lining her waist, and a bow of purple ribbon at her throat.

'Why, you've come real early,' she said as she kissed Alice's cheek, pink and soft within the stiff bonnet. 'And I'm real glad, too, for it'll give us a nice long visit before supper. Come in and take off your bonnet; you look kind o' hot and tired.' And she led the way into a cool, shady room.

Alice handed her the rosebuds. 'They're all I brought you this time,' she apologised. 'And they're all wilted; I must have held them too tight.'

'Oh, they'll freshen up when I put 'em in water. I'll go right now and draw a bucket out of the bottom of the well.'

'I'd rather go to the porch.'

So they went back to the shade of the grapevine, and Miss Martha resumed her work. She was piecing a quilt, a double Irish chain of tiny red and white blocks. Alice watched her for a minute and then asked a little shyly: 'Is that my quilt you're piecing, Aunt Mattie?'

'Yes, I guess it is. It's the one I promised you, anyhow, if you like it. It'll be right pretty, I think,' and she held up a piece for Alice to get the effect. But the girl looked away, and a slow color came into her cheeks. 'Aunt Mattie,' she said softly, 'I sha'n't need it. I'm—John and I—we've quit.'

Miss Martha looked at her a moment and then let her hands drop with the work in them to her lap. She showed no surprise; the words seemed rather to be a confirmation of something she had expected and dreaded.

'I don't know what to say,' she said finally. 'I reckon you've made up your mind and are settled about it; only,' she hesitated, 'I hope it's all for the best.'

She began her work again. 'I'll go ahead and finish the quilt anyhow, and give it to you as I said I would, for I guess you'll need quilts whether you marry or don't. I find I always do.'

'But I'm not going to keep house and live by myself as you do,' the girl demonstrated.

'What are you going to do, then?'

'Live at home. Why not?'

'Well, yes, that's likely for a while, but one of these times you won't have no home to stay at, honey; your ma and pa they'll be gone same as mine is, and your brothers and sisters they'll be married and gone, too. Then you'll be living by yourself, I guess, same as I do.'

'I'll live with my brothers and sisters, then.'

'My experience is that you won't ever keep that up long. I've tried it, and I know what I'm talking about.'

'Weren't they good to you, Aunt Mattie?' the girl asked after a minute.

'Why, yes, they meant to be, but they've got their own interests and their own families, and it don't make no difference how long you stay—you're an outsider. Why, you ought to know yourself how 'tis; you've visited at your sister Elma's. Did you really to say feel at home there, like you do at your own home now?'

'No,' Alice admitted reluctantly, 'I didn't, but Elma's so awfully changed. You know how she used to be so particular about everything—takin' such care of her face and hands, and always curling her hair; well, I wish you'd see her now. She goes out without a bonnet, and combs back her hair tight and slick, and does it up any way that's handiest. She hardly ever changes her dress after dinner, and she just works and slaves; don't think of anything else. And Harry's worse than she is: goes around without any kind of a collar; and it seems to me, Aunt Mattie, they don't care much about each other any more. That's the worst thing. When he came from his work he used to call to her and go in where she was and laugh and joke about things, and seem to take some enjoyment in life; but now it's work and save and lay by for the children, and that's all they live for. Don't you hate to see folks get that way, Aunt Mattie?'

'Yes, I do. And yet, you know, we maybe ain't fair to 'em, judging on the outside like we do. I reckon it seems different to them. And as for not makin' over each other, don't you reckon that's partly because they understand each other so well it ain't—well, ain't called for? Yet I'm like you; I don't just like to see it.'

There seemed no more to say on the subject, and a silence fell between them, broken after some minutes by Miss Martha, who asked with some hesitation: 'What was the trouble between you and John, if you don't mind my asking?'

'I don't mind your asking, Aunt Mattie,' Alice answered, flushing, 'but I don't know how to answer you, for there wasn't really anything the trouble. We just quit.'

'Mutual consent?'

'No—well, not at first. I didn't want to set the day; I couldn't. It was after I'd been down to Elma's, and I was disgusted with the thought of everything. I don't want to live like she does and be like them; and that's what it does mean to get married and settle down on a farm; and I told John so and it made him angry.'

'Well, I thought that was about what's the matter. I don't blame you—and I don't blame John for gettin' mad, either. What does you ma think about it?'

