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LITTLE PRUDY'S
SISTER SUSY



SOPHIE MAY

**LITTLE PRUDY'S
SISTER SUSY**

By

SOPHIE MAY

New York
Hurst & Company
Publishers

TO MY
LITTLE NIECE
Katie Clarke
THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU, KATIE,
WITH THE LOVE OF YOUR AUNTIE.



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PREFACE.

Here is a story about the oldest of the three little Parlin girls, "sister Susy;" though so many things are always happening to Prudy that it is not possible to keep her out of the book.

I hope my dear little friends will see how kind it was in God to send the "slow winter" and the long nights of pain to little Prudy.

If trouble should come to us, let us grow gentle, and patient, and lovely.

Little friends, be sure of one thing—our dear Father in heaven sends us something hard to bear only because he loves us.

CHAPTER I.

KEEPING SECRETS.

We might begin this story of Susy Parlin on a New Year's day, only it is so hard to skip over Christmas. There is such a charm about Christmas! It makes you think at once of a fir tree shining with little candles and sparkling with toys, or of a droll Santa Claus with a pack full of presents, or of a waxen angel called the Christ-child.

And it is just as well to date from the twenty-fifth of December, because, as "Christ was born on Christmas day," that is really the "Happy New Year."

For a long while the three little Parlin girls had been thinking and dreaming of presents. Susy's wise head was like a beehive, full of little plans and little fancies, which were flying about like bees, and buzzing in everybody's ears.

But it may be as well to give you a short description of the Parlin family.

Susy's eyes were of an "evening blue," the very color of the sky in a summer night; good eyes, for they were as clear as a well which has the "truth" lying at the bottom of it. She was almost as nimble as a squirrel, and could face a northern snow storm like an engineer. Her hair was dark brown, and as smooth and straight as pine-needles; while Prudy's fair hair rippled like a brook running over pebbles. Prudy's face was sunny, and her mouth not much larger than a button-hole.

The youngest sister was named Alice, but the family usually called her Dotty, or Dotty Dimple, for she was about as round as a period, and had a cunning little dimple in each cheek. She had bright eyes, long curls, and a very short tongue; that is, she did not talk much. She was two years and a half old before she could be prevailed upon to say anything at all. Her father declared that Dotty thought there were people enough in the world to do the talking, and she would keep still; or perhaps she was tired of hearing Prudy say so much.

However, she had a way of nodding her curly head, and shaking her plump little forefinger; so everybody knew very well what she meant. She had learned the use of signs from a little deaf and dumb boy of whom we shall hear more by and by; but all at once, when she was ready she began to talk with all her might, and soon made up for lost time.

The other members of the family were only grown people: Mr. and Mrs. Parlin, the children's excellent parents; Mrs. Read, their kind Quaker grandmother; and the Irish servant girl, Norah.

Just now Mrs. Margaret Parlin, their "aunt Madge," was visiting them, and the little girls felt quite easy about Christmas, for they gave it all up to her; and when they wanted to know how to spend their small stock of money, or how much this or that pretty toy would cost, Prudy always settled it by saying, "Let's go ask auntie: *she'll* know, for she's been through the Rithmetic."

Prudy spoke these words with awe. She thought "going through the Rithmetic" was next thing to going round the world.

"O Auntie, I'm so glad you came," said Susy, "for I didn't see how I was ever going to finish my Christmas presents: I go to school, you know, and it takes me all the rest of the time to slide!"

The children were busy making wonderful things "all secret;" or they would have been secret if Prudy hadn't told.

For one thing, she wondered very much what Susy could be doing with four pins stuck in a spool. She watched the nimble fingers as they passed the worsted thread over the pin-heads, making stitches as fast as Susy could wink.

"It looks like a tiny snake all sticked through the hole in the spool," said Prudy, eager with curiosity. "If you ain't a-goin' to speak, I don't know what I *shall* do, Susy Parlin!"

When poor Susy could not pretend any longer not to hear, she answered Prudy, half vexed, half laughing, "O, dear, I s'pose you'll tease and tease till you find out. Won't you never say a word to anybody, *never*?"

"Never in my world," replied the little one, with a solemn shake of her head.

"Well, it's a lamp-mat for auntie. It's going to be blue, and red, and all colors; and when it's done, mother'll sew it into a round, and put fringe on: won't it be splendid? But remember, you promised not to tell!"

Now, the very next time Prudy sat in her auntie's lap she whispered in her ear,—

"You don't know what *we're* making for you, *all secret*, out of worsted, and *I shan't* tell!"

"Mittens?" said aunt Madge, kissing Prudy's lips, which were pressed together over her sweet little secret like a pair of sugar-tongs clinching a lump of sugar.

"Mittens? No, indeed! Better'n that! There'll be fringe all over it; it's in a round; it's to put something on,—to put the *lamp* on!"

"Not a lamp-mat, of course?"

"Why, yes it is! O, there, now you've been and guessed all in a minute! Susy's gone an' told! I didn't s'pose she'd tell. I wouldn't for nothin' in my world!"

Was it strange that Susy felt vexed when she found that her nice little surprise was all spoiled?

"Try to be patient," said Mrs. Parlin, gently. "Remember how young and thoughtless your sister is. She never means any harm."

"O, but, mamma," replied Susy, "she *keeps* me being patient all the whole time, and it's hard work."

So Susy, in her vexation, said to Prudy, rather sternly, "You little naughty thing, to go and tell when you promised not to! You're almost as bad as Dotty. "What makes you act so?"

"Why, Susy," said the child, looking up through her tears, "have I *acted*? I didn't know I'd acted! If you loved me, you wouldn't look that way to me. You wrinkle up your face just like Nanny when she says she'll shake the naughty out of me, Miss Prudy."

Then what could Susy do but forgive the sweet sister, who kissed her so coaxingly, and looked as innocent as a poor little kitty that has been stealing cream without knowing it is a sin?

It was plain that it would not do to trust Prudy with secrets. Her brain could not hold them, any more than a sieve can hold water. So Mrs. Parlin took pity upon Susy, and allowed her and her cousin Florence Eastman to lock themselves into her chamber at certain hours, and work at their presents without interruption.

While the little girls sat together busily employed with book-marks and pin-cushions, the time flew very swiftly, and they were as happy as bees in a honeysuckle.

Mrs. Parlin said she believed nothing less than Christmas presents would ever make Susy willing to use a needle and thread; for she disliked sewing, and declared she wished the man who made the needles had to swallow them all.

The family were to celebrate Christmas evening; for Mr. Parlin was away, and might not reach home in season for Christmas eve.

For a wonder they were not to have a Tree, but a Santa Claus, "just for a change."

"Not a truly Santa Claus, that comes puffin' down the chimney," explained Prudy, who knew very well it would be only cousin Percy under a mask and white wig.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE DAYLIGHT.

On Christmas morning, at three o'clock, there was a great bustle and pattering of little feet, and buzzing of little voices trying to speak in whispers. Susy and Prudy were awake and astir.

"Where *do* you s'pose the stockings are?" buzzed Prudy, in a very loud whisper.

"Right by the bed-post, Prudy Parlin; and if you don't take care we'll wake everybody up.—'Sh! 'Sh!"

"Mine's pinned on," said Prudy; "and I've pricked my fingers. O deary me!"

"Well, of course you've waked 'em all now," exclaimed Susy, indignantly: "I might have pricked my fingers to pieces, but I wouldn't have said a word."

Mr. and Mrs. Parlin, who were in the next room, were wide awake by this time; but they said nothing, only listened to the whispers of the children, which grew fainter, being smothered and kept down by mouthfuls of candy, lozenges, and peanuts.

The little girls longed for daybreak. The sun, however, seemed to be in no haste, and it was a long while before there was a peep of light. Susy and Prudy waited, wondering whether the sun would really forget to show his face; but all the while they waited they were eating candy; so it was neither dull nor lonely. As for closing their eyes again, they would have scorned the idea. It would be a pity indeed to fall asleep, and lose the pleasure of saying "Merry Christmas" to everybody. Norah, the Irish servant, had said she should be up very early to attend High Mass: they must certainly waylay her on the stairs. How astonished she would be, when she supposed they were both soundly asleep!

"Let me do it myself," said Susy: "you stay here, Prudy, for you'll be sure to make a noise."

"I'll go on my tippy toes," pleaded Prudy, her mouth half filled with chocolate drops.

So through their mother's room they stole softly, only throwing over one chair, and hitting Dotty's crib a little in their haste. Dotty made a sleepy sound of alarm, and Prudy could not help laughing, but only "in her sleeve," that is, in her "nightie" sleeve, which she put up to her mouth to smother the noise.

When they had reached the back-stairs Susy whispered, "O, Norah is up and gone down. I hear her in the kitchen. 'Sh! 'Sh!"

Susy thought there was no time to be lost, and she would have rushed down stairs, two steps at a time, but her little sister was exactly in the way.

"Somebody has been and tugged my little chair up here," said Prudy, "and I must tug it back again."

So in the dim light the two children groped their way down stairs, Prudy going first with the chair.

"O, what a little snail! Hurry—can't you?" said Susy, impatiently; "Norah'll be gone! What's the use of our waking up in the night if we can't say Merry Christmas to anybody?"

"Well, *ain't* I a-hurryin' now?" exclaimed Prudy, plunging forward and falling, chair and all, the whole length of the stairs.

All the house was awake now, for Prudy screamed lustily. Grandma Read called out from the passage-way,—

"O, little Prudence, has thee broken thy neck?"

Mrs. Parlin rushed out, too frightened to speak, and Mr. Parlin ran down stairs, and took Prudy up in his arms.

"It was—you—did it—Susy Parlin," sobbed the child. "I shouldn't—have—fell, if you—hadn't—have—screamed."

The poor little girl spoke slowly and with difficulty, as if she dropped a bucket into her full heart, and drew up the words one at a time.

"O, mother, I know it was me," said Susy meekly; "and I was careless, and it was all in the dark. I'm sure I hope Prudy'll forgive me."

"No, it wasn't you, neither," said Prudy, whose good humor was restored the moment Susy had made what she considered due confession. "You never touched me, Susy! It was the *chair*; and I love you just as dearly as ever I did."

Prudy lay on the sofa for some time, looking quite pale by the gas-light, while her mother rubbed her side, and the rest of the family stood looking at her with anxious faces.

It was quite an important occasion for Prudy, who always liked to be the centre of attraction.

"O, mamma," said she, closing her eyes languidly, "when the room makes believe whirl round, does it *truly* whirl round?"

The truth was, she felt faint and dizzy, though only for a short time.

"I wish," said she, "it had been somebody else that fell down stairs, and not me, for I didn't go down easy! The *prongs* of the chair pushed right into my side."

But it did not appear that Prudy was much injured, after all. In a few minutes she was skipping about the room almost as nimbly as ever, only stopping to groan every now and then, when she happened to think of it.

"It is a wonder," said Mr. Parlin, "that more children are not lamed for life by such accidents."

"I have often thought of it," said aunt Madge. "Some little ones seem to be making hair-breadth escapes almost every day of their lives. I believe Prudy would have been in her grave long ago, if it had not been for her guardian angel."

The long-expected Christmas had come at last, and Prudy had stumbled into it, as she stumbled into everything else. But it is an ill wind which blows no good to anybody; and it so happened that in all this confusion Susy was able to "wish a Merry Christmas" to Norah, and to the whole family besides.

When Mrs. Parlin found that the children were too thoroughly awake to go to sleep again that morning, she told them they might dress themselves in the parlor if they would keep as quiet as possible, and let the rest of the household take another nap.

It all seemed very strange and delightful to the little girls. It was like another sort of life, this new arrangement of stealing about the house in the silent hours before daybreak. Susy thought she should like to sit up all night, and sleep all day, if the mayor would only hush the streets; it would be so odd!

"O, how dark the clouds are!" said Prudy, peeping out of the window; "it *fogs* so I can't see a single thing. Susy, I'm going to keep *at watch* of the sky. Don't you s'pose, though, 'twill be Christmas all the same, if there's a snow storm?"

"There's been snow," said Susy, "all in the night. Look down at the pavement. Don't you wish that was frosted cake?"

"O, the snow came in the night, so not to wake us up," cried Prudy, clapping her hands; "but it wouldn't have waked us, you know, even in the night, for it came so still."

"But why don't the clouds go off?" she added, sadly.

"I don't know," replied Susy; "perhaps they are waiting till the sun comes and smiles them away."

Such happy children as these were, as they sat peeping out of the window at the dull gray sky!

They did not know that a great mischief was begun that morning—a mischief which was no larger yet than "a midge's wing." They were watching the clouds for a snow storm; but they never dreamed of such things as clouds of *trouble*, which grow darker and darker, and which even the beautiful Christmas sun cannot "smile away."

CHAPTER III.

SUSY'S CHRISTMAS.

It was bright and beautiful all day, and then, when no one could possibly wait any longer, it was Christmas evening. The coal glowed in the grate with a splendid blaze: all the gas-burners were lighted, and so were everybody's eyes. If one had listened, one might have heard, from out of doors, a joyful tinkling of sleigh-bells; yet I fancy nobody could have told whether the streets were still or noisy, or whether the sky had a moon in it or not; for nobody was quiet long enough to notice.

But by and by, when the right time had come, the folding-doors were opened, just like the two covers to a Christmas fairy book. Then, in a second, it was so still you might have heard a pin drop.

Such a funny little old gentleman had arrived: his face alive with dimples, and smiles, and wrinkles. His cheeks were as red and round as winter apples, and where there wasn't a wrinkle there was a dimple; and no doubt there was a dimple in his chin, and his chin maybe was double, only you couldn't tell, for it was hidden ever so deep under a beard as white as a snow-drift.

He walked along, tottering under the weight of a huge pack full of presents. He extended his small arms towards the audience most affectionately, and you could see that his antiquated coat-sleeves were bristling with toys and glistening with ornaments. His eyes twinkled with fun, and his mouth, which seemed nearly worn out with laughing, grew bigger every minute.

It took the dear old gentleman some time to clear his throat; but when he had found his voice, which at first was as fine as a knitting-needle, and all of a tremble, he made

THE SPEECH OF SANTA CLAUS.

"How do, my darlings? How do, all round? Bless your little hearts, how do you all do? Did they tell ye Santa wasn't a-comin', my dears? Did your grandpas and grandmas say, 'Humph! there isn't any such a person.' My love to the good old people. I know they mean all right; but tell them they'll have to give it up now!"

(Here Santa Claus made a low bow. Everybody laughed and clapped; but Prudy whispered, "O, don't he look old all over? What has he done with his *teeth*? O, dear, has anybody pulled 'em out?")

