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The Funeral, [p. 52.](#)

LITTLE PITCHER-STORIES.

BABY PITCHER'S TRIALS.

BY

MRS. MAY.

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BABY PITCHER'S TRIALS.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE LITTLE PRINCESS MADE SUNSHINE.

It was raining fast, and it had rained for two days. This was the third. Flora had become tired of the leaden sky and the wet earth. She had watched the moving clouds and the swaying branches of the trees long enough, and now she was ready for fair weather. But it seemed as if fair weather

would never come, and she looked in vain for a bit of blue sky. There was not even a light streak.



It was stormy without and it was stormy within. The gray side of the sky was all that could be seen, and the gray side of Flora's temper was out also. There was a sunny side to both, but that was carefully hidden by the sober clouds.

Flora was tired of the big drops that chased each other down the pane. She was tired of trying to look abroad through the wet glass and the mist. When she did get a glimpse of the outer world there was nothing to see, and that was the worst of it. There was nothing but muddy roads, pools of water and little patches of green grass. It was not to be borne.

Flora crept down from her high chair to the lowly footstool, leaned her head upon her hand and sighed. Sister Amy had gone to school, and Charley and Bertie were big boys. Of course they could go anywhere in any weather, with "yubber" boots. How she envied them! Only she the youngest of the flock, the Baby Pitcher, was forced to stay at home because it rained. So she sighed. Mamma heard the sigh and said inquiringly, "Well?"

"If I was a lady," said Flora, "a certain true lady, I wouldn't stay in for the weather. I would put on my water-prooth and go a-fishing."

"In the rain?"

"I would."

Mamma laughed. Now Flora was not in a mood to be laughed at, so she shut her eyes to keep back the tears, for she knew they would come if she did not shut the covers down tightly. She did not keep them all back however, for mamma saw two or three rolling slowly down her little girl's cheek.

"Wouldn't go fishing without a water-prooth," she added, petulantly; "might fall in and get wet."

Mamma did not laugh now. She was very grave. She had not had an easy time of it since falling weather set in. She could do nothing right. All her efforts had failed to amuse Flora. So mamma sighed.

Flora, forgetting that she must keep the covers shut down tightly, opened wide her eyes and was astonished. Mamma looked so very sober. Was she too going to cry because the pleasant sunshine staid away so long?

"I wouldn't," she said, earnestly. Mamma looked up. "I never would cry for the rain," hastily brushing the moisture from her own cheek. "Ladies don't, nor good children; only cross ones."

"I am glad to hear it," said mamma; but she did not smile.

"It will be pleasant when it clears off, I guess; don't you?"

"It generally is," said mamma, quietly; and then she went on with her work and paid no more attention to Flora. Now that was unusual conduct. What did mamma mean? In thinking about it, Flora forgot her own troubles, and forgot all about the rain, though at that moment it was beating fiercely against the window, and the cold wind was begging to come in. By and by she carried the footstool to her mother's side and seated herself demurely.

"I am going to tell you a story," she said. "It is a story, but it is the truth, too. Want to hear it?"

Mamma assented.

"Well. Once, a good while ago, almost as much as a week, somebody went a-fishing. It wasn't Charley or Bertie or Amy or me. His mother told him never to do it because he might tumble in, you know. But he did; he went."

"What a naughty boy!" said mamma, gravely.

"But he wasn't a boy."

"Excuse me," said mamma, "I thought he was."

"And he wasn't a girl."

"No?"

"No. You could never guess what he was."

"Then you will have to tell me."

"He was a fly."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, he was a fly; a sure enough fly. And where do you think the pond was? Not a truly pond, but play it was, you know."

"It might have been the sirup pitcher or the plum jar. Flies are very fond of sweets."

"But it wasn't. It was the cream jug. He was trying to catch some milk and he tumbled in."

"What a pity!"

"Yes, and his mamma wasn't there, and the milk drowned him. And I hope he will remember it as long as he lives, and never do so any more. Wasn't that a good story?"

"It was a very good story."

"Did it make you feel better?"

"A great deal better; and now I will tell you a story."

"Oh, goody!"

Flora brushed the curls back from her face and prepared to listen.

"Once upon a time," said mamma.

"Long ago?"

"Not so very long ago."

"Much as a week?"

"Oh, no; not so much as a week. We will say about two days."

"Well."

"Once upon a time—"

"About two days ago?"

"Yes, dear. In a little white palace no larger than this house, there lived a king and a queen, a tall princess and a little princess."

"Oh oo!" said Flora.

"And the king could not always remain in the pretty palace, because it was necessary for him to go abroad to provide food and clothing for his family. The queen, the tall princess and the little princess, were his family."

"Yes," said Flora.

"And the tall princess could not always stay in the palace, because she expected to be a queen herself some day, and her mamma—I mean the queen—wanted her to be a wise one; so she sent her away to school every morning. But the queen and the little princess stayed in the palace, and it often happened that they were left at home together."

"Just like us."

"Yes, dear. The princess used to run about and play out of doors like other little girls when the weather was pleasant, and when it was not she amused herself in doors with her toys and her pets."

