

'It is a pity I have made that engagement; for the day is of the finest, and that drive of last year made me very happy.'

'It was pleasant,' agreed Aurore; and with a start she perceived that her whilom admirer wore once more in his buttonhole a blue flower.

'You have not changed your mind about marrying?' Toussaint asked.

'We will have your wedding first,' answered Aurore, laughing, though her heart was sore.

'That can not be, Ma'amselle Aurore!' he exclaimed with emphasis. 'When mine is, then also must be yours; for I will never marry another.'

It is a pity you have made that engagement for the Mountain,' remarked Aurore, irrelevantly, with a laugh and a blush.

'Does that mean,' cried Toussaint eagerly, 'that you would perhaps come for a drive?'

Aurore nodded shyly.

'Does it mean anything more?' asked Toussaint; and this time his tone was beseeching. 'Does it mean that you could forget my ugly name and become—'

'Madame La Mort,' assented Aurore, 'since Love has conquered Death.'

And Toussaint did not know that the jest was her father's.—*Ave Maria.*

## AN INTERLUDE

Aunt Abbie had one of her headaches, and the household was demoralised, if the word can be applied to anything so staid and simple. The sufferer, provided by her niece with a hot soapstone for her feet and various concoctions of herbs to drink, had withdrawn to the chamber above the living room. Meanwhile a hush settled over the house. Miss Fanny checked the exultant spring song that rose to her lips, and the chickens seemed to tread more softly.

'I do hope nobody'll come in,' said Miss Fanny; 'for it's too cold to sit out doors, and Aunt Abbie could never stand to hear talking.'

But Mrs. Currier, her nearest neighbor, was at that moment lifting the latch. There were two grades of callers in Hilltop. If you went in without knocking, you were on terms of intimacy; a warning rap indicated more formal relations.

Miss Fanny held up a warning finger.

'Aunt Abbie's dreadful bad with one of her headaches,' she said, 'and maybe she's asleep.'

And so they conversed in whispers. But presently the alluring themes of house-cleaning and garden-planting tempted them. They raised their voices, and Aunt Abbie awoke. She was better; the headache was in full flight. She even felt equal to taking a silent part in the conversation going on downstairs, and stepped softly to the aperture through which in winter the stovepipe came from below to supply her bedchamber with warmth.

'She must be an awful sight of trouble,' were the first words she heard.

'She is,' said Miss Fanny's well-known voice. 'I've planned every way in the world to get rid of her. I declare it seems sometimes as if I couldn't stand to have her around another minute.'

Aunt Abbie had heard enough. She crawled into bed again, and shook with sobs that racked her old frame. Her own niece planning to get rid of her! Tired of her! Thinking her trouble! Why had she never suspected this before? Fanny had always seemed so kind. Her own sister's daughter, and such a hypocrite!

'Oh—oh!' wept the injured woman.

'Are you worse, Aunt Abbie?' whispered Miss Fanny, putting her head in at the door. 'I thought I heard you groaning.'

'No, I ain't,' answered Aunt Abbie. 'The headache's just about gone, but there's worse things than headaches.'

'I know that,' responded Miss Fanny, cheerfully; 'but I'm awful glad you're better. Don't you think you could drink some tea? You didn't eat a swaller of dinner.'

'I don't want any tea or anything else. I've just been eating you out of house and home this long while.'

'Why, Aunt Abbie!'

'Yes, I have, and I'm an awful lot of trouble and expense, and you'd like to get rid of me.'

'I don't know what you mean,' said her niece. 'I'm sure I'm just as glad as can be to have you here. You ain't hardly a mite of expense, either, and if you was I wouldn't care.'

'That'll do to talk,' said Aunt Abbie, getting out of bed and planting her feet on the floor with decision; 'but I know you're sick and tired having me round.'

Gentle Miss Fanny was perplexed. Had those awful headaches ended by affecting her aunt's brain? She tried a diverting theme.

'You'll feel different after you get downstairs. Mrs. Currier just left; she brought me some tomato plants.'

No answer.

'And, Aunt Abbie, I've concluded not to go and help Cousin Hannah with the house-cleaning. I don't believe you're a bit well.'

'I'm well enough for a tiresome old critter that's in folks' way,' answered Aunt Abbie; 'and I won't have you staying at home for me.'