"Yes, my dears," continued the old gentleman, encouraged by the applause,—"yes, my dears, here I am, as jolly as ever! But bless your sweet little hearts, I've had a terrible time getting here! The wind has been blowin' me up as fierce as you please, and I've been shook round as if I wasn't of more account than a kernel of corn in a popper!"

"O, O, I've been ducked up to the chin in some awful deep snow-drifts, up there by the North Pole! This is the very first time the storms have come so heavy as to cover over the end of the North Pole! But this year they had to dig three days before they could find it. O, ho!"

"I was a-wanderin' round all last night; a real shivery night, too! Got so *broke up*, there's nothing left of me but small pieces. O, hum!"

"Such a time as I had in some of those chimneys, you haven't any idee! Why, if you'll believe me, over there in Iceland somebody forgot to clear out the chimney, and there I stuck fast, like a fish-bone in your throat; couldn't be picked out, couldn't be swallowed!"

"The funniest time that was! How I laughed! And then the children's mother woke up, and, 'O, dear,' said she; 'hear the wind sigh down the chimney!' 'Only me,' says I; 'and I've caught you napping this time!' She helped me out, and when I had caught my breath, I climbed out the window; but, deary me, I shouldn't wonder if that very woman went to sleep again, and thought it was all a dream! Heigh-ho! that's the way they always treat poor Santa Claus nowadays."

(Here the children laughed, and Susy said, "I guess he must have bumped his nose against that chimney: see what a hump!")

"O, O, don't you make sport of me, children! My nose is big, to be sure, but I'm going to keep it and make the best of it! If you love Santa as he loves you, you wouldn't mind the looks. I *was* going to change my coat and dickey; but then, thinks I, I'll come just as I am! I patted myself on the shoulder, and says I, 'Santa Claus, don't you fret if you *are* growin' old! You may look a little dried up, but your heart isn't wrinkled; O no!' You see father Adam and me was very near of an age, but somehow I never growed up! I always thought big folks did very well in their place; but for my part, give me the children. Hurrah for the children!"

(Great clapping and laughing.)

"I tell you, darlings, I haven't forgot a single one of you. My pockets are running over. I've been preparing presents for you ever since last fall, when the birds broke up housekeeping.

"Here's a tippet for the Prudy girl, and she may have it for nothing; and they are cheaper 'n that, if you take 'em by the quantity.

"I'm a walkin' book-case. Why, I've brought stories and histories enough to set up a store! I've got more nuts than you can shake a hammer at; but I think there's more bark to 'em than there is bite. O, O, I find I can't crack 'em with my teeth, as I used to a hundred years ago!"

"But my dear, sweet, cunning little hearers, I must be a-goin'! Queen Victoria, said she to me, said she, 'Now, Santa, my love, do you hurry back to fill my children's stockings before the clock strikes twelve.' Queen Vic is an excellent woman, and is left a poor widow; so I can't disappoint her, poor soul!

"I must be a-goin'! Would like to hug and kiss you all round, but can't stop. (Kisses his hand and bows.) A Merry Christmas to you all, and a Happy New Year."

So saying, Santa Claus suddenly disappeared at the hall door, dropping his heavy pack upon the table.

In another minute the lively old gentleman was in the front parlor without any mask, and of course it was nobody but cousin Percy "with his face off."

Then they all fell to work sorting out presents. Prudy seized her fur tippet, and put it on at once.

"O, how pretty I look," said she; "just like a little cat! *Ain't* I cunning?"

But nobody could pause to attend to Prudy, though she chatted very fast, without commas or periods, and held up to view a large wax doll which "would be alive if it could talk." They all had gifts as well as Prudy, and wished to talk rather than to listen. They asked questions without waiting for answers, and did not mind interrupting one another, and talking all at once, like a party of school children.

All this was hardly polite, it is true; but people are sometimes surprised out of their good manners on Christmas evenings, and must be forgiven for it, as such a good time happens but once a year.

Percy broke in with an old song, and went through with a whole stanza of it, although no one listened to a word:—

"Good luck unto old Christmas,
And long life let us sing,
For he doeth more good unto the poor
Than many a crownéd king."

"My beautiful books!" cried aunt Madge; "Russia morocco."

"My writing-desk,—has any one looked at it?" said Mrs. Parlin; "rose-wood, inlaid with brass."

"My skates!" broke in Susy, at the top of her voice.

"Hush!" screamed cousin Percy; "won't anybody please notice my drum? If you won't look, then look out for a drum in each ear!"

And as nobody would look or pay the slightest attention, they all had to hear "Dixie" pounded out in true martial style, till they held on to their ears.

"Rattlety bang!" went the drum. "Tweet, tweet," whistled the little musical instruments which the children were blowing.

"Have pity on us!" cried aunt Madge; "I am bewildered; my head is floating like a Chinese garden."

"Order!" shouted Mr. Parlin, laughing.

"O, yes, sir," said Percy, seizing Susy and whirling her round. "Children, why don't you try to preserve order? My nerves are strung up like violin-strings! I've got a pound of headache to every ounce of brains. Susy Parlin, do try to keep still!"

"Thee needn't pretend it is all Susan," said grandma Read, smiling. "Thee and little Prudence are the noisiest of the whole!"

In fact, they raised such a din, that after a while poor grandma Read smoothed the Quaker cap over her smiling face, and stole off into her own chamber, where she could "settle down into quietness." Much noise always confused grandma Read.

But in a very few moments, when the excitement began to die out, there was a season of overwhelming gratitude. Everybody had to thank everybody else; and Mr. Parlin, who had a beautiful dressing-gown to be grateful for, nevertheless found time to tell Susy, over and over again, how delighted he was with her book-mark, made, by her own fingers, of three wide strips of velvet ribbon; on the ends of which were fastened a cross, a star, and an anchor, of card-board.

"Papa, one ribbon is to keep your place in the Old Testament," said Susy; "one is to stay in the middle, at the births and marriages; and the other one is for our chapter in the New Testament, you know."

"I think my lamp-mat is very pretty," said aunt Madge, kissing Susy; "every bit as pretty as if Prudy hadn't 'been and told."

Prudy had bought a shawl-pin for her mother, a fierce little wooden soldier for aunt Madge, and something for everybody else but Susy. Not that she forgot Susy. O, no! but one's money does not always hold out, even at Christmas time.

"Why," said Mr. Parlin, "what is this sticking fast to the sole of my new slipper? Molasses candy, I do believe."

"Yes sir; that's for Susy," cried Prudy, suddenly remembering how she had tucked it in at the last moment, when she could not stop to find any wrapping-paper. "It isn't so big as it was, but it's the biggest piece I had in this world. I saved it last night. Susy likes 'lasses candy, and I couldn't think of nothin' else."

It was a wonder that Prudy's candy had not spoiled some of the nice presents.

Susy received several pretty things; and though she did not talk quite so much as Prudy, she was just as happy. For one thing, she had what she had not dreamed was possible for a little girl—a bottle of otto of rose; "just like a young lady."

This was a real delight to Susy: but Prudy, sniffing at it, said, coolly, "O, ho! it smells 's if it didn't cost more'n a cent! 'Tisn't half so sweet as pep'mint!"

Before Dotty could be put to bed, she had contrived to break several toys, all of which happened to be Susy's—a sugar temple, a glass pitcher, and a small vase.

This was an evening long to be remembered; but the most remarkable event of all was to come.

"Susy, my daughter," said Mr. Parlin, "have you been wondering why you don't see a present from me?"

Susy blushed. She had certainly expected something handsome this year from her father.

"I haven't forgotten you, my dear; but the present I have chosen wouldn't sit very well on the shoulders of such a little fellow as Santa Claus."

Percy laughed. "Wouldn't it have been a load, uncle?"

"Hush!" whispered aunt Madge; "she isn't to know till morning."

"But, papa," said Susy, her eyes shining with excitement, "why couldn't you bring it in here now?"

"It is better off out of doors. Indeed, to tell the truth, my child, it is hardly suitable for the parlor."

"Now, Miss Susy," said Percy, measuring off his words on the tips of his fingers, "I'm authorized to tell you it's something you mustn't take in your lap, mustn't hang on a nail; if you do, you'll lose it. I'm sure 'twill please you, Susy, because it's a mute, and can't speak. You—"

"O, hush talking about dumb people! I shouldn't think you'd make sport of Freddy Jackson! If *you* was a little *deaf-and-dumber* than you are now, I'd like you better!

"O, dear, dear!" cried she, dancing about the room; "what can it be? I can't wait!"

"Only think; all night before I'll know," thought she, as she touched her pillow. "O, Prudy, to-morrow morning! Only think of to-morrow morning! All my other presents are just nothing at all. Anything is *so* much nicer when you don't know what it is!"

CHAPTER IV.

SUSY'S WINGS.

Susy awoke next morning very much surprised to find the sun so high. Prudy was lying beside her, talking to herself.

"I don't feel very well," said the child; "but I'm pleasant; I mean to be good all day."

"Why didn't you speak to me?" cried Susy, springing out of bed, "when you knew how I couldn't wait to see my present?"

"I would have woke you up, Susy, but I ain't well; I'm sick in my knees."

And Prudy limped about the room to show her sister how lame she was. But Susy was in too great a hurry to pay much attention to her, or to help her dress.

"Good morning, papa!" she exclaimed, the moment she entered the parlor; "now may I see the present?"

"Do you suppose you could wait till after breakfast, Susy?"

Aunt Madge smiled as she looked at the little eager face.

"I see you are going on with your lessons," said she.

"What lessons, auntie? Why, it is the holidays!"

"Lessons in patience, my dear. Isn't something always happening which you have to be patient about?"

Susy thought of Prudy's habit of disclosing secrets, Dotty's trying way of destroying playthings; and now this long delay about her present. She began to think there were a great many vexations in the world, and that she bore them remarkably well for such a little girl.

"Yes, thee must let patience have her perfect work, Susan," said grandma Read, after the "silent blessing" had been asked at the table.

"Mayn't I go, too?" said Prudy, when she saw her father, her auntie, and Susy leaving the house just after breakfast.

And she went, as a matter of course; but the pavements were a little slippery from sleet; and Prudy, who was never a famous walker, had as much as she could do, even with the help of her father's hand, to keep from falling.

"Why, Prudy," said Mr. Parlin, "what ails you this morning? You limp so much that I believe you need crutches."

"I'm sick in my knee," replied Prudy, delighted to see that her lameness was observed. "If *you* had my knee, and it hurt, you'd know how it feels!"

By this time they had reached a livery stable; and, to Susy's surprise, her father stopped short, and said to a man who stood by the door, "Mr. Hill, my daughter has come to look at her pony."

Prudy was in a great fright at sight of so many horses, and needed all her auntie's attention; but Susy had no fear, and Mr. Parlin led her along to a stall where stood a beautiful black pony, as gentle-looking as a Newfoundland dog.

"How do you like him, Susy? Stroke his face, and talk to him."

"But, O, papa, you don't mean, you can't mean, he's my very own! A whole pony all to myself!"

"See what you think of his saddle, miss," said Mr. Hill, laughing at Susy's eagerness; and he led pony out, and threw over his back a handsome side-saddle.

"Why, it seems as if I could just jump on without anybody touching me," cried Susy.

"Not afraid a bit?" said Mr. Hill, as Mr. Parlin seated Susy in the saddle, and gave her the reins. "Ponies throw people, sometimes."

"O, but my papa would never give me a bad pony," answered Susy, with perfect confidence.

Mr. Hill laughed again. He was a rough man; but he thought a child's faith in a parent was a beautiful thing.

He did not know many passages of Scripture, but thought he had read somewhere, "And if he ask bread, will he give him a stone?" No; fathers are glad to give their "best gifts," and the little ones trust them.

"It's like sailing in a boat," cried Susy, riding back and forth about the yard in great excitement; "why, it's just as easy as the swing in the oilnut-tree at grandma Parlin's! O, papa, to think I should forget to thank you!"

But perhaps Mr. Parlin regarded glowing cheeks and shining eyes as the very best of thanks.

Prudy thought the pony a beautiful "baby horse;" wanted to ride, and didn't want to; was afraid, and wasn't afraid, and, as her father said, "had as many minds as some politicians who are said to 'stand on the fence.'" By and by, after some coaxing, the timid little thing consented to sit behind Susy, and cling round her waist, if her father would walk beside her to make sure she didn't fall off. In this way they went home.

"I like to sit so I can hug my sister, while she drives the horse," said Prudy; "besides, it hurts me to walk."

Mr. Parlin and aunt Madge smiled at the child's speeches, but gave no more heed to this lameness of which she complained, than they did to any of the rest of her little freaks.

Prudy liked to be pitied for every small hurt; and when Susy had a sore throat, and wore a compress, she looked upon her with envy, and felt it almost as a personal slight that *her* throat could not be wrapped in a compress too.

On their way they met "lame Jessie," a little girl with crooked spine and very high shoulders, who hobbled along on crutches.

"She's lamer than me," said Prudy. "Good morning, Jessie."

"I know what I've thought of," said Susy, who could talk of nothing which was not in some way connected with her pony. "I'm going to give that girl some rides. How happy she will be, poor little Jessie!"

"When you get your sleigh," said Mr. Parlin.

"My sleigh, papa? How many more presents are coming?"

"It is hard to tell, Susy; one gift makes way for another, you see. First comes the pony; but how can he live without a stable, and a groom to feed him? Then what is a pony worth without a

saddle? And, as one does not wish always to ride pony-back, a sleigh is the next thing."

"But, papa, you know in the summer!"

"Yes, my dear, in the summer, if we all live, there must be a light carriage made on purpose for you."

"There is one thing more that pony needs," said aunt Madge, stroking his eyebrows, "and that is, a name."

"O, I never thought of that," said Susy; "help me find a name, auntie."

"Let me think. I should call him something good and pleasant. Think of something good and pleasant Think of something you like very much."

"O, Frosted Cake," cried Prudy: "wouldn't that be pleasant? Susy loves that."

"I should like to name him for the American Eagle," said Susy, who had heard some patriotic speeches from her cousin Percy; "only you couldn't pet that name, could you?"

"You might call him Don Carlos, or Don Pedro," suggested Mr. Parlin.

"No, papa; only think of Donny: that is like Donkey! You haven't any long ears, *have* you, pony? If you had, I'd call you Little Pitcher, for 'little pitchers have great ears.' That makes me think of Mr. Allen, auntie. How big his ears are, you know? *Is* it because his teacher pulled them so?"

"O, call him 'Gustus,'" cried Prudy.

"But that would soon be Gusty," said aunt Madge, "and would sound too much like the east wind."

"Dear me," sighed Susy; "who'd ever think it was such hard work to find names?"

"O, look," said Prudy, as they passed a jaded old horse; "there is a pony just exactly like this! Only it's twice as big, you know, and not a *bit* such a color!"