"Did she have a white mouse, do you think?"

"I think she had a white mouse."

"And a grandma?"

"I am almost certain that she had a grandma."

"But the grandma did not live in the palace?"

"Oh, no. The grandma lived in a house not far from the palace, and the tall princess and the little princess used to visit her almost every day."

"Well."

"The queen and the little princess were very happy together until something happened. It was a long storm that happened, and there was no sunshine in the palace for more than two days."

Flora, reminded of the rain, glanced at the window against which the big drops were rattling merrily, but quickly turned to mamma again, for she did not wish to lose one word of the story.

"Now when the sun did not shine in the palace it was a very gloomy place, not like a palace at all, and the queen was sad and the princess unhappy. The princess did not know why she was unhappy, but the queen knew. It was because there was no sunshine to make little faces look pleasant and cheerful. It made the queen sad to see the little princess unhappy and discontented, so she thought she would try to make some sunshine."

"Did she?"

"No," said mamma. "I am sorry to say that the poor queen worked very hard, but she had forgotten how to make it."

"Too bad!" said Flora.

"But when the poor queen was quite discouraged the little princess thought that she would try; and what her poor mamma—I mean the queen—had failed to do, she did. The little princess made the sunshine."

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Flora, clapping her hands. "How did she do it?"

"Why," said mamma, smiling, and putting her arm round the little girl's neck, "she brought her footstool to the queen's side and told the queen a story."

"Just like me!"

"Yes, dear. And the queen was very happy because the palace was no longer dark and gloomy; it was bright with the sunshine her little girl had made."

"The princess, you mean."

"The princess was a little girl."

"And was the queen a lady?"

"The queen was the little girl's mamma."

"Oh, I know!" said Flora, jumping about in high glee, "I am the little princess and you are the queen, and this is the palace."

"Yes," said mamma.

"And papa is the king, and sister is the tall princess."

"Yes, dear."

"And I hope," she added, earnestly, "that the princess will never forget that she knows how to make sunshine."

"The queen hopes so too," said mamma.

CHAPTER II.

FLORA WAITS FOR THE SUN TO DRINK UP THE WATER.



The next morning there was sunshine everywhere; inside of the palace and out. The long storm was over. Flora waited in the porch for the sun to drink up the moisture from the soaked ground, that she might run about and enjoy her freedom. She had been housed so long—three whole days! And now the grass was springing up all around, and the swelling buds were ready to burst forth into leaves. And the birds were singing gaily as if they too were glad to come out and play.

Flora watched them as they hopped from twig to twig, and wished she could borrow their brown wings, for she wanted to fly away over the tops of the houses and sing with them a joyful song. But she could not borrow the brown wings, and she could not turn herself into a bird. So she sat down on the upper step which the sun had dried, and tried to feel satisfied with the nimble feet and curious fingers that God had given to her instead of wings and claws.

The steam was rising from the ground, and the bright drops sparkled on the tender blades of grass. When the last bright drop had disappeared, and there was no longer any steam, she was at liberty to go where she pleased. She felt very comfortable in her thick jacket and leather boots, for it was as yet too early in the season to lay them by, but if she could have had her own way, she would have welcomed the pleasant morning in ankle-ties and a shaker.

"Mamma knows best," she whispered to Dinah, the black baby, with blue buttons for eyes and ravelled-out yarn for hair. "Mamma knows best, and I hope you are 'vinced of it."

The sun had gone away from the step, and Flora was somewhat chilly, so she pinned the shawl tightly about Dinah and walked up and down the porch. "You don't know everything," she said, sharply, "because you ain't old enough. And I ain't. Did you think I was? No. I will tell you who is. Mamma is. She is ever so old, and she knows all there is in the world. When she tells me to put on my warm jacket, I don't cry. But you do, and you ought to be ashamed of it. Will you do it without crying next time? Eh?" She gave the baby a little shake and went on with her lecture. "Naughty children say 'no' when mamma says 'yes.' Good ones don't. Good ones say just as mamma says. And naughty children tell stories. I don't tell stories and good children don't. If you say you don't cry when you do cry, that's a story. And if you say you do cry when you don't cry, *that's* a story. It is a story both ways, and both ways are wicked. Mamma says so, and she knows. When you are as old as mamma, you will know too. And I will. So don't ask any more questions about it."

Dinah had come out to take the air and be company for Flora. To be sure, Amy, the tall princess spoken of in the last chapter, was sitting at the window that opened on to the porch; but then she

was busy. She could not be company for anybody, for she was studying her home lesson. Flora pitied her very much, for she looked very sober and kept repeating to herself words that Flora could not understand. It was a hard lesson, and Amy was determined to conquer it. Flora felt like talking, and there was no one to talk to but Dinah. Dinah was a good listener, but not much of a talker. In fact, she could not speak a word; so if she had any ideas, she did not express them. Flora was tired of having everything her own way. She thought it would be a great deal nicer if Amy would put down that stupid book, and pay some attention to her; but she did not say so aloud. She whispered it to Dinah in a tone that only Dinah could hear. By and by Amy did put down the book, and with it the sober, earnest look.