The mystery grew darker. What had clouded and embittered that old mind? Miss Fanny, puzzled and apprehensive, left for her cousin's the next morning.

'If I hadn't promised, I wouldn't go a step,' she said as she went away. 'Those headaches are surely wearing on you.'

'They ain't,' said Aunt Abbie. 'I'm just as well as ever I was.'

'Well, be sure and take that liver medicine—a teaspoonful before each meal; and take things easy. You can pile up the dishes and leave them for me to wash, and I'll be home in a couple of days. And, Aunt Abbie,' she came back to say, 'you get that notion out of your mind that you're a trouble to me. Why, I wouldn't know what to do without you!'

Then she hurried on, fearing, like a true New Englander, to betray unwonted emotion.

'I heard her with my own ears,' said Aunt Abbie to herself. "'I've planned every way to get rid of her. It seems as if I couldn't stand it.'" Those were her very words, and I'm going right straight away.'

She had thought it all out in the night. She would go and work in the cotton mill again, just as she did when she was a girl.

'There wasn't a hand that could beat me,' she reasoned. 'I could do twice what most of them could, and I guess I can yet. When they see me run a loom, they'll think I am pretty spry.'

She put the house in order, leaving several days' supply of water for the chickens, and trusting them to forage for food. Then she made her travelling toilet, putting on her black alpaca gown and adorning the waist with a large pink bow, as a supposed concession to fashion. She wore her Sunday bonnet; but in her excitement forgot to pin it securely to her little knot of hair, and it settled down on one side of her head in a rakish and jaunty manner. In her old carpet-bag she packed such articles as she deemed would be required, and tied a white apron about her waist.

'Folks is always eating in the cars, I've been told,' she said. 'Some children might sit near me and get grease on my front breadth.'

After she had fairly started, she went back twice, to put the cat out and to hide the spoons. She left a note on her niece's pincushion.

'I ain't going to be any more trouble to you,' so it ran. 'You'll find the spoons in the green-sprigged teapot, and be sure and cover the tomato plants if it gets frosty.'

It was something of a walk through the woods to the station; but she met no one, and bought her ticket with mingled joy and apprehension. A strange youth stamped it and pushed it through a little grating, and the train whizzed in. A man in uniform helped her to get aboard, and she sat on the edge of the seat, her carpet-bag grasped tightly, her bonnet still perched insecurely over one ear. The brisk walk in the wind had disarranged her thin grey hair, and it was a very unkempt and dishevelled old lady who arrived at — early in the afternoon and asked the way to 'the mill.' There was not a familiar building in sight; the faces in the street were strange, and her unaccustomed fast had weakened her.

'The mill?' asked a kindly woman whom she addressed. 'Which one?'

'Are there two?'

'Bless your heart, grandma, there's a dozen or more!' was the reply. 'And right across the street is the office of the biggest one, if you want to find out anything.'

Aunt Abbie passed through the open portal.

'What is it, grandma?' asked a man behind a railing. Aunt Abbie was vexed.

'I ain't your grandma,' she said; 'and I ain't that woman's grandma, either. I want a place to work.'

The man, being busy, attempted to dismiss her, saying that no scrub women were needed.

'I don't want to scrub,' she answered. 'I want to run a loom. I was the spryest girl in the mill once. You just let me try, and you'll see.'

'Move along!' he said. 'There are others waiting to see me.' He thought her demented; and, from his point of view, had reason to do so.

She went out of the door, tears in her dim old eyes. Two boys 'shied' pebbles at her and called her Mrs. Hayseed. No longer able to stand, she sat down on the curb, and a crowd gathered. A policeman, to the urchins' delight, sent in a call for a patrol waggon, and took her kindly but forcibly by the arm.

'If you'll let me, I'll take care of her,' said a clear voice, as a young woman made her way through the crowd and put her arm about the bewildered Aunt Abbie. 'Come right along with me, dear!' And she smoothed the straggling hair and put the bonnet straight with deft touches. Aunt Abbie's grandfather fought at Bunker Hill, and at a friendly word she was her brave self again. Then the cry of 'A fight!' from the next corner attracted the boys as well as the guardian of the peace, and the women—one so old, and one so young—were left to themselves.

'What I want is a cup of tea,' said Aunt Abbie, 'and then I'm going straight home. I'm afraid I'm going to have one of my headaches. I'm subject to them. I never saw such an awful place as this is.'