"Well, there, Prudy," said Susy, disdainfully, "I thought, when you began to speak, you was going to tell something! Why don't you wait till you have something to say? Please give me a list of names, papa."

"There's Speedwell, Lightfoot, Zephyr, Prince, Will-o'-the-wisp—"

"I might call him Wispy," broke in Susy. "Zephyr is good, only it makes you think of worsteds."

"Now, listen," said aunt Madge; "you might call him Elephant, just for sport, because he is in reality so very little. Or, on the other hand, you might find the least speck of a name, like Firefly, or Midge."

"I don't like any of those," replied Susy, still dissatisfied.

"I see," said aunt Madge, laughing, "nothing will please you but a great name. What say to Pegasus, a flying horse, which poets are said to ride? It might be shortened to Peggy."

"Now, auntie, you wouldn't have this beautiful pony called Peggy; you know you wouldn't! the one my father bought on purpose for me! But was there such a horse, truly?"

"O, no; there is an old fable, which, as we say, is 'as true now as it ever was,' of a glorious creature with wings, and whoever mounts him gets a flying ride into the clouds. But the trouble is to catch him!"

"O, I wish my pony could fly," said Susy, gazing dreamily at his black mane and sleek sides. "The first place I'd go to would be the moon; and there I'd stay till I built a castle as big as a city. I'd come home every night, so mother wouldn't be frightened, and fly up in the morning, and—and—"

"See here," said Prudy, who had for some time been trying to speak; "call him *Wings*!"

"So I will," answered Susy, quickly, "and I'll make believe he flies in the air like a bird. Now, auntie, what do you think of Wings?"

"Odd enough, I'm sure, my dear."

"Well, *I* like it," returned Susy, with a positive shake of the head. "It's of no use to keep fussing so long over a name, and I feel a great deal easier, now I've made up my mind! Dear little Wings, you prick up your ears, and I know you like it, too. I wish you had a soul, so you could be taken to church, and christened like a baby."

Just here Susy was startled by a sudden laugh from cousin Percy, who had for some moments been walking behind the pony unobserved.

"You're enough to frighten any one to death," she screamed, "creeping about like a cat."

Susy had a foolish dread of being laughed at.

"Creeping like a cat," echoed Percy, "while you creep like a snail! What will you take for your pony, that can fly in the air like a bird, but can't walk on the ground any better than a goose?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Susy, quite excited: "if you want to see anybody

ride fast, just look here." And she started the pony at full speed, regardless of Prudy, who was so frightened, that she seized poor Wings by his flowing mane, and called out for her sister to stop. But Susy dashed on at a flying pace, and Percy cried after her, "O, Susy, cousin Susy, what think of your Christmas present? Will you remember not to eat it, and not to hang it on a nail? Susy, Susy?"

There was hardly a happier child living than Susy, during those delightful holidays. She said to herself, sometimes, that this was such a beautiful world, she couldn't think of a single thing that wasn't as splendid as it could be.

CHAPTER V.

PRUDY'S TROUBLE.

The happy days flew by. The Old Year was worn out, and the New Year stepped in fresh and youthful. Susy found her little sleigh a very comfortable affair; and so, I think, did "lame Jessie." When her father found that Susy had really chosen for her pony the name of Wings, he ordered a beautiful picture of the Flying Horse to be painted on the dashboard of the sleigh.

Susy was delighted with this, and her vivid fancy took wings at once, and flew away to the other end of the world, where her aunt Madge told her the fountain of Pirene was said to gush out of a hill-side.

"Only think," said she to Flossy; "it was a woman once, that fountain was; but she poured her life all out into tears, crying because her son was killed. So the fountain is made of tears!"

"Bitter and salt, then," said Florence, threading her needle.

"No, indeed; just as sweet and nice as any water. Pegasus loved it; and there was a beautiful young man, his name was Bel—Bel—well, I declare, I've forgotten,—no, 'twas Bellerophon; and he had a bridle, and wanted a horse. O, do you know this horse was white, with silvery wings, wild as a hawk; and, once in a while, he would fold up his wings, and trot round on the mountain!"

Florence yawned, and waxed her thread.

"O, it was a splendid bridle, this man had, made of gold; and I forgot—the mountain the horse trotted round on was called Helicon. And the man mounted him, and went up, up, till they were nothing but specks in the sky."

"A likely story," said Florence; "there, you've told enough! I don't want to hear any more such nonsense."

"Well, if you don't want to hear about the monster they killed, you needn't; that's all I can say; but the young man loved that horse; and he kissed him, too, he was so splendid!"

"Kiss a horse!" Flossy looked very, much disgusted.

"Why, I've kissed my pony a great many times," said Susy, bravely, "right between his eyes; and he almost kisses me. He wants to say, 'I love you.' I can see it in his eyes."

By this time Flossy had finished her doll's garment, and, putting it on the little thing's shoulders, held up the doll to be admired.

"I think her opera cloak is very 'bewitching,' don't you, Susy? It is trimmed with ermine, because she is a queen, and is going to the opera."

"It looks well enough," said Susy, indifferently, "but it isn't ermine; it's only white cat's fur, with black spots sewed on,"

"Of course it isn't real ermine!" replied Florence; "but I play that it is, and it's just as well."

"But you know all the while it's a make-believe. She hasn't any more sense than a stick of wood, either; and I don't see any sport in playing with dolls."

"And I don't see any sense in fairy stories," retorted Flossy. "Do you know what Percy says about you? He says your head is as full of airy notions as a dandelion top. I love Queen Mab as if she was my own sister," continued Flossy, in a pettish tone. "You know I do, Susy. I always thought, if anything should happen to Queen Mab, and I lost her, I should certainly dress in mourning; now you needn't laugh."

"O, I can't help laughing, when anybody makes such a fuss over a doll," replied Susy, with a curl of the lip. "Anything that isn't alive, and hasn't any sense, and don't care for you! I like canary birds, and babies, and ponies, and that's enough to like."

"Well, now, that's so funny!" said Florence, twitching the folds of Queen Mab's dress into place; "for the very reason I like my doll, is because she *isn't* alive. I wouldn't have been you, Susy Parlin, when you had your last canary bird, and let him choke to death."

"O, no, Flossy, I didn't let him choke: I forgot to put any seed in the bottle, and he stuck his head

in so deep, that he smothered to death."

"I don't know but smothering is as bad as choking," said Florence; "and now your new bird will be sure to come to some bad end."

"You're always saying hateful things," exclaimed Susy, a good deal vexed. "I like Grace Clifford ten times as well, for she's a great deal more lady-like."

"Well, I suppose I can go home," said Florence, with a rising color; "you're such a perfect lady that I can't get along with you."

"O, dear," thought poor Susy, "what does ail my tongue? Here this very morning I said in my prayer, that I meant to be good and patient."

Florence began to put on her cloak.

"Cousin Flossy," said Susy, in a hesitating voice, "I wish you wouldn't go. I didn't mean to tell that I liked Gracie best; but it's the real honest truth, and if I should take it back, 'twould be a lie."

This was not making matters much better. Florence put on her hood, and tied it with a twitch.

"But I like *you* ever so much, Flossy; now, you know I do. You're hateful sometimes; but so am I; and I can't tell which is the hatefulest."

Here Flossy, who was as fickle as the wind, laughed merrily, took off her hood and cloak, and danced about the room in high spirits.

"Yes," said she, "I'll stay just on purpose to plague you!"

But good humor had been restored on both sides, and the little girls were soon talking together, as freely as if nothing had happened.

"Just come out in the kitchen," said Susy, "and you shall see me wash my bird."

"Why, I thought birds washed themselves," replied Florence, following her cousin with some surprise.

"They do, but Dandy won't; it's all in the world I have against Dandy; he isn't a cold-water bird."

Grandma Read stood by the kitchen table, clear-starching one of her caps—a piece of work which she always performed with her own hands. She moved one side to make room for Susy's bird-cage, but said she did not approve of washing canaries; she thought it must be a dangerous experiment.

"If he needed a bath, he would take it himself, Susan. Little birds know what is best for them by instinct, thee may depend upon it."

"But my birdie gay ought to be clean," persisted Susy, who was often very positive. "Mrs. Mason says so—the lady that gave him to me. I told her he wouldn't bathe, and she said then I must bathe him."

Susy went to the range, and, dipping some hot water from the boiler, cooled it with fresh water, till she found, by putting in her fingers, that it was of a proper temperature, according to her own judgment. Then she plunged the timid little canary into the bowl, in spite of his fluttering. Such a wee young thing as he was too! He seemed to be afraid of the water, and struggled against it with all his small strength.

"O, Dandy, darling," said Susy, in a cooing voice, as if she were talking to a baby; "be a little man, Dandy; hold up his head, and let Susy wash it all cleany! O, he's Susie's birdie gay!—What makes him roll up his eyes?"

"Take him out quick, Susan," said grandma Read; "he will strangle."

A few seconds more and all would have been over with birdie gay. He curled down very languidly on the floor of the cage, and seemed to wish to be let alone.

"He acts so every morning when I bathe him," said Susy, who would not give up the point; "but Mrs. Mason told me to do it! Dotty always cried when she was washed, till she was ever so old."

"I think," said Mrs. Parlin, who had just entered the kitchen, "I must ask Mrs. Mason if she is very sure it is proper to treat little birds in that way."

"But look, mamma; here he is, shaking out his feathers, all bright and happy again. O, you cunning little Dandy, now we'll hang you up in the sun to dry. See him hop on one foot; that is just to make me laugh."

"But *I* hop on one foot, too," said little Prudy, "and you don't laugh at me."

"This is a droll little head for fancies," said Mrs. Parlin, patting Prudy's curls, and looking at grandma Read. "Do you know, mother, that for several days she has made believe she was lame Jessie, and has hobbled about whenever she could think of it."

"Now you mustn't laugh," said Prudy, looking up with a grieved face; "I can't never help hopping; I *have* to hop. My knee was so sick, I cried last night, and I was just as *wide-awakeful!*"

"Ain't thee afraid the child has been hurt in some way, my daughter?" said grandma Read.

"O, no, mother," said Mrs. Parlin, smiling, as Prudy limped out of the room. "I have examined her knee, and there is nothing the matter with it. She is only imitating that lame child. You know Prudy has all sorts of whims. Don't you know how she has wanted us to call her Jessie sometimes?"

"Why, no, indeed, grandma, she isn't lame," said Susy, laughing. "Sometimes she will run about the room as well as I do, and then, in a few minutes, when she thinks of it, she will limp and take hold of chairs. Mother, isn't it just the same as a wrong story for Prudy to act that way? If I did so, you'd punish me; now, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know what to think about it," said Mrs. Parlin, gravely. "Sometimes I am afraid Prudy is really becoming naughty and deceitful. I thought once it was only her funny way of playing; but she is getting old enough now to know the difference between truth and falsehood."

There was an anxious look on Mrs. Parlin's face. She was a faithful mother, and watched her children's conduct with the tenderest care.

But this lameness of which little Prudy complained, was something more than play; it was a sad truth, as the family learned very soon. Instead of walking properly when her mother bade her do so, the poor child cried bitterly, said it hurt her, and she was so tired she wished they would let her lie on the sofa, and never get up. At times she seemed better; and when everybody thought she was quite well, suddenly the pain and weakness would come again, and she could only limp, or walk by catching hold of chairs

At last her father called in a physician.

"How long has this child been lame?" said he.

"A month or more."

The doctor looked grave. "Has she ever had an injury, Mr. Parlin, such as slipping on the ice, or falling down stairs?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Parlin, "I believe not."

"Not a serious injury that I know of," said Mrs. Parlin, passing her hand across her forehead, and trying to remember. "No, I think Prudy has never had a *bad* fall, though she is always meeting with slight accidents."

"O, mamma," said Susy, who had begged to stay in the room, "she did have a fall: don't you know, Christmas day, ever so long ago, how she went rolling down stairs with her little chair in her arms, and woke everybody up?"

The doctor caught at Susy's words.

"With her little chair in her arms, my dear? And did she cry as if she was hurt?"

"Yes, sir; she said the *prongs* of the chair stuck into her side."

"It hurt me dreffully," said Prudy, who had until now forgotten all about it. "Susy spoke so quick, and said I was a little snail; and then I rolled over and over, and down I went."

The doctor almost smiled at these words, lisped out in such a plaintive voice, as if Prudy could not think of that fall even now, without pitying herself very much.

"Just let me see you stand up, little daughter," said he; for Prudy was lying on the sofa.

But it hurt her to bear her weight on her feet.

She said, "One foot, the '*lame-knee-foot*,' came down so long, it *more* than touched the floor."

The doctor looked sober. The foot did drag indeed. The trouble was not in her knee, but in her hip, which had really been injured when she fell down stairs, and the "prongs" of the chair were forced against it.

It seemed to Mrs. Parlin strange that Prudy had never complained of any pain in her side; but the doctor said it was very common for people to suffer from hip-disease, and seem to have only a lame knee.

"Hip-disease!" When Mrs. Parlin heard these words, she grew so dizzy, that it was all she could do to keep from fainting. It came over her in a moment, the thought of what her little daughter would have to suffer—days and nights of pain, and perhaps a whole lifetime of lameness. She had often heard of hip-disease, and was aware that it is a very serious thing.

Do you know, she would gladly have changed places with Prudy, would gladly have borne all the child must suffer, if by that means she could have saved her? This is the feeling which mothers have when any trouble comes upon their children; but the little ones, with their simple minds, cannot understand it.

CHAPTER VI.

ROSY FRANCES EASTMAN MARY.

Prudy had enjoyed a great many rides in Susy's beautiful sleigh; but now the doctor forbade her going out, except for very short distances, and even then, he said, she must sit in her mother's lap. He wanted her to lie down nearly all the time, and keep very quiet.

At first, Mrs. Parlin wondered how it would be possible to keep such a restless child quiet; but she found, as time passed, and the disease made progress, that poor little Prudy was only too glad to lie still. Every motion seemed to hurt her, and sometimes she cried if any one even jarred the sofa suddenly.

These were dark days for everybody in the house. Susy, who was thoughtful beyond her years, suffered terribly from anxiety about her little sister. More than that, she suffered from remorse.

"O, grandma Read," said she one evening, as she sat looking up at the solemn, shining stars, with overflowing eyes—"O, grandma!" The words came from the depths of a troubled heart. "I may live to be real old; but I never shall be happy again! I can't, for, if it hadn't been for me? Prudy would be running round the house as well as ever!"

Mrs. Read had a gentle, soothing voice. She could comfort Susy when anybody could. Now she tried to set her heart at rest by saying that the doctor gave a great deal of hope. He could not promise a certain cure, but he felt great faith in a new kind of splint which he was using for Prudy's hip.