"Goody!" said Flora, clapping her hands, regardless of Dinah's peril. But Dinah did not fall. Flora caught her by the neck just in time to prevent a terrible blow. When Flora said "Goody," Amy opened the window.

"It is you, is it?" she said. "I thought it was a mouse."

"It is only me," said Flora. "I am going out when the sun has drunk up all the water."

"The sun is a thirsty fellow, my dear."

"He is," sighed Flora. "Dinah is tired of waiting."

"Flora is tired of waiting, I guess."

"Yes, Flora is."

"And what would she like to do while the sun is drinking?"

"Have fun," said Flora, laying the black baby down for a nap, with the shawl drawn up over her head. "Dinah is asleep and I am ready."

"You are a dear little thing for keeping so still while I was studying, and we will have some fun."

"Oo!" said Flora. "I have fifteen minutes to do whatever I please with, and then I must be off. Now, what would you like to do?"

"Play something," said Flora, joyfully.

"Well."

"I should like to get out my china set and play dinner, with real sugar in the sugar bowl, and apple cut up for meat."

"That would be jolly if we only had the time; but we have not."

"Oh!" sighed Flora.

Amy put on hat and coat, and tightened the strap around her books.

"How would you like 'mother' or 'tag'?"

"First rate," said Flora. "I will be the mother, and you may be 'it.'"

"All at once?"

"Yes. But if you catch me, it won't be fair."

"No, indeed," said Amy. "And you musn't start till I get my hand on the post."

"No."

"And if you don't 'bey the rules we must begin over again."

"Yes."

"Ready?"

"Ready."

As Flora started to run, somebody called "Holloa!" So she stopped short and asked, "Who is that?"

It was Charley passing by on his way to school, alone.

"You had better hurry up," he cried. "If you stop there fooling with the Baby Pitcher, you will be late."

"It is early yet," said Amy; but Flora was angry and she stamped her foot and screamed,

"'Taint late, either, Charley Waters; and you are an ugly boy to call me that. My name ain't Baby Pitcher; my name is Flora Lee!"

"Whew!" said Charley. "The Lee spunk is running away with the little pet. Catch it somebody!"

"You must not tease her," said Amy; "she wants to play."

"Don't either," pouted Flora.

"I thought you did."

"She wants coaxing," said Charley.

"Don't either, Charley Waters."

"You will play to oblige sister, won't you?" said Amy, soothingly.

No, Flora would not. Charley had interfered with their plans and ruffled her temper. It was too bad of Charley, but then Charley was not wholly to blame, for the Baby Pitcher's temper was easily ruffled. And now it was really time for Amy to go. The fifteen minutes had melted away.

"I do not like to leave the little sister with such a sour face," she whispered in Flora's ear. "If you will brush away the black looks and be pleasant, you may ask mamma to let you write on my white slate."

"Till you come home?"

"Yes."

Flora with a quick motion brushed away the gloomy clouds and held up her sunny face for a kiss.

"That is a lady," said Amy, approvingly.

"I will be very careful, and I won't break it," said Flora, gratefully; "and Dinah must not touch it."

"Well! If you haven't got an April face I wouldn't say so," declared Charley, at the risk of banishing the smiles.

But Flora did not care. She was thinking of the pretty white slate. She had never held it in her hands but once, and then Amy stood by to watch and to caution her. Now she was to have it all to herself.

"I am off," said Charley. "Will somebody kiss me before I go?"

"Dinah will."

Flora held up the black baby, but Charley made a wry face and said "Pah!" That amused Flora, and she ran after Charley and insisted upon his kissing Dinah, but before she knew it, Charley caught her in his arms and left a kiss on the tip of her nose. He did not mean to leave it there, he was trying to put it on her cheek, but the little nose was right in the way, so it caught the kiss.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Charley. "Let me take it back and put it where it belongs."

So Flora held quite still, and Charley made believe take it back; and he put another one on the cheek. Then he and Amy trudged along to school, leaving Flora and Dinah in a very happy mood.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF POOR ROBIN.



Flora waited until they had turned the corner. When they looked back, she waved her hand, and, before passing out of sight, Charley threw a farewell kiss.

"It was not for you," she said to the black baby, "so you need not look so pleasant about it. It was for me. And now we will go in and write on the white slate; but you must not touch it, for somebody has clumsy fingers and black fingers. It isn't me—my fingers are white; and it isn't Amy. It is you. Dolls don't know so much as other folks, and dolls break things. I don't. If you break that slate, Amy will cry. She said I might take it; she didn't say nothing to you. Will you 'member?"

They went in, but they soon came out again. The sunny morning called so loudly that Flora could not stay in doors. Not even the white slate had power to keep her. She played with it a while, and then it was cast aside, because Dinah wanted to take a walk. How she knew it, I am sure I cannot tell. Perhaps the black baby whispered her wishes in the ear of her mistress, and Flora was quite willing to oblige her. When they went out, the steps of the porch were dry, and there was no longer any mist; so Flora was at liