very sad over it. Harriet and the little brothers?

Oh, yes, she would miss them, they were dear little things and devoted to her.

Then there were the neighbors, and the schoolmates, and the people of the village. She would miss the minister,—the dear old minister and his wife. Many a time she had gone with her arms full of flowers to the parsonage down the street, and spent the afternoon with the minister's wife. Her smooth white hair under its muslin cap, and her soft wrinkled cheek were very dear to the young girl. She had talked to this friend more freely about her innermost thoughts than she had ever spoken to any living being. Oh, she would miss the minister's wife very much if she were to go away.

The names of her schoolmates came to her. Harriet Woodgate, Eliza Buchanan, Margaret Fletcher, three girls who were her intimates. She would miss them, of course, but how much? She could scarcely tell. Margaret Fletcher more than the other two. Mary Ann Fothergill? She almost laughed at the thought of anybody missing Mary Ann. John Middleton? Hanford Weston? There was not a boy in the school she would miss for an instant, she told herself with conviction. Not one of them realized her ideal. There was much pairing off of boy and girl in school, but Marcia, like the heroine of "Comin' thro' the Rye," was good friends with all the boys and intimate with none. They all counted it an honor to wait upon her, and she cared not a farthing for any. She felt herself too young, of course, to think of such things, but when she dreamed her day dreams the lover and prince who figured in them bore no familiar form or feature. He was a prince and these were only schoolboys.

The merry chatter of the young people in the house floated through the open windows, and Marcia could hear her sister's voice above them all. Chameleon-like she was all gaiety and laughter now, since her gravity at supper.

They were coming out the front door and down the walk. Kate was with them. Marcia could catch glimpses of the

girls’ white frocks as they came nearer. She saw that her sister was walking with Captain Leavenworth. He was a handsome young man who made a fine appearance in his uniform. He and Kate had been intimate for two years, and it might have been more than friendship had not Kate’s father interfered between them. He did not think so well of the handsome young captain as did either his daughter Kate or the United States Navy who had given him his position. Squire Schuyler required deep integrity and strength of moral character in the man who aspired to be his son-in-law. The captain did not number much of either among his virtues.

There had been a short, sharp contest which had ended in the departure of young Leavenworth from the town some three years before, and the temporary plunging of Kate Schuyler into a season of tears and pouting. But it had not been long before her gay laughter was ringing again, and her father thought she had forgotten. About that time David Spafford had appeared and promptly fallen in love with the beautiful girl, and the Schuyler mind was relieved. So it came about that, upon the reappearance of the handsome young captain wearing the insignia of his first honors, the Squire received him graciously. He even felt that he might be more lenient about his moral character, and told himself that perhaps he was not so bad after all, he must have something in him or the United States government would not have seen fit to honor him. It was easier to think so, now Kate was safe.

Marcia watched her sister and the captain go laughing down to the gate, and out into the street. She wondered that Kate could care to go out to-night when it was to be almost her last evening at home; wondered, too, that Kate would walk with Captain Leavenworth when she belonged to David now. She might have managed it to go with one of the girls. But that was Kate’s way. Kate’s ways were not Marcia’s ways.

Marcia wondered if she would miss Kate, and was obliged to acknowledge to herself that in many ways her sister's absence would be a relief to her. While she recognized the power of her sister's beauty and will over her, she felt oppressed sometimes by the strain she was under to please, and wearied of the constant, half-fretful, half playful fault-finding.

The gay footsteps and voices died away down the village street, and Marcia ventured forth from her retreat. The moon was just rising and came up a glorious burnished disk, silhouetting her face as she stood a moment listening to the stirring of a bird among the branches. It was her will to-night to be alone and let her fancies wander where they would. The beauty and the mystery of a wedding was upon her, touching all her deeper feelings, and she wished to dream it out and wonder over it. Again it came to her what if the day after the morrow were her wedding day and she stood alone thinking about it. She would not have gone off down the street with a lot of giggling girls nor walked with another young man. She would have stood here, or down by the gate—and she moved on toward her favorite arch of lilac and syringa—yes, down by the gate in the darkness looking out and thinking how it would be when he should come. She felt sure if it had been herself who expected David she would have begun to watch for him a week before the time he had set for coming, heralding it again and again to her heart in joyous thrills of happiness, for who knew but he might come sooner and surprise her? She would have rejoiced that to-night she was alone, and would have excused herself from everything else to come down there in the stillness and watch for him, and think how it would be when he would really get there. She would hear his step echoing down the street and would recognize it as his. She would lean far over the gate to listen and watch, and it would come nearer and nearer, and her heart would beat faster and faster, and her breath come quicker, until he was

at last by her side, his beautiful surprise for her in his eyes. But now, if David should really try to surprise Kate by coming that way to-night he would not find her waiting nor thinking of him at all, but off with Captain Leavenworth.

With a passing pity for David she went back to her own dream. With one elbow on the gate and her cheek in her hand she thought it all over. The delayed evening coach rumbled up to the tavern not far away and halted. Real footsteps came up the street, but Marcia did not notice them only as they made more vivid her thoughts.

Her dream went on and the steps drew nearer until suddenly they halted and some one appeared out of the shadow. Her heart stood still, for form and face in the darkness seemed unreal, and the dreams had been most vivid. Then with tender masterfulness two strong arms were flung about her and her face was drawn close to his across the vine-twined gate until her lips touched his. One long clinging kiss of tenderness he gave her and held her head close against his breast for just a moment while he murmured: “My darling! My precious, precious Kate, I have you at last!”

The spell was broken! Marcia’s dream was shattered. Her mind awoke. With a scream she sprang from him, horror and a wild but holy joy mingling with her perplexity. She put her hand upon her heart, marvelling over the sweetness that lingered upon her lips, trying to recover her senses as she faced the eager lover who opened the little gate and came quickly toward her, as yet unaware that it was not Kate to whom he had been talking.

CHAPTER III

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Marcia stood quivering, trembling. She comprehended all in an instant. David Spafford had come a day earlier than he had been expected, to surprise Kate, and Kate was off having a good time with some one else. He had mistaken her for Kate. Her long dress and her put-up hair had deceived him in the moonlight. She tried to summon some womanly courage, and in her earnestness to make things right she forgot her natural timidity.

"It is not Kate," she said gently; "it is only Marcia. Kate did not know you were coming to-night. She did not expect you till to-morrow. She had to go out,—that is—she has gone with—" the truthful, youthful, troubled sister paused. To her mind it was a calamity that Kate was not present to meet her lover. She should at least have been in the house ready for a surprise like this. Would David not feel the omission keenly? She must keep it from him if she could about Captain Leavenworth. There was no reason why he should feel badly about it, of course, and yet it might annoy him. But he stepped back laughing at his mistake.

"Why! Marcia, is it you, child? How you have grown! I never should have known you!" said the young man pleasantly. He had always a grave tenderness for this little sister of his love. "Of course your sister did not know I was coming," he went on, "and doubtless she has many things to attend to. I did not expect her to be out here watching for me, though for a moment I did think she was at the gate. You say she is gone out? Then we will go up to the house and I will be there to surprise her when she comes."

Marcia turned with relief. He had not asked where Kate was gone, nor with whom.