"O, grandma, it may be, and then, again, it may not be," sobbed poor Susy; "we can't tell what God will think best; but anyhow, it was I that did it."

"But, Susan, thee must think how innocent thee was of any wrong motive. Thee did not get angry, and push thy little sister, thee knows thee didn't, Susan! Thee was only in a hurry, and rather thoughtless. The best of us often do very foolish things, and cause much mischief; but thee'll find it isn't best to grieve over these mistakes. Why, my dear little Susan, I have lived eight years to thy one, and if I should sit down now and drop a tear for every blunder I have made, I don't know but I could almost make a fountain of myself, like that woman thee tells about in the fairy story."

"The fountain of Pirene that Pegasus loved," said Susy; "that was the name of it. Why, grandma, I never should have thought of your saying such a queer thing as that! Why, it seems as if you always did just right, and thought it all over before you did it. Do *you* ever do wrong? How funny!"

Mrs. Read smiled sadly. She was not an angel yet; so I suppose she did wrong once in a while.

"Now, grandma, I want to ask you one question, real sober and honest. You know it was so dark that morning in the middle of the night, when we were going down the back stairs? Now, if I'd made a great deal worse mistake than calling Prudy a snail,—if I'd pushed her real hard, and she had fallen faster,—O, I can't bear to think! I mean, if the chair-prongs had hit her head, grandma—and—killed her! What would they have done to *me*? I thought about it last night, so I couldn't go to sleep for the longest while! I heard the clock *strike* once while I was awake there in bed! Would they have put me in the lock-up, grandma, and then hung me for murder?"

"My dear child, no, indeed! How came such horrible ideas in thy tender little brain? It is too dreadful to think about; but, even if thy little sister *had* died, Susan, thee would have been no more to blame than thee is now, and a great, great deal more to be pitied."

Susy sat for a long while gazing out of the window; but the stars did not wink so solemnly; the moon looked friendly once more. Susy was drinking in her grandmother's words of comfort. The look of sadness was disappearing from the young face, and smiles began to play about the corners of her mouth.

"Well," said she, starting up briskly, "I'm glad I wasn't so very terribly wicked! I wish I'd been somewhere else, when I stood on those back-stairs, in the middle of the night; but what's the use? I'm not going to think any more about it, grandma; for if I should think till my head was all twisted up in a knot, what good would it do? It wouldn't help Prudy any; would it, grandma?"

"No, dear," said the mild, soothing voice again; "don't think, I beg of thee; but if thee wants to know what would do Prudence good, I will tell thee: try thy best to amuse her. She has to lie day after day and suffer. It is very hard for a little girl that loves to play, and can't read, and doesn't know how to pass the time; don't thee think so, Susan?"

It was certainly hard. Prudy's round rosy face began to grow pale; and, instead of laughing and singing half the time, she would now lie and cry from pain, or because she really did not know what else to do with herself.

It was worst at night. Hour after hour, she would lie awake, and listen to the ticking of the clock. Susy thought it a pitiable case, when *she*, heard the clock strike *once*; but little Prudy heard it strike again and again. How strangely it pounded out the strokes in the night! What a dreary sound it was, pealing through the silence! The echoes answered with a shudder. Then, when Prudy had counted one, two, three, four, and the clock had no more to say at that time, it began to tick again: "Prudy's sick! Prudy's sick! O, dear me! O, dear me!"

Prudy could hardly believe it was the same clock she saw in the daytime. She wondered if it felt lonesome in the night, and had the blues; or what *could* ail it! The poor little girl wanted somebody to speak to in these long, long hours. She did not sleep with Susy, but in a new cot-bed of her own, in aunt Madge's room; for, dearly as she loved to lie close to any one she loved, she begged now to sleep alone, "so nobody could hit her, or move her, or joggle her."

It was a great comfort to have aunt Madge so near. If it had been Susy instead, Prudy would have had no company but the sound of her breathing. It was of no use to try to wake Susy in the dead of night. Pricking her with pins would startle her, but she never knew anything even after she was startled. All she could do was to stare about her, cry, and act very cross, and then—go to sleep again.

But with aunt Madge it was quite different. She slept like a cat, with one eye open. Perhaps the reason she did not sleep more soundly, was, that she felt a care of little Prudy. No matter when Prudy spoke to her, aunt Madge always answered. She did not say, "O, dear, you've startled me out of a delicious nap!" She said, "Well, darling, what do you want?" Prudy generally wanted to know when it would be morning? When would the steamboat whistle? What made it stay dark so long? She wanted a drink of water, and *always* wanted a story.

If aunt Madge had forgotten to provide a glass of water, she put on her slippers, lighted the little handled lamp, and stole softly down stairs to the pail, which Norah always pumped full of well-water the last thing in the evening.

Or, if Prudy fancied it would console her to have a peep at her beautiful doll which "would be alive if it could speak," why, down stairs went auntie again to search out the spot where Susy had probably left it when "she took it to show to some children."

The many, many times that kind young lady crept shivering down stairs to humor Prudy's whims! Prudy could not have counted the times; and you may be sure aunt Madge never *would*.

Then the stories, both sensible and silly, which Prudy teased for, and always got! Aunt Madge poured them forth like water into the *sieve* of Prudy's mind, which could not hold stories any better than secrets. No matter how many she told, Prudy insisted that she wanted "one more," and the "same one over again."

It touched Susy to the heart to see how much her little sister suffered, and she spent a great deal of time at first in trying to amuse her. Aunt Madge told stories in the night; but Susy told them in the daytime, till, as she expressed it, her "tongue ached." She cut out paper dolls when she wanted to read, and played go visiting, or dressed rag babies, when she longed to be out of doors. But while the novelty lasted, she was quite a Florence Nightingale.

Her Wednesday and Saturday after-noons were no longer her own. Before Prudy's lameness, Susy had used her new skates a great deal, and could now skim over the ice quite gracefully, for a little girl of her age. The reason she learned to skate so well, was because she was fearless. Most children tremble when they try to stand on the ice, and for that very reason are nearly sure to fall; but Susy did not tremble in the face of danger: she had a strong will of her own, and never expected to fail in anything she undertook.

She had spent half of her short life out of doors, and almost considered it lost time when she was obliged to stay in the house for the rain.

Mrs. Parlin kept saying it was high time for her eldest daughter to begin to be womanly, and do long stints with her needle: she could not sew as well now as she sewed two years ago.

But Mr. Parlin laughed at his wife's anxiety, and said he loved Susy's red cheeks; he didn't care if she grew as brown as an Indian. She was never rude or coarse, he thought; and she would be womanly enough one of these days, he was quite sure.

"Anything," said Mr. Parlin, "but these *womanly* little girls, such as I have seen sitting in a row, sewing seams, without animation enough to tear rents in their own dresses! If Susy loves birds, and flowers, and snowbanks, I am thankful, and perfectly willing she should have plenty of them for playthings."

Then, when Mrs. Parlin smiled mischievously, and said, "I should like to know what sort of a wild Arab you would make out of a little girl," Mr. Parlin answered triumphantly,— "Look at my sister Margaret! I brought her up my own self! I always took her out in the woods with me, gunning and trouting. I taught her how to skate when she was a mere baby. I often said she was all the brother I had in the world! She can remember now how I used to wrap her in shawls, and prop her up on the woodpile, while I chopped wood."

"And how you hired her to drop ears of corn for you into the corn-sheller; and how, one day, her fingers were so benumbed, that one of them was clipped off before she knew it!"

"Well, so it was, that is true; but only the tip of it. Active children will meet with accidents. She was a regular little fly-away, and would sooner climb a tree or a ladder any time, than walk on solid ground. *Now* look at her!"

And Mr. Parlin repeated the words, "Now look at her," as if he was sure his wife must confess that she was a remarkable person.

Mrs. Parlin said, if Susy should ever become half as excellent and charming as Miss Margaret

Parlin, she should be perfectly satisfied, for her part.

Thus Susy was allowed to romp to her heart's content; "fairly ran wild," as aunt Eastman declared, with a frown of disapproval. She gathered wild roses, and wore them in her cheeks, the very best place in the world for roses. She drank in sunshine with the fresh air of heaven, just as the flowers do, and thrived on it.

But there was one objection to this out-of-doors life: Susy did not love to stay in the house. Eainy days and evenings, to be sure, she made herself very happy with reading, for she loved to read, particularly fairy books, and Rollo's Travels.

But now, just as she had learned to skate on the basin with other little girls and young ladies, and could drive Wings anywhere and everywhere she pleased, it was a sore trial to give up these amusements for the sake of spending more hours with poor little Prudy. She was very self-denying at first, but it grew to be an "old story." She found it was not only pony and skates she must give up, but even her precious reading, for Prudy was jealous of books, and did not like to have Susy touch them. She thought Susy was lost to her when she opened a book, and might as well not be in the house, for she never heard a word that anybody said.

Now I know just what you will think: "O, I would have given up a great deal more than ponies and books for *my* dear little sister! I would have told her stories, and never have complained that my 'tongue ached.' It would not have wearied me to do anything and everything for such a patient sufferer as little Prudy!"

But now I shall be obliged to confess one thing, which I would have gladly concealed.

Prudy was not always patient. Some sweet little children become almost like the angels when sickness is laid upon them; but Prudy had been such a healthy, active child, that the change to perfect quiet was exceedingly tiresome. She was young, too,—too young to reason about the uses of suffering. She only knew she was dreadfully afflicted, and thought everybody ought to amuse her.

"O, dear me!" said Susy, sometimes, "I just believe the more anybody does for Prudy, the more she expects."

Now this was really the case. When Prudy first began to lie upon the sofa, everybody pitied her, and tried to say and do funny things, in order to take up her attention. It was not possible to keep on giving so much time to her; but Prudy expected it. She would lie very pleasant and happy for hours at a time, counting the things in the room, talking to herself, or humming little tunes; and then, again, everything would go wrong. Her playthings would keep falling to the floor, and, as she could not stoop at all, some one must come and pick them up that very minute, or they "didn't pity her a bit."

Every once in a while, she declared her knee was "broken in seven new places," and the doctor must come and take off the splint. She didn't want such a hard thing "right on there;" she wanted it "right off."

Her mother told her she must try to be patient, and be one of God's little girls. "But, mamma," said Prudy, "does God love me any? I should think, if he loved me, he'd be sorrier I was sick, and get me well."

Then, sometimes, when she had been more fretful than usual, she would close her eyes, and her mother would hear her say, in a low voice,—

"O, God, I didn't mean to. It's my *knee* that's cross!"

Upon the whole, I think Prudy was as patient as most children of her age would have been under the same trial. Her father and mother, who had the most care of her, did not wonder in the least that her poor little nerves got tired out sometimes.

While Susy was at school, Prudy had a long time to think what she wanted her to do when she should come home. She would lie and watch the clock, for she had learned to tell the time quite well; and when the hour drew near for Susy to come, she moved her head on the pillow, and twisted her fingers together nervously.

If Susy was in good season, Prudy put up her little mouth for a kiss, and said,—

"O, how I do love you, Susy! Ain't I your dear little sister? Well, won't you make me a lady on the slate?"

Susy's ladies had no necks, and their heads were driven down on their shoulders, as if they were going to be packed into their chests; but, such as they were, Prudy wanted them over and over again.

But if Susy stopped to slide, or to play by the way, she would find little Prudy in tears, and hear her say, "O, what made you? Naughty, naughty old Susy! I'm goin' to die, and go to God's house, and then you'll be sorry you didn't 'tend to your little sister."

Susy could never bear to hear Prudy talk about going to God's house. Her conscience pricked her when she saw that the poor child was grieved; and she resolved, every time she was late, that she would never be late again.

Prudy had a great many odd fancies now: among others, she had a fancy that she did not like the name of Prudy.

"Why; only think," said she, "you keep a-calling me Prudy, and Prudy, and Prudy. It makes my head ache, to have you say Prudy so much."

"But, my dear child," said Mr. Parlin, smiling, "it happens, unfortunately, that Prudy is your name; so I think you will have to try and bear it as well as you can."

"But I can't bear it any longer," said the child, bursting into tears. "Prudy is all lame and sick, and I never shall walk any more while you call me Prudy, papa."

Mr. Parlin kissed his little daughters's pale cheek, and said, "Then we will call you pet names; will that do?"

Prudy smiled with delight.

"I've thought of a real beautiful, splendid name," said she. "It is Rosy Frances Eastman Mary; ain't it splendid?"

After this announcement, Prudy expected the family would be sure to call her Rosy Frances Eastman Mary; and, indeed, they were quite willing to please her, whenever they could remember the name. They all supposed it was a fancy she would forget in a day or two; but, instead of that, she clung to it more and more fondly. If any one offered her an orange, or roasted apple, and said, "Look, Prudy; here is something nice for you," she would turn her face over to one side on the pillow, and make no reply. If she wanted a thing very much, she would never accept it when she was addressed by the obnoxious name of Prudy. Even when her father wanted to take her in his arms to rest her, and happened to say, "Prudy, shall I hold you a little while?" she would say, "Who was you a-talkin' to, papa? There isn't any Prudy here!" Then her father had to humble himself, and ask to be forgiven for being so forgetful.

The child had a delicate appetite, and her mother tried to tempt it with little niceties; but, no matter what pains she took, Prudy relished nothing unless it was given to her as Rosy Frances, the little girl who was *not* Prudy.

"O, here is a glass of lemonade for you, Prudy; made on purpose for you," Susy would say; "do drink it!"

"O, dear me, suz," cried Prudy, with tears falling over her cheeks; "O, Susy, you plague me, and I never done a thing to you! You called me Prudy, and I ain't Prudy, never again! Call me Rosy Frances Eastman Mary, and I'll drink the lemonade."

"You precious little sister," said Susy, bending over her gently, "you'll forgive me; won't you, darling?"

"I'll try to," replied Prudy, with a look of meek forbearance, as she sipped the lemonade.

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE TROUBLES.

Somebody said once to Susy and Flossy, when they were having a frolic in "Prudy's sitting-room," up stairs, "What happy little things! You don't know what trouble is, and never will, till you grow up!"

The little girls preserved a respectful silence, till the lady was out of hearing, and then held an indignant discussion as to the truth of what she had said. It would have been a discussion, I mean, if they had not both taken the same side of the question.

"How she sighed," said Susy, "just as if she was the *melancholiest* person that ever was!" Susy was famous for the use she made of adjectives, forming the superlatives just as it happened.

"Yes, just the way," responded Flossy. "I'd like to know what ever happened to *her*? Pshaw! She laughed this afternoon, and ate apples fast enough!"

