

WITHOUT KITH OR KIN.

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CHAPTER I.

MABEL was right; the sun shone on them on their journey, and was shining full on the west front of Wrotham when, an hour or so before it set, Elizabeth first saw her new home. A great house, larger by far than the Clock House (too large to be loved much, she thought at this first sight of it), with a sort of beauty in the quaintness of its architecture, and in one grey tower that, standing at the eastern corner of it, had been allowed to clothe itself with ivy,—a special privilege accorded to no other portion of the building, for all the rest stood bare and stately—white stone a little stained with age rising from a stone terrace.

"It has a cold look at first," Mrs. Hilliard said to her, "but I think one grows to like it by degrees. I am getting fond of walking up and down this terrace. Through the whole year, winter and summer, we shall see the sunsets from here. You see where the sun goes down now. In winter he must set over there, behind a whole net-work of bare branches. I am going to have part of this place matted, and covered with an awning, and all of it made pretty with flowers

and creepers; but that will hardly be this year, perhaps: there is so much indoors still to do."

Pauline said this, but to Elizabeth's eye there did not seem much left to do within the house as, following where Mrs. Hilliard led, she looked into room after room, and went up the broad staircase, and traversed the gallery where the pictures were.

"I came here with Arthur once just after we were married, and we walked up and down this gallery for such a long time, and talked of all the things that we would do when we came back from India," Pauline said, with a half smile and half sigh. "I suppose I shall forget that day in time, but as yet I never walk along here without thinking of it. We stood together at that window for half an hour. How hopeful and foolish one is when one is young! I don't think we ever thought that all the changes could come that *have* come since,—that things could ever look less bright to us than they did then."

The sun was coming slantwise through the windows, and touching a picture here and there; one picture specially that hung, not on the long wall, but at the end of the gallery where they turned. There was a door there on their left hand, leading out upon a landing.

"The other staircase comes up here," Pauline said, "and that is the one we oftenest use. You need not pass all through the gallery, you know, every time you want to get up to your room—that is, unless you like. Look, this goes down direct into the hall. And here

are your rooms. I hope you will like them, dear. I chose sunny ones for you, because our dear old school-room at the Clock House is so bright. Do you think you can make yourself comfortable here, and be content to stay with us?" Pauline said in her kind way.

Elizabeth could be content to stay, and thankful too; but yet the first days seemed blank enough. She did her teaching; she arranged her little properties in her new rooms; she helped Pauline in some of the business that she had to do; but her heart was aching all the time, and yearning for the home and for the warm familiarity of the things that she had left. People like Elizabeth suffer so acutely when they are separated from what they know and love. It is to them much as though a limb should be cut off, and the wound left bare. It takes weeks even to skin it over; it takes months, and sometimes years to heal it. Elizabeth knew that every one was kind to her in this new home of hers, and she was grateful with all her heart for their kindness, but yet she could not forget the place that she had left. This great house in the first weeks seemed to chill her with its stateliness, its chilness, its silent unfamiliarity.

She began to love its outer aspect first. As time went on, and she wandered day after day amongst its noble trees, she gradually came to feel something for them that by degrees grew into an almost passionate love. For it was the first time in all her life that she had really known what the true beauty of trees was. At the Clock House they had had much wood, but no

individual trees, as they had here, whose loveliness was a thing to dream of. "Yes, we are proud of our trees," Pauline said, when Elizabeth first spoke to her about them, and both Pauline and Mr. Hilliard liked to talk of their beauty, and to tell their age and girth, and calculate the space that was covered by their outspreading branches; but yet to Pauline and Mr. Hilliard both they were trees merely, not, as they became to Elizabeth, a kind of embodied poetry.

From the windows in the long gallery she could overlook the finest of them, and, in a large degree at first, perhaps, from the intense pleasure that that wooded prospect gave her, she began after a time to fall into the habit of pacing that gallery up and down. It was not a picture-gallery properly; but there were pictures there—faces of silent men and women that looked down upon her as she walked, and brought to her a soothing sense of dumb companionship; for her solitary upbringing had given her a taste for solitude, but yet had left her enough love for human sympathy to make these calm faces on the canvas pleasant to her, like quiet shadows of living faces. There were one or two that as she passed them used to smile at her, and she would smile back a greeting to them sometimes.

"That bright-looking girl with the shepherdess's crook was Arthur's great-grandmother," Pauline said to her one day. "I like her best of all of them; but she had such a sorrowful life, for all her brightness here. There is a little miniature of her shut away