'Oh, she doesn't say anything. I guess she's glad, though. I don't think ma wants me ever to get married. You know I'm the baby, and she likes to keep me with her, I suppose. Then, you know, she's got an idea that I'd make an artist if I had a chance. I do draw fairly well, and she's always been at pa to send me away where I can take lessons. My teacher at the academy said she thought I could illustrate for magazines and papers if I was trained for it, and now pa says he'll let me go and take lessons next fall if I want to. And I guess ma likes that.'

'I must say I wouldn't hardly 'a' thought it. John's a good boy, and he's got good prospects. I'd 'a' thought your ma'd 'a' hated it.'

'Well, she didn't; she did more than anyone else to bring it about. When I came back from Elma's and told her how it all was out there, she said it was what anyone might expect; marrying a farmer and settling down to life on a farm always meant about the same thing. And she said she didn't for the life of her see how a girl that had been raised on a farm and knew what it meant could do it. Then she said to me, "It'll be just the same with you, mind my word"; and I made up my mind right then that it wouldn't.'

Miss Martha threaded her needle carefully and tied a knot before she made any comment.

'I don't think she did right to say what she did in the first place, and I'll say it if she is your mother,' she said. 'I always hate to hear married women talking that way, because, to begin with, they don't mean it. They don't stop to think—that's where the trouble is. They see their girls young and care-free and havin' a good time, and they hate to see 'em tied down to hard work and worries and everything. But if they'd think a minute, they'd see that their girls'll get old and care'll come to 'em and worry, whether they marry or don't marry, and they'll not find it any easier to bear havin' it all to bear by theirselves, either.'

There seemed something personal in Miss Martha's resentment, and Alice was at a loss for a reply. Finally she asked shyly: 'Do you think, Aunt Mattie, that married folks are happier than others?'

'Well, now, that's hard to say; in lots of cases of course they ain't; but I do think, Alice, as a general thing they are.'

'But you have an easy life here by yourself; you haven't much to do, and your house is always just so; when you put anything away it stays right where you put it, and there's nobody to bother you. Seems to me you've escaped a good deal.'

Miss Martha looked at her. 'Now, Alice,' she said, 'seems to me that's a good deal like congratulatin' a man that hadn't any legs on escaping rheumatism in the knees, and you wouldn't do that. No, don't apologise—everybody says that to me. I ought to get used to it, I suppose, but I don't, somehow. It hurts every time. But then I can't expect folks that are always workin' to keep things up and gettin' all wore out at it, to know how much more tiresome 'tis not to have it to do.' She paused, looking away from her work and from her visitor, far away, across the field of young corn that lay beyond the road, to where the river shone silver between the trunks of the sycamores and the cottonwoods.

'Honey,' she said at last, without turning her eyes. I'd tell you something if I thought you'd care about it or it would do you any good: something I haven't told many. I don't know if you ever knowed it or not, but I was engaged myself once.'

Alice shook her head.

'No, I reckon not,' Miss Martha went on. 'There didn't many know it, I guess; folks was slyer about being engaged them days. I'd just turned eighteen when we broke off. I can't tell you how old I was when I got engaged, because I don't know myself.'

'Why, how was that?'

'Well, I guess I'll begin at the beginning. His name was Charley Mills, and his folks used to live back along the road about half a mile from us, and he always came along by our house to go to school. Seems as if folks took it for granted we'd marry, same as we did ourselves. Though I can't say as my folks approved of it. They never had anything against Charley, as I know of, but they was pretty well off for them days, and carried their heads higher than most, and the Millses was poor. They was the only renters in our whole district. Of course, the people around thought that anybody with any spunk would at least make out to get a place of their own. But the Millses was content as anybody; fact is, I think that was what aggravated our folks, that they was content. I remember how often father'd manage to bring up that old sayin' about "What's bred in the bone and born in the blood," and I knowed he was hittin' Charley Mills for my benefit just as well as if he'd called out his name. And mother she'd say things about folks that didn't have no regular wash-day and that fried down their sausages in cakes 'stead of casin' 'em and all such.

'Well, you know how it is; if you're looking for a thing, you're mighty apt to find it or to think you do, which comes to the same thing. I got to watchin' Charley and pickin' flaws in him and thinkin' every little fault meant a bigger one behind it, though I did love him. I knew that all the time. Sometimes seems to me it is that way; nobody can see the faults in a body like the one that loves 'em best, because it don't hurt anybody else so much, and they don't care enough to notice 'em. But it's a bad habit to get into.