"O, she thinks she must make believe have a dreadful time, because she is grown up," said Susy, scornfully. "She's forgot she was ever a little girl! I've had troubles; I guess I have! And I know one thing, I shall remember 'em when I grow up, and not say, 'What happy little things!' to children. It's real hateful!"

Little folks have trouble, to be sure. Their hearts are full of it, and running over, sometimes; and how can the largest heart that ever beat be *more* than full, and running over?

Susy had daily trials. They were sent to her because they were good for her. Shadows and night-dews are good for flowers. If the sun had shone on Susy always, and she had never had any shadows and night dews, she would have *scorched up* into a selfish girl.

One of her trials was Miss Dotty Dimple. Now, she loved Dotty dearly, and considered her funny

all over, from the crown of her head to the soles of her little twinkling feet, which were squeezed into a pair of gaiters. Dotty loved those gaiters as if they were alive. She had a great contempt for the slippers she wore in the morning, but it was her "darlin' gaiters," which she put on in the afternoon, and loved next to father and mother, and all her best friends.

When ladies called, she stepped very briskly across the floor, looking down at her feet, and tiptoeing about, till the ladies smiled, and said, "O, what sweet little boots!" and then she was perfectly happy.

Susy was not very wide awake in the morning; but Dotty was stirring as soon as there was a peep of light, and usually stole into Susy's bed to have a frolic. Nothing but a story would keep her still, and poor Susy often wondered which was harder, to be used as a football by Dotty, or to tell stories with her eyes shut.

"O, Dotty Dimple, keep still; can't you? There's a darling," she would plead, longing for another nap; "*don't* kill me."

"No, no; me won't kill," the little one would reply; "'tisn't *pooty* to kill!"

"O, dear, you little, cunning, darling plague, now hush, and let me go to sleep!"

Then Dotty would plant both feet firmly on Susy's chest, and say, in her teasing little voice, as troublesome as the hum of a mosquito,—

"Won't you tell me 'tory—tell me a 'tory—tell me a 'tory, Susy."

"Well, what do you want to hear?"

Now, it was natural for Susy to feel cross when she was sleepy. It cost her a hard struggle to speak pleasantly, and when she succeeded in doing so, I set it down as one of her greatest victories over herself. The Quaker motto of her grandmother, "Let patience have her perfect work," helped her sometimes, when she could wake up enough to remember it.

"Tell 'bout little yellow gell," said the voice of the mosquito, over and over again.

Susy roused herself after the third request, and sleepily asked if something else wouldn't do?

"I had a little nobby-colt."

"No, no, you *di'n't*, you *di'n't*; grandma had the nobby! Tell yellow gell."

"O," sighed Susy, "how can you want to hear that so many, many times? Well, once when I was a little bit of a girl—"

"'Bout's big as me, you *said*," put in Dotty.

"O, yes, I did say so once, and I suppose I must tell it so every time, or you'll fuss! Well, I had a yellow dress all striped off in checks—"

"Di'n't it go this way?" said Dotty, smoothing the sheet with her little hand, "and this way?"

"What? What?" Susy roused herself and rubbed her eyes. "O, yes, it went in checks; and I was at grandma Parlin's, and Grace—Grace—O, Grace and I went into the pasture where there were a couple of cows, a gray cow and a red cow."

"Now you must say what *is* couple," says Dotty.

"Then what is couple?"

"Gray cow," answers Dotty, very gravely.

"So when the cows saw us coming, they—they—O, they threw up their heads, and stopped eating grass—in the air. I mean—threw—up—their heads." Susy was nearly asleep.

"Up in the air?"

"Yes, of course, up in the air. (There, I *will* wake up!) And the gray cow began to run towards us, and Grace says to me, 'O, my, she thinks you're a pumpkin!'"

"You?"

"Yes, me, because my dress was so yellow. I was just as afraid of the cow as I could be."

"Good cow! *He* wouldn't hurt!"

"No, the cow was good, and didn't think I was a pumpkin, not the least speck. But I was so afraid, that I crept under the bars, and ran home."

"To grandma's house?"

"Yes; and grandma laughed."

"Well, where was me?" was the next question, after a pause.

Then, when the duty of story-telling was performed, Susy would gladly have gone back to "climbing the dream-tree;" but no, she must still listen to Dotty, though she answered her

questions in an absent-minded way, like a person "hunting for a forgotten dream."

One morning she was going to ride with her cousin Percy. It had been some time since she had seen Wings, except in the stable, where she visited him every day.

But Dotty had set her heart on a rag-baby which Susy had promised to dress, and Prudy was anxious that Susy should play several games of checkers with her.

"O, dear," said the eldest sister, with the perplexed air of a mother who has disobedient little ones to manage. "I think I have about as much as I can bear. The *children* always make a fuss, just as sure as I want to go out."

The old, impatient spirit was rising; that spirit which it was one of the duties of Susy's life to keep under control.

She went into the bathing-room, and drank off a glass of cold water, and talked to herself a while, for she considered that the safest way.

"Have I any right to be cross? Yes, I think I have. Here Dotty woke me up, right in the middle of a dream, and I'm sleepy this minute. Then Prudy is a little babyish thing, and always was—making a fuss if I forget to call her Rosy Frances! Yes, I'll be cross, and act just as I want to. It's too hard work to keep pleasant; I won't try."

She walked along to the door, but, by that time, the better spirit was struggling to be heard.

"Now, Susy Parlin," it said, "you little girl with a pony, and a pair of skates, and feet to walk on, and everything you want, ain't you ashamed, when you think of that dear little sister you pushed down stairs—no, didn't push—that poor little lame sister!—O, hark! there is your mother winding up that hard splint! How would you feel with such a thing on your hip? Go, this minute, and comfort Prudy!"

The impatient feelings were gone for that time; Susy had swallowed them, or they had flown out of the window.

"Now Rosy Frances Eastman Mary," said she, "if your splint is all fixed, I'll comb your hair."

The splint was made of hard, polished wood and brass. Under it were strips of plaster an inch wide, which wound round and round the poor wounded limb. These strips of plaster became loose, and there was a little key-hole in the splint, into which Mrs. Parlin put a key, and wound up and tightened the plaster every morning. This operation did not hurt Prudy at all.

"Now," said Susy, after she had combed Prudy's hair carefully, and put a net over it, until her mother should be ready to curl it, "now we will have a game of checkers."

Prudy played in high glee, for Susy allowed her to jump all her men, and march triumphantly into the king-row, at the head of a victorious army.

"There, now, Rosy," said Susy, gently, "are you willing to let me go out riding? I can't play any more if I ride, for I must dress Dotty's doll, and feed my canary."

"O, well," said Prudy, considering the matter, "I'm sick; I tell you how it is, I'm sick, you know; but—well, you may go, Susy, if you'll make up a story as long as a mile."

Susy really felt grateful to Prudy, but it was her own gentle manner which had charmed the sick child into giving her consent.

Then Susy proceeded to dress Dotty's doll in a very simple fashion, with two holes for short sleeves, and a skirt with a raw edge; but she looked kind and pleasant while she was at work, and Dotty was just as well pleased as if it had been an elegant costume she was preparing. And it was really good enough for a poor deformed rag-baby, with a head shaped like a stove-pipe.

Susy was delighted to find how well a little patience served her in amusing "the children." Next, she went to give Dandy his morning bath. Mrs. Parlin still thought it a dangerous practice, but had not seen Mrs. Mason, to question her about it, and Susy was too obstinate in her opinion to listen to her mother.

"I must do it," said Susy; "it has been ever so long since Dandy was bathed, and I shouldn't take any comfort riding, mamma, if I didn't leave him clean."

Susy plunged the trembling canary into his little bathing-bowl, in some haste. He struggled as usual, and begged, with his weak, piping voice, to be spared such an infliction. But Susy was resolute.

"It'll do you good, Ducky Daddles; we mustn't have any lazy, dirty birdies in this house."

Ducky Daddies rolled up his little eyes, and gasped for breath.

"O, look, mother!" cried Susy, laughing; "how funny Dandy acts! Do you suppose it's to make me laugh? O, is he fainting away?"

"Fainting away! My dear child, he is dying!"

This was the sad truth. Mrs. Parlin fanned him, hoping to call back the lingering breath. But it was too late. One or two more throbs, and his frightened little heart had ceased to beat; his frail

life had gone out as suddenly as a spark of fire.

Susy was too much shocked to speak. She stood holding the stiffening bird in her hands, and gazing at it.

Mrs. Parlin was very sorry for Susy, and had too much kindness of feeling to add to her distress by saying,—

"You know how I warned you, Susy."

Susy was already suffering for her obstinacy and disregard of her mother's advice; and Mrs. Parlin believed she would lay the lesson to heart quite as well without more words. It was a bitter lesson. Susy loved dumb creatures dearly, and was just becoming very fond of Dandy.

In the midst of her trouble, and while her eyes were swollen with tears, her cousin Percy came with Wings and the sleigh to give her the promised ride. Susy no longer cared for going out: it seemed to her that her heart was almost broken.

"Well, cousin Indigo, what is the matter?" said Percy; "you look as if this world was a howling wilderness, and you wanted to howl too. What, crying over that bird? Poh! I can buy you a screech-owl any time, that will make twice the noise he could in his best days. Come, hurry, and put your things on!"

Susy buried her face in her apron.

"I'll compose a dirge for him," said Percy.

"My bird is dead, said Susy P.,
My bird is dead; O, deary me!
He sang so sweet, te whee, te whee;
He sings no more; O, deary me!
Go hang his cage up in the tree,
That cage I care no more to see.
My bird is dead, cried Susy P."

These provoking words Percy drawled out in a sing-song voice. It was too much. Susy's eyes flashed through her tears.

"You've always laughed at me, Percy Eastman, and plagued me about Freddy Jackson, and everything, and I've borne it like a—like a lady. But when you go to laughing at my poor little Dandy that's dead, and can't speak—"

Susy was about to say, "Can't speak for himself," but saw in time how absurdly she was talking, and stopped short.

Percy laughed.

"Where are you going with that cage?"

"Going to put it away, where I'll never see it again," sobbed poor Susy.

"Give it to me," said Percy: "I'll take care of it for you."

If Susy's eyes had not been blinded by tears, she would have been surprised to see the real pity in Percy's face.

He was a rollicking boy, full of merriment and bluster, and what tender feelings he possessed, he took such a wonderful amount of pains to conceal, that Susy never suspected he had any. She would have enjoyed her ride if she had not felt so full of grief. The day was beautiful. There had been a storm, and the trees looked as if they had been snowballing one another; but Susy had no eye for trees, and just then hardly cared for her pony.

Percy put the cage in the sleigh, under the buffalo robes; and when they reached his own door, he carried the cage into the house, while Susy drew a sigh of relief. He offered to stuff Dandy, or have him stuffed; but Susy rejected the idea with horror.

"No, if Dandy was dead, he was all dead; she didn't want to see him sitting up stiff and cold, when he couldn't sing a speck."

CHAPTER VIII.

ANNIE LOVEJOY.

But the day was not over yet. The bright sun and blue sky were doing what they could to make a cheerful time of it, but it seemed as if Susy fell more deeply into trouble, as the hours passed on.

There are such days in everybody's life, when it rains small vexations from morning till night, and when all we can do is to hope for better things to-morrow.

It was Wednesday; and in the afternoon, Flossy Eastman came over with a new game, and while the little girls, Flossy, Susy and Prudy were playing it, and trying their best to keep Dotty Dimple's prying fingers and long curls out of the way, in came Miss Annie Lovejoy.

This was a little neighbor, who, as the children sometimes privately declared, was "always 'round." Mrs. Parlin had her own private doubts about the advantages to be derived from her friendship, and had sometimes gone so far as to send her home, when she seemed more than usually in the way.

Annie's mother lived next door, but all Mrs. Parlin knew of her, was what she could see and hear from her own windows; and that little was not very agreeable. She saw that Mrs. Lovejoy dressed in gaudy colors, and loaded herself with jewelry; and she could hear her scold her servants and children with a loud, shrill voice.

The two ladies had never exchanged calls; but Annie, it seemed, had few playmates, and she clung to Susy with such a show of affection, that Mrs. Parlin could not forbid her visits, although she watched her closely; anxious, as a careful mother should be, to make sure she was a proper companion for her little daughter. So far she had never known her to say or do anything morally wrong, though her manners were not exactly those of a well-bred little girl.

This afternoon, when the new game was broken up by the entrance of Annie, the children began the play of housekeeping, because Prudy could join in it. Susy found she enjoyed any amusement much more when it pleased the little invalid.

"I will be the lady of the house," said Annie, promptly, "because I have rings on my fingers, and a coral necklace. My name is Mrs. Piper. Prudy,—no, Rosy,—you shall be Mrs. Shotwell, come a-visiting me; because you can't do anything else. We'll make believe you've lost your husband in the wars. I know a Mrs. Shotwell, and she is always *taking-on*, and saying, 'My poor dear husband,' under her handkerchief; just this way."

The children laughed at the nasal twang which Annie gave to the words, and Prudy imitated it to perfection, not knowing it was wrong.

"Well, what shall I be?" said Susy, not very well pleased that the first characters had been taken already.

"O, you shall be a hired girl, and wear a handkerchief on your head, just as our girl does; and you must be a little deaf, and keep saying, 'What, ma'am?' when I speak to you."

"And I," said Florence, "will be Mr. Peter Piper, the head of the family."

"Yes," returned Annie, "you can put on a waterproof cloak, and you will make quite a good-looking husband; but I shall be the head of the family myself, and have things about as I please!"

"Well, there," cried Flossy, slipping her arms into the sleeves of her cloak, "I don't know about that; I don't think it's very polite for you to treat your husband in that way."

Flossy wanted to have the control of family matters herself.

"But I believe in 'Woman's Rights,'" said Annie, with a toss of the head, "and if there's anything I despise, it is a *man* meddling about the house."

Here little Dotty began to cause a disturbance, by sticking a fruit-knife into the edges of the "what-not," and making a whirring noise.

"I wouldn't do so, Dotty," said Susy, going up to her; "it troubles us; and, besides, I'm afraid it will break the knife."

"I don't allow my hired girl to interfere with my children," said Annie, speaking up in the character of Mrs. Piper; "I am mistress of the house, I'd have you to know! There, little daughter, they shan't plague her; she shall keep on doing mischief; so she shall!"

Dotty needed no coaxing to keep on doing mischief, but hit the musical knife harder than ever, giving it a dizzy motion, like the clapper in a mill.

Prudy was quite annoyed by the sound, but did not really know whether to be nervous or not, and concluded to express her vexation in groans: the groans she was giving in memory of the departed Mr. Shotwell, who had died of a "cannon bullet."

"My good Mrs. Shotwell," said Mrs. Piper, trying to "make conversation," "I think I have got something in my eye: will you please tell me how it looks?"

"O," said Prudy, peeping into it, "your eye looks very well, ma'am; don't you 'xcuse it; it looks well enough for *me*."

"Ahem!" said Mrs. Piper, laughing, and settling her head-dress, which was Susy's red scarf: "are your feet warm, Mrs. Shotwell?"

"Thank you, ma'am," replied Prudy, "I don't feel 'em cold. O, dear, if your husband was all deaded up, I guess you'd cry, Mrs. Piper."

Susy and Flossy looked at each other, and smiled. They thought Prudy seemed more like herself than they had known her for a long time.

"You must go right out of the parlor, Betsey," said Mrs. Piper, flourishing the poker; "I mean you, Susy—the parlor isn't any place for hired girls."

"Ma'am?" said Susy, inclining her head to one side, in order to hear better.

"O, dear! the plague of having a deaf girl!" moaned Mrs. Piper. "You don't know how trying it is, Mrs. Shotwell! That hired girl, Betsey, hears with her elbows, Mrs. Shotwell; I verily believe she does!"

"O, no, ma'am," replied Prudy; "I guess she doesn't hear with her elbows, does she? If she *heard* with her elbows, she wouldn't have to ask you over again!"

This queer little speech set Mr. Piper and his wife, and their servant, all to laughing, and Betsey looked at her elbows, to see if they were in the right place.

"Will you please, ma'am," said Prudy, "ask Betsey to *hot* a flatiron? I've cried my handkerchief all up!"

"Yes; go right out, Betsey, and *hot* a flatiron," said Mrs. Piper, very hospitably. "Go out, this instant, and build a fire, Betsey."

"Yes, go right out, Betsey," echoed Mr. Piper, who could find nothing better to do than to repeat his wife's words; for, in spite of himself, she did appear to be the "head of the family."

"It was my darlin' husband's handkerchief," sobbed Prudy.

"Rather a small one for a man," said Mr. Piper, laughing.

"Well," replied Prudy, rather quick for a thought, "my husband had a very small nose!"

Mrs. Piper tried to make more "conversation."

"O, Mrs. Shotwell, you ought to be exceeding thankful you're a widow, and don't keep house! I think my hired girls will carry down my gray hairs to the grave! The last one I had was Irish, and very Catholic."

Prudy groaned for sympathy, and wiped her eyes on that corner of her handkerchief which was supposed to be not quite "cried up."

"Yes, indeed, it was awful," continued Mrs. Piper; "for she was always going to masses and mass-meetings; and there couldn't anybody die but they must be 'waked,' you know."

"Why, I didn't know they could be waked up when they was dead," said Prudy, opening her eyes.

"O, but they only *make believe* you can wake 'em," said Mrs. Piper; "of course it isn't true! For my part, I don't believe a word an Irish girl says, any way."

"Hush, my child," she continued, turning to Dotty, who was now sharpening the silver knife on the edges of the iron grate. "Betsey, why in the world don't you see to that baby? I believe you are losing your mind!"

"That makes me think," said Prudy, suddenly breaking in with a new idea; "what do you s'pose the reason is folks can't be waked up? What makes 'em stay in heaven all the days, and nights, and years, and never come down here to see anybody, not a minute?"

"What an idea!" said Annie. "I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, I've been a thinkin'," said Prudy, answering her own question, "that when God has sended 'em up to the sky, they like to stay up there the best. It's a nicer place, a great deal nicer place, up to God's house."

"O, yes, of course," replied Annie, "but our play—"

"I've been a thinkin'," continued Prudy, "that when I go up to God's house, I shan't wear the splint. I can run all over the house, and he'll be willing I should go up stairs, and down cellar, you know."

Prudy sighed. Sometimes she almost longed for "God's house."

"Well, let's go on with our play," said Annie, impatiently. "It's most supper-time, Mrs. Shotwell. Come in, Betsey."

"Ma'am?" said Betsey, appearing at the door, and turning up one ear, very much as if it were a dipper, in which she expected to catch the words which dropped from the lips of her mistress. "Betsey, have you attended to your sister—to my little child, I mean? Then go out and make some sassafras cakes, and some eel-pie, and some squirrel-soup; and set the table in five minutes: do you hear?"

"Ma'am?" said the deaf servant; "what did you say about ginger-bread?"

Susy did not like her part of the game; but she played it as well as she could, and let Annie manage everything, because that was what pleased Annie.

"O, how stupid Betsey is!" said Mr. Piper, coming to the aid of his wife. "Mrs. Piper says eel-jumbles, and sassafras-pie, and pound-cake; all made in five minutes!"

Here everybody laughed, and Prudy, suddenly remembering her part, sighed, and said,—

"O, my darlin' husband used to like jumble-pie! I've forgot to cry for ever so long!"

Susy began to set the table, and went into the nursery for some cake and cookies, which were kept in an old tin chest, on purpose for this play of housekeeping, which had now been carried on regularly every Wednesday and Saturday afternoon, for some time.

Susy opened the cake-chest, and found nothing in it but a few dry cookies: the fruit-cake was all gone. Who could have eaten it? Not Flossy, for she had a singular dislike for raisins and currants, and never so much as tasted fruit-cake. Not Prudy, for the poor little thing had grown so lame by this time, that she was unable to bear her weight on her feet, much less to walk into the nursery. Dotty could not be the thief. Her baby-conscience was rather tough and elastic, and I suppose she would have felt no more scruples about nibbling nice things, than an unprincipled little mouse.

But, then Dotty couldn't reach the cake-chest; so she was certainly innocent.

Then Susy remembered in a moment that it was Annie: Annie had run into the house morning and night, and had often said, "I'm right hungry. I'm going to steal a piece of our cake!"

So it seemed that Annie had eaten it *all*. Susy ran back to Prudy's sitting-room, where her little guests were seated, and said, trying not to laugh,—

"Please, ma'am, I just made some eel-jumbles and things, and a dog came in and stole them."

"Very well, Betsey," said Mrs. Piper, serenely; "make some more."

"Yes, make some more," echoed Mr. Piper; and added, "chain up that dog."

"But real honest true," said Susy, "the fruit-cake *is* all gone out of the chest. You ate it up, you know, Annie; but it's no matter: we'll cut up some cookies, or, may be, mother'll let us have some oyster-crackers."

"I ate up the cake!" cried Annie; "It's no such a thing; I never touched it!" Her face flushed as she spoke.

"O, but you did," persisted Susy; "I suppose you've forgotten! You went to the cake-chest this morning, and last night, and yesterday noon, and ever so many more times."

Annie was too angry to speak.

"But it's just as well," added Susy, politely; "you could have it as well as not, and perfectly welcome!"

"What are you talking about?" cried Annie, indignantly; for she thought she saw a look of surprise and contempt on Flossy's face, and fancied that Flossy despised her because she had a weakness for fruit-cake.

"I wonder if you take me for a pig, Susy Parlin! I heard what your mother said about that cake! She said it was too dry for her company, but it was too rich for little girls, and we must only eat a *teeny* speck at a time. I told my mamma, and she laughed, to think such mean dried-up cake was too rich for little girls!"

Susy felt her temper rising, but her desire to be polite did not desert her.

"It *was* rich, nice cake, Annie; but mother said the slices had been cut a great while, and it was drying up. Let's not talk any more about it."

"O, but I *shall* talk more about it," cried Annie, still more irritated; "you keep hinting that I tell wrong stories and steal cake; yes, you do! and then you ain't willing to let me speak!"

All this sounded like righteous indignation, but was only anger. Annie was entirely in the wrong, and knew it; therefore she lost her temper.

Susy had an unusual amount of self-control at this time, merely because she had the truth on her side. But her dignified composure only vexed Annie the more.

"I won't stay here to be imposed upon, and told that I'm a liar and a thief; so I won't! I'll go right home this very minute, and tell my mother just how you treat your company!"

And, in spite of all Susy could say, Annie threw on her hood and cloak, and flounced out of the room; forgetting, in her wrath, to take off Susy's red scarf, which was still festooned about her head.

"Well, I'm glad she's gone," said Flossy, coolly, as the door closed with a slam. "She's a bold thing, and my mother wouldn't like me to play with her, if she knew how she acts! She said 'victuals' for food, and that isn't *elegant*, mother says. What right had she to set up and say she'd be Mrs. Piper? So forward!"

After all, this was the grievous part of the whole to Flossy,—that she had to take an inferior part in the play.

"But I'm *sorry* she's gone," said Susy, uneasily. "I don't like to have her go and tell that I wasn't polite."

"You *was* polite," chimed in little Prudy, from the sofa; "a great deal politer'n she was! I wouldn't care, if I would be you, Susy. I don't wish Annie was dead, but I wish she was a duck a-sailin' on the water!"

The children went back to the game they had been playing before Annie came; but the interest was quite gone. Their quick-tempered little guest had been a "*kill-joy*" in spite of her name.

But the afternoon was not over yet. What happened next, I will tell you in another chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

MORAL COURAGE.

Annie Lovejoy had not been gone fifteen minutes, when there was a sharp ringing of Mrs. Parlin's doorbell, and a little boy gave Norah the red scarf of Susy's, and a note for Mrs. Parlin.

Norah suspected they both came from Mrs. Lovejoy, and she could see that lady from the opposite window, looking toward the house with a very defiant expression.

Mrs. Parlin opened the note with some surprise, for she had been engaged with visitors in the parlor, and did not know what had been going on up stairs.

Whatever Mrs. Lovejoy's other accomplishments might be, she could not write very elegantly. The ink was hardly dry, and the words were badly blotted, as well as incorrectly spelled.

"Mrs. Parlin.

"Madam: If my own *doughter* is a *theif* and a *lier*, I beg to be informed. She has no *knowlidg* of the cake, *whitch* was so *dryed* up, a *begar woold* not touch it. Will Miss Susan Parlin come over here, and take back her words?"

"SERENA LOVEJOY."

Mrs. Parlin was at a loss to understand this, for she had quite forgotten the fact, that the children had any cake to use at their play of housekeeping. She supposed that Susy must have accused Annie of prying into the china-closet, where the cakes and jellies were kept. She sent for Susy at once.

"My daughter," said she, in her usual quiet tones, "did you ever have any reason to suppose that Annie Lovejoy went about meddling with our things, and peeping into the closets?"

"Why, no, mother," replied Susy, much surprised; "she never saw the closets, that I know of. Why, mother, what do you mean?"

"Never ate cake, did she, without leave?"

"O, now I know what you mean, mother! Yes'm, she ate some of that fruit-cake you gave us to play with; and when I told her of it, she got angry, and said she was going right home, and would tell her mother how I treated my company; but I don't see how you found that out!"

"Never mind yet how I found it out, my dear. I want to know if you are sure that Annie ate the cake?"

"Yes, mother: just as certain sure as I can be! You know Dotty can't reach that high shelf in the nursery-closet, and I can't, without getting into a chair; and Prudy can't walk a step; and Flossy despises cake."

"But," said Mrs. Parlin, smiling, "I don't see that you have proved Annie to be the guilty one."

"Guilty? O, I don't know as she is *guilty*, mamma; but she ate the cake! She ate it right before my face and eyes; but I told her it was just as well, she was perfectly welcome, and tried to be as polite as if she was a grown-up lady, mother. But, O, dear, it didn't make a speck of difference how much I said; for the more I said, the more angry she grew, and I couldn't make her believe I didn't think she was a thief and a liar! Only think, a thief and a liar! But I never said those words at all, mother!"

"Very well, my dear; I am sure you did not. It is a great comfort to me, Susy, that I can always rely on your word. You have done nothing wrong, and need not be unhappy; but Mrs. Lovejoy sends for you to go over and tell her just what you mean about the cake; are you willing to go?"

Susy was not willing; indeed, she was very much frightened, and begged her mother to excuse her in some way to Mrs. Lovejoy, or, if that would not do, to go herself and explain the matter for her.

But, as it was Susy's own affair, Mrs. Parlin wished to have as little to do with it as possible. Besides, she considered it a good opportunity to teach Susy a lesson in moral courage.

Susy started very reluctantly.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Lovejoy will scold real sharp," said she. "What shall I do? O, mother, I didn't see Annie eat *all* the cake; I didn't watch. How do I know but she gave some crumbs to the cat? Can't I—can't I say, I *guess* the cat ate it?"

"Susy!" said Mrs. Parlin, sternly, "are you more afraid of displeasing Mrs. Lovejoy than you are of displeasing God? All that is required of you is the simple truth. Merely say to Annie's mother just what you have said to me; that you saw Annie eating cake several times, though there was no harm in it, and you did *not* call her either a thief or a liar. Speak respectfully, but decidedly; and when you have said all that is necessary, leave her politely, and come home."

Susy called up all her courage when she entered Mrs. Lovejoy's house, and saw that lady sitting very erect on a sofa, with a bleak face, which looked somehow as if a north-east wind had blown over it, and frozen it.

"Well, little girl," said she, without waiting for ceremony, "so you call my Annie all the bad names you can think of, it seems. Is that the way you are brought up?"

"I didn't call her names, ma'am; she ate the cake, but I was willing," replied Susy, calmly and respectfully, though she trembled from head to foot. There was one thought which sustained Susy; she was telling the truth, and that was just what God wanted her to do.

"Well," said Mrs. Lovejoy, "I must say you're a dignified little piece! Do you know you've done the same thing as to tell me I lie?"

This was just the way *Annie* had spoken; warping innocent words, and making them the occasion of a quarrel.

Susy could think of nothing which seemed exactly right to say to Mrs. Lovejoy in reply; so she wisely held her peace.

"Yes, miss, you've insulted my child, and, as if that were not enough, you come over here, deliberately, and insult *me*, in my own house!"

Tears sprang to Susy's eyes, but she resolutely crushed them back. There was, in her childish mind, a certain sense of self-respect, which made her unwilling to cry in the presence of such a person as Mrs. Lovejoy. She felt instinctively that the woman was not a lady. Susy was too young to reason about the matter; but she was quite sure her own mother was a model of good manners; and never, never had she known her mother to raise her voice to such a high key, or speak such angry words!

Mrs. Lovejoy said a great many things which were both severe and unjust; but Susy managed to keep up a respectful manner, as her mother had directed. Mrs. Lovejoy was disappointed. She had expected Susy would quail before her presence and make the most humble confessions.

"I always knew," cried Mrs. Lovejoy, becoming more and more exasperated,—*"I always knew Mrs. Parlin held her head pretty high! She is a proud, stuck-up woman, your mother is; she has taught you to look down on my little girl! O, yes, I understand the whole story! You're a beautiful family for neighbors!"*

Poor Susy was fairly bewildered.

"Now you may go home as straight as you can go! But remember one thing: never, while we live in this city, shall my daughter Annie darken your doors again!"

Susy walked home with downcast head and overflowing eyes. Her heart was very heavy, for she felt she had been disgraced for life, and could never be respected any more. Here was a trial so terrible that it caused the death of little Dandy to seem almost a trifle by comparison.

It was strange, Susy thought, how people could live through such severe troubles as had fallen to her lot to-day. She was a little girl of quick and sensitive feelings, and a sharp word always wounded her more than a blow. How that angry woman had talked about her mother!

Susy decided, upon the whole, that this was the sting—this was the "pin in the lash," which had hurt her more than the lash. How *dared* Mrs. Lovejoy say a word about her own mother, who was certainly the best woman that ever lived, always excepting the good people in the Bible!

By the time she entered the house, her indignation had risen like a blaze, and burned away all her tears. But should she tell her mother what Mrs. Lovejoy had said about her ownself, about her being "stuck up," and holding her head pretty high? Susy could not decide whether she ought to tell her, and risk the danger of almost breaking her heart! But before she had time to decide, she had poured out the whole story in a torrent.

Strange to say, Mrs. Parlin listened with perfect calmness, and even said, when Susy had finished,—

"Very well, my dear; now you may go and hang up your hood and cloak."

"But, mother," said Susy, rushing up stairs again, quite out of breath, "now I've taken care of my things; but did you understand what I said, mother? Annie will never come into this house, never again! Her mother forbids it!"

"That is quite fortunate for me, Susy, as it saves me the trouble of forbidding it myself!"

"Why, mother, you wouldn't do such a thing as that! Why, mother, I never heard of your doing such a thing in my life!"

"I should regret the necessity very much, my child; but wouldn't it be better, on the whole, to have a little moral courage, and put an end to all intercourse between the two families, than to live in a constant broil?"

"Why, yes, mother, I suppose so."

Susy was beginning to feel more composed. She saw that her mother understood the whole story, yet her heart was far from being broken!

"What is moral courage, mother?"

"The courage to do right."

"Did I have moral courage when I told Mrs. Lovejoy the truth?"

"Yes, dear. It was hard for you, wasn't it? If it had been easy, there would have been no moral courage about it."

"I am glad I had moral courage!" said Susy with animation. "I knew I did something *right*, but I didn't know what you called it."

"Now," continued Mrs. Parlin, "I have this very day been talking with a lady, who once lived next door to Mrs. Lovejoy; and she tells me enough about her to convince me that she is not a person I wish for a neighbor. And I have heard enough about Annie, too, to feel very sure she is not a safe companion for my little daughter."

"But, mother," said Susy, "you are not—you don't feel 'stuck up' above Mrs. Lovejoy?"

Mrs. Parlin smiled.

"That is not a very proper expression, Susy; but I think I do not feel *stuck-up* above her in the least. I am only anxious that my little daughter may not be injured by bad examples. I don't know what sort of a little girl Annie might be with proper influences, but—"

"Now, mamma, I don't want to say anything improper," said Susy, earnestly; "but wouldn't it be the *piousest* for me to play with Annie, and try to make her go to Sabbath school, and be better?"

Mrs. Parlin did not answer at once. She was thinking of what she had said to Susy about people who are "home missionaries," and do a great deal of good by a beautiful example.

"If you were older, dear, it would be quite different. But, instead of improving Annie, who is a self-willed child, I fear you would only grow worse yourself. She is bold, and you are rather timid. She wants to lead, and not to follow. I fear she will set you bad examples."

"I didn't know, mamma; but I thought I was almost old enough to set my *own* examples! I'm the oldest of the family."

Susy said no more about becoming a home-missionary to Annie; for, although she could not quite see the force of her mother's reasoning, she believed her mother was always right.

"But what does she mean by calling me *timid*? She has blamed me a great deal for being *bold*."

Yes, bold Susy certainly was, when there was a fence to climb, a pony to ride, or a storm to be faced; but she was, nevertheless, a little faint-hearted when people laughed at her. But Susy was learning every day, and this time it had been a lesson in moral courage. She did not fully understand her mother, however, as you will see by and by.

CHAPTER X.

RUTHIE TURNER.

"The darkest day,
Wait till to-morrow, will have passed away."

The next morning, Susy woke with a faint recollection that something unpleasant had occurred, though she could not at first remember what it was.

"But I didn't do anything wrong," was her second thought. "Now, after I say my prayers, the next thing I'll feed—O, Dandy is dead!"

"See here, Susy," said Percy, coming into the dining-room, just after breakfast; "did you ever see this cage before?"

"Now, Percy! When you know I want it out of my sight!"

Then, in the next breath, "Why, Percy Eastman, if here isn't your beautiful mocking-bird in the cage!"

"Yes, Susy; and if you'll keep him, and be good to him, you'll do me a great favor."

It was a long while before Susy could be persuaded that this rare bird was to be her "ownest own." It was a wonderfully gifted little creature. Susy could but own that he was just as good as a canary, only a great deal better. "The greater included the less." He had as sweet a voice, and a vast deal more compass. His powers of mimicry were very amusing to poor little Prudy, who was never tired of hearing him mew like a kitten, quack like a duck, or whistle like a schoolboy.

Susy was still more delighted than Prudy. It was so comforting, too, to know that she was doing Percy "a great favor," by accepting his beautiful present. She wondered in her own mind how he *could* be tired of such an interesting pet, and asked her to take it, just to get rid of it!

About this time, Mr. Parlin bought for Prudy a little armed-chair, which rolled about the floor on wheels. This Prudy herself could propel with only the outlay of a very little strength; but there were days when she did not care to sit in it at all. Prudy seemed to grow worse. The doctor was hopeful, very hopeful; but Mrs. Parlin was not.

Prudy's dimpled hands had grown so thin, that you could trace the winding path of every blue vein quite distinctly. Her eyes were large and mournful, and seemed to be always asking for pity. She grew quiet and patient—"painfully patient," her father said. Indeed, Mr. Parlin, as well as his wife, feared the little sufferer was ripening for heaven.

"Mamma," said she, one day, "mamma, you never snip my fingers any nowadays do you? When I'm just as naughty, you never snip my fingers!"

Mrs. Parlin turned her face away. There were tears in her eyes, and she did not like to look at those little white fingers, which she was almost afraid would never have the natural, childish naughtiness in them any more.

"I think sick and patient little girls don't need punishing," said she, after a while. "Do you remember how you used to think I snipped your hands to 'get the naughty out?' You thought the naughty was all in your little hands!"

"But it wasn't, mamma," said Prudy, slowly and solemnly. "I know where it was: it was in my *heart*."

"Who can take the naughty out of our hearts, dear? Do you ever think?"

"Our Father in heaven. No one else can. *He* knows how to snip our hearts, and get the naughty out. Sometimes he sends the earache and the toothache to Susy, and the—the—the lameness to me. O, he has a great many ways of snipping!"

Prudy was showing the angel-side of her nature now. Suffering was "making her perfect." She had a firm belief that God knew all about it, and that somehow or other it was "all right." Her mother took a great deal of pains to teach her this. She knew that no one can bear affliction with real cheerfulness who does not trust in God.

But there was now and then a bright day when Prudy felt quite buoyant, and wanted to play. Susy left everything then, and tried to amuse her. If this lameness was refining little Prudy, it was also making Susy more patient. She could not look at her little sister's pale face, and not be touched with pity.

One afternoon, Flossy Eastman and Ruthie Turner came to see Susy; and, as it was one of Prudy's best days, Mrs. Parlin said they might play in Prudy's sitting-room. Ruthie was what Susy called an "old-fashioned little girl." She lived with a widowed mother, and had no brothers and sisters, so that she appeared much older than she really was. She liked to talk with grown people upon wise subjects, as if she were at least twenty-five years old. Susy knew that this was not good manners, and she longed to say so to Ruthie.

Aunt Madge was in Prudy's sitting-room when Ruthie entered. Ruthie went up to her and shook hands at once.

"I suppose it is Susy's aunt Madge," said she. "I am delighted to see you, for Susy says you love little girls, and know lots of games."

There was such a quiet composure in Ruth's manner, and she seemed to feel so perfectly at home in addressing a young lady she had never seen before, that Miss Parlin was quite astonished, as well as a little inclined to smile.

Then Ruthie went on to talk about the war. Susy listened in mute despair, for she did not know anything about politics. Aunt Madge looked at Susy's face, and felt amused, for *Ruthie* knew nothing about politics either: she was as ignorant as Susy. She had only heard her mother and other ladies talking together. Ruthie answered all the purpose of a parrot hung up in a cage, for she caught and echoed everything that was said, not having much idea what it meant.

When aunt Madge heard Ruth laboring away at long sentences, with hard words in them, she thought of little Dotty, as she had seen her, that morning, trying to tug Percy's huge dog up stairs in her arms.

"It is too much for her," thought aunt Madge: "the dog got the upper-hand of Dotty, and I think the big words are more than a match for Ruth."

But Ruth did not seem to know it, for she persevered. She gravely asked aunt Madge if she approved of the "*Mancimation of Proclapation*." Then she said she and her mamma were very much "*perplexed*" when news came of the last defeat. She would have said "*surprised*" only *surprised* was an every-day word, and not up to standard of elegant English.

Ruth was not so very silly, after all. It was only when she tried to talk of matters too old for her that she made herself ridiculous. She was very quiet and industrious, and had knit several pairs of socks for the soldiers.

As soon as Miss Parlin could disentangle herself from her conversation with Ruthie, she left the children to themselves.

"Let's keep school," said Prudy. "I'll be teacher, if you want me to."

"Very well," replied Susy, "we'll let her; won't we, girls? she is such a darling."

"Well," said Prudy, with a look of immense satisfaction, "please go, Susy, and ask grandma if I may have one of those shiny, white handkerchiefs she wears on her neck, and a cap, and play Quaker."

Grandma was very glad that Prudy felt well enough to play Quaker, and lent her as much "costume" as she needed, as well as a pair of spectacles without eyes, which the children often borrowed for their plays, fancying that they added to the dignity of the wearer.

When Prudy was fairly equipped, she was a droll little Quakeress, surely, and grandma had to be called up from the kitchen to behold her with her own eyes. The little soft face, almost lost in the folds of the expansive cap, was every bit as solemn as if she had been, as aunt Madge said, "a hundred years old, and very old for her age."

She was really a sweet little likeness of grandma Read in miniature.

"And their names are alike, too," said Susy: "grandma's name is Prudence, and so is Prudy's."

"Used to be," said Prudy, gravely.

"Rosy Frances" was now lifted most carefully into her little wheeled chair and no queen ever held a court with more dignity than she assumed as she smoothed into place the folds of her grandma's snowy kerchief, which she wore about her neck.

"What shall we do first?" said Flossy and Susy.

"Thee? thee?" Prudy considered "thee" the most important word of all. "Why, *thee* may behave; I mean, behave *thyselves*."

The new teacher had not collected her ideas yet.

"Let's get our books together," said Susy, "and then we'll all sit on the sofa and study."

"Me, me," chimed in Dotty Dimple, dropping the little carriage in which she was wheeling her kitty; "me, too!"

"Well, if you must, you must; snuggle in here between Flossy and me," said Susy, who was determined that to-day everything should go on pleasantly.

"Sixteenth class in joggerphy," said Miss Rosy Frances, peeping severely over her spectacles. "Be spry quick!"

The three pupils stood up in a row, holding their books close to their faces.

"Thee may hold out your hands now, and I shall ferule thee—the whole school," was the stern remark of the young teacher, as she took off her spectacles to wipe the holes.

"Why, we haven't been doing anything," said Ruthie, affecting to cry.

"No, I know it; but thee'd *ought* to have been doing something; thee'd ought to have studied thy lessons."

"But, teacher, we didn't have time," pleaded Flossy; "you called us out so quick! Won't you forgive us!"

"Yes, I will," said Rosy Frances, gently; "I will, if thee'll speak up *'xtremely* loud, and fix *thine* eyes on thy teacher."

The pupils replied, "Yes, ma'am," at the top of their voices.

"Now," said Rosy Frances, appearing to read from the book, "where is the Isthmus of *Susy*?"

The scholars all laughed, and answered at random. They did not know that their teacher was trying to say the "Isthmus of Suez."

The next question took them by surprise:—

"Is there any man in the moon?"

"What a queer idea, Rosy," said Susy; "what made you ask that?"

"Cause I wanted to know," replied the Quaker damsel. "They said he came down when the other man was eatin' porridge. I should think, if he went back up there, and didn't have any wife and children, he'd be real lonesome!"

This idea of Prudy's set the whole school to romancing, although it was in the midst of a recitation. Flossy said if there was a man in the moon, he must be a giant, or he never could get round over the mountains, which she had heard were very steep.

Ruthie asked if there was anything said about his wife! Susy, who had read considerable poetry was sure she had heard something of a woman up there, named "Cynthia;" but she supposed it was all "moonshine," or "made up," as she expressed it. She said she meant to ask her aunt Madge to write a fairy story about it.

Here their progress in useful knowledge was cut short by the disappearance of Dotty. Looking out of the window, they saw the little rogue driving ducks with a broomstick. These ducks had a home not far from Mrs. Parlin's, and if Dotty Dimple had one temptation stronger than all others, it was the sight of those waddling fowls, with their velvet heads, beads of eyes, and spotted feathers. When she saw them "marshin' along," she was instantly seized with a desire either to head the company or to march in the rear, and set them to quacking. She was bareheaded, and Susy ran down stairs to bring her into the house; and that was an end of the school for that day. Dotty Dimple was something like the kettle of molasses which Norah was boiling, very sweet, but very apt to *boil over*: she needed watching.

When Norah's candy was brought up stairs, the little girls pronounced it excellent.

"O, dear," said Flossy, "I wish our girl was half as good as Norah! I don't see why Electa and Norah ain't more alike when they are own sisters!"

"What dreadful girls your mother always has!" said Susy; "it's too bad?"

"I know of a girl," said Prudy, "one you'd like ever'n, ever so much, Flossy; only you can't have her."

"Why not?" said Flossy; "my mother would go hundreds of leagues to get a good girl. Why can't she have her?"

"O, 'cause, she's *dead*! It's Norah's cousin over to Ireland."

They next played the little game of guessing "something in this room," that begins with a certain letter. Ruthie puzzled them a long while on the initial S. At last she said she meant "scrutau" (escritoire or scrutoire), pointing towards the article with her finger.

"Why, that's a *writing-desk*," said Susy. "I don't see where you learn so many big worns, Ruthie."

"O, I take notice, and remember them," replied Ruthie, looking quite pleased. She thought Susy was praising her.

"Now let *me* tell some letters," said Prudy.

"L.R. She lives at your house, Flossy."

Nobody could guess.

"Why, I should think *that* was easy enough," said Prudy: "it's that girl that lives there; she takes off the covers of your stove with a clothes-pin: it's 'Lecta Rosbornd.'"

The little girls explained to Prudy that the true initials of Electa Osborne would be E. O., instead of L. R. But Prudy did not know much about spelling. She *had* known most of her letters; but it was some time ago, and they had nearly all slipped out of her head.

She said, often, she wished she could "only, only read;" and Susy offered to teach her, but Mrs. Parlin said it would never do till Prudy felt stronger.

I will tell you now why I think Susy did not understand her mother when she said Annie was not a suitable playmate. In the evening, after Ruthie and Flossy were gone, Susy said to her mother,—

"I feel real cross with Ruthie, mamma: I think she puts herself forward. She goes into a room, and no matter how old the people are that are talking, she speaks up, and says, 'O, yes, I know all about it.' I never saw such an old-fashioned little girl."

"Very well," said Mrs. Parlin; "if *she* is rude, take care that the same fault does not appear in yourself, Susy."

"But, mother," said Susy, suddenly veering about and speaking in Ruth's favor, "I don't know but it's proper to do as Ruthy does. If you know something, and other people don't, ain't it right to speak up and say it?"

"It is never right for little girls to *monopolize* conversation, Susy; that is, to take the lead in it, and so prevent older people from talking. Neither is it proper to pretend to know more than we do, and talk of things beyond our knowledge."

"I knew you would say so, mother. I just asked to hear what you would say. I know Ruthie is ill-mannered: do you think I ought to play with her any more?"

Mrs. Parlin looked at Susy in surprise.

"Why, you know, mother, you wouldn't let me play with Annie Lovejoy. You said, 'evil communications corrupted good manners.'"

"But can't you see any difference in the cases, Susy? What a muddy little head you must wear on your shoulders!"

"Not much of any," said Susy, trying to think; "they're both *bold*; that's what you don't like."

"Anything else, Susy?"

"O, yes, mother; Ruthie's good, and Annie isn't. It was queer for me to forget that!"

"I should think it was, Susy, since it is the only thing of much importance, after all. Now, it seems to me you are very ready to cast off your friends when their manners offend you. How would you like it to be treated in the same way? Suppose Mrs. Turner and Ruthie should be talking together this very minute. Ruthie says, 'That Susy Parlin keeps her drawers in a perfect tumble; she isn't orderly a bit. Susy Parlin never knit a stitch for the soldiers in her life. Mother, mayn't I stop playing with Susy Parlin?'"

Susy laughed, and looked a little ashamed.

"Well, mother," said she, twisting the corner of her handkerchief, "I guess I can't say anything about Ruthie Turner; she's a great deal better girl than I am, any way."

CHAPTER XI.

SUSY'S BIRTHDAY.

Days and weeks passed. The snowflakes, which had fallen from time to time, and kept themselves busy making a patchwork quilt for mother Earth, now melted away, and the white quilt was torn into shreds. The bare ground was all there was to be seen, except now and then a dot of the white coverlet. It was Spring, and everything began to wake up. The sun wasn't half so sleepy, and didn't walk off over the western hills in the middle of the afternoon to take a nap.

The sleighing was gone long ago. The roads were dismal swamps. "Wings" would have a rest till "settled going." Susy's skates were hung up in a green baize bag, to dream away the summer.

The mocking-bird performed his daily duties of entertaining the family, besides learning a great many new songs. Susy said she tried not to set her heart on that bird.

"I'll not give him a name," she added, "for then he'll be sure to die! My first canary was Bertie, and I named the others Berties, as fast as they died off. The last one was so yellow that I couldn't help calling him Dandelion; but I wish I hadn't, for then, perhaps, he'd have lived."

Susy had caught some whimsical notions about "signs and wonders." It is strange how some intelligent children will believe in superstitious stories! But as soon as Susy's parents discovered that her young head had been stored with such worse than foolish ideas, they were not slow to teach her better.

She had a great fright, about this time, concerning Freddy Jackson. He was one of the few children who were allowed to play in "Prudy's sitting-room." He did not distract the tired nerves of "Rosy Frances," as her cousin Percy and other boys did, by sudden shouts and loud laughing. Prudy had a vague feeling that he was one of the little ones that God thought best to punish by "snipping his heart." She knew what it was to have *her* heart snipped, and had a sympathy with little Freddy.

Susy loved Freddy, too. Perhaps Percy was right, when he said that Susy loved everything that was dumb; and I am not sure but her tender heart would have warmed to him all the more if he had been stone-blind, as well as deaf.

Freddy had a drunken father, and a sad home; but, for all that, he was not entirely miserable. It is only the wicked who are miserable. The kind Father in heaven has so planned it that there is something pleasant in everybody's life.

Freddy had no more idea what *sound* is than we have of the angels in heaven; but he could see, and there is so much to be seen! Here is a great, round world, full of beauty and wonder. It stands ready to be looked at. Freddy's ears must be forever shut out from pleasant sound; but his bright eyes were wide open, seeing all that was made to be seen.

He loved to go to Mrs. Parlin's, for there he was sure to be greeted pleasantly; and he understood the language of smiles as well as anybody.

When grandma Read saw him coming she would say,—

"Now, Susan, thee'd better lay aside thy book, for most likely the poor little fellow will want to *talk*."

And Susy did lay aside her book. She had learned so many lessons this winter in self-denial!

These "silent talks" were quite droll. Little Dotty almost understood something about them; that is, when they used the signs: the alphabet was more than she could manage. When Freddy wanted to talk about Dotty, he made a sign for a dimple in each cheek. He smoothed his hair when he meant Susy, and made a waving motion over his head for Prudy, whose hair was full of ripples.

Prudy said she had wrinkled hair, and she knew it; but the wrinkles "wouldn't come out."

Grandma Read sat one evening by the coal-grate, holding a letter in her hand, and looking into the glowing fire with a thoughtful expression. Susy came and sat near her, resting one arm on her grandma's lap, and trying in various ways to attract her attention.

"Why, grandma," said she, "I've spoken to you three times; but I can't get you to answer or look at me."

"What does thee want, my dear? I will try to attend to thee."

"O, grandma, there are ever so many things I want to say, now mother is out of the room, and father hasn't got home. I must tell somebody, or my heart will break; and you know, grandma dear, I can talk to you so easy."

"Can thee? Then go on, Susy; what would thee like to say?"

"O, two or three things. Have you noticed, grandma, that I've been just as sober as can be?"

"For how long, Susan?"

"O, all day; I've felt as if I couldn't but just live!"

Grandma Read did not smile at this. She knew very well that such a child as Susy is capable of intense suffering.

"Well, Susan, is it about thy sister Prudence?"

"O, no, grandma! she's getting; better; isn't she?"

"Are thy lessons at school too hard for thee, Susan?"

Mrs. Read saw that Susy was very reluctant about opening her heart, although she had said she could talk to her grandmother "so easy."

"No, indeed, grandma; my lessons are not too hard. I'm a real good scholar—one of the best in school for my age."

This was a fact. Some people would have chidden Susy for it; but Mrs. Read reflected that the child was only telling the simple truth, and had no idea of boasting. She was not a little girl who would intrude such remarks about herself upon strangers. But when she and her grandma were talking together confidentially, she thought it made all the difference in the world; as indeed it did.

"I have a great deal to trouble me," said Susy, and the "evening-blue" of her eyes clouded over, till there were signs of a shower. "I thought my pony would make me happy as long as I lived; but it hasn't. One thing that I feel bad about is—well, it's turning over a new leaf. When New Year's comes, I'm going to do it, and don't; so I wait till my birthday, and then I don't. It seems as if I'd tried about a thousand New Years and birthdays to turn over that leaf."

Grandma smiled, but did not interrupt Susy.

"I think I should be real good," continued the child, "if it wasn't such hard work. I can't be orderly, grandma—not much; and then Dotty upsets everything. Sometimes I have to hold my breath to keep patient."

"Well, grandma, my birthday comes to-morrow, the 8th of April. I like it well enough; only there's one reason why I don't like it at all, and that is a Bible reason. It's so dreadful that I can't bear to say it to you," said Susy, shuddering, and lowering her voice to a whisper; "I don't want to grow up, for I shall have to marry Freddy Jackson."

Grandma tried to look serious.

"Who put such a foolish idea into thy head, child?"

"Cousin Percy told me last night," answered Susy, solemnly. "How can you laugh when it's all in the Bible, grandma? I never told anybody before. Wait; I'll show you the verse. I've put a mark at the place."

Susy brought her Bible to her grandmother, and, opening it at the thirty-first chapter of Proverbs, pointed, with a trembling finger, to the eighth verse, which Mrs. Read read aloud,—

"Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction."

"Now Percy says that's a sure sign! I told him, O, dear! Freddy ought to marry a dumb woman; that would be *properest*; but Percy says no—anything has got to 'come to pass' when it's *foreordinationed*!"

"And could thee really believe such foolishness, my sensible little Susan? Does thee suppose the good Lord ever meant that we should read his Bible as if it were a wicked dream-book?"

"Then you don't think I shall have to marry Freddy Jackson," cried Susy, immensely relieved. "I'm so glad I told you! I felt so sober all day, only nobody noticed it, and I was ashamed to tell!"

"It is a good thing for thee to tell thy little troubles to thy older friends, Susan: thee'll almost always find it so," said grandma Read, stroking Susy's hair.

"Now, my child, I have a piece of news for thee, if thee is ready to hear it: thy cousin, Grace Clifford, has a little sister."

"A baby sister? A real sister? Does mother know it?"

"Yes, thy mother knows it."

"But how *could* you keep it to yourself so long?"

"Thee thinks good news is hard to keep, does thee? Well, thee shall be the first to tell thy father when he comes home."

Susy heard steps on the door-stone, and rushed out, with the joyful story on her lips. It proved to be not her father, but callers, who were just ringing the bell; and they heard Susy's exclamation, —

"O, have you heard? Grace has a new sister, a baby sister, as true as you live!" with the most provoking coolness.

But when Mr. Parlin came, he was sufficiently interested in the news to satisfy even Susy.

CHAPTER XII.

FAREWELL.

Prudy was really getting better. Mrs. Parlin said she should trust a physician more next time. The doctor declared that all the severe pain Prudy had suffered was really necessary.

"Believe me, my dear madam," said he, "when the poor child has complained most, she has in fact been making most progress towards health. When the sinews are 'knitting together,' as we call it, then the agony is greatest."

This was very comforting to Mrs. Parlin, who thought she would not be discouraged so easily again; she would always believe that it is "darkest just before day."

There was really everything to hope for Prudy. The doctor thought that by the end of three months she would walk as well as ever. He said she might make the effort now, every day, to bear her weight on her feet. She tried this experiment first with her father and mother on each side to support her; but it was not many days before she could stand firmly on her right foot, and bear a little weight on her left one, which did not now, as formerly, drag, or, as she had said, "*more* than touch the floor." By and by she began to scramble about on the carpet on all fours, partly creeping, partly pushing herself along.

It was surprising how much pleasure Prudy took in going back to these ways of babyhood.

Faint blush roses began to bloom in her cheeks as soon as she could take a little exercise and go out of doors. Her father bought a little carriage just suitable for the pony, and in this she rode every morning, her mother or Percy driving; for Mrs. Parlin thought it hardly safe to trust Susy with such a precious encumbrance as this dear little sister.

She had been willing that Susy should manage Wings in a sleigh, but in a carriage the case was quite different; for, though in a sleigh there might be even more danger of overturning, there was not as much danger of getting hurt. Indeed, Susy's sleigh had tipped over once or twice in turning too sharp a corner, and Susy had fallen out, but had instantly jumped up again, laughing.

She would have driven in her new carriage to Yarmouth and back again, or perhaps to Bath, if she had been permitted. She was a reckless little horsewoman, afraid of nothing, and for that very reason could not be trusted alone.

But there was no difficulty in finding companions. Percy pretended to study book-keeping, but was always ready for a ride. Flossy was not steady enough to be trusted with the reins, but Ruth Turner was as careful a driver as need be; though Susy laughed because she held the reins in both hands, and looked so terrified.

She said it did no good to talk with Ruth when she was driving; she never heard a word, for she was always watching to see if a carriage was coming, and talking to herself, to make sure she remembered which was her right hand, so she could "turn to the right, as the law directs."

Prudy enjoyed the out-of-doors world once more, and felt like a bird let out of a cage. And so did

Susy, for she thought she had had a dull season of it, and fully agreed with Prudy, who spoke of it as the "slow winter."

But now it was the quick spring, the live spring. The brooks began to gossip; the birds poured out their hearts in song, and the dumb trees expressed their joy in leaves

"The bobolink, on the mullein-stalk,
Would rattle away like a sweet girl's talk."

The frogs took severe colds, but gave concerts a little way out of the city every evening. The little flowers peeped up from their beds, as Norah said, "like babies asking to be took;" and Susy took them; whenever she could find them, you may be sure, and looked joyfully into their faces. She could almost say,—

"And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes."

She said, "I don't suppose they know much, but *perhaps* they know enough to have a good time: who knows?"

Susy took long walks to Westbrook, and farther, coming home tired out, but loaded with precious flowers. There were plenty of friends to give them to her from their early gardens: broad-faced crocuses, jonquils, and lilies of the valley, and by and by lilacs, with "purple spikes."

She gathered snowdrops, "the first pale blossoms of the unripened year," and May-flowers, pink and white, like sea-shells, or like "cream-candy," as Prudy said. These soft little blossoms blushed so sweetly on the same leaf with such old experienced leaves! Susy said, "it made her think of little bits of children who hadn't any mother, and lived with their grandparents."

Dotty was almost crazy with delight when she had a "new pair o' boots, and a pair o' shaker," and was allowed to toddle about on the pavement in the sunshine. She had a green twig or a switch to flourish, and could now cry, "Hullelo!" to those waddling ducks, and hear them reply, "Quack! quack!" without having such a trembling fear that some stern Norah, or firm mamma, would rush out bareheaded, and drag her into the house, like a little culprit.

It was good times for Dotty Dimple, and good times for the whole family. Spring had come, and Prudy was getting well. There was a great deal to thank God for!

It is an evening in the last of May. A bit of a moon, called "the new moon," is peeping in at the window. It shines over Susy's right shoulder, she says. Susy is reading, Prudy is walking slowly across the floor, and Dotty Dimple is whispering to her kitty, telling her to go down cellar, and catch the naughty rats while they are asleep. When kitty winks, Dotty thinks it the same as if she said,—

"I hear you, little Miss Dotty: I'm going."

I think perhaps this is a good time to bid the three little girls good-by, or, as dear grandma Read would say, "Farewell!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE PRUDY'S SISTER SUSY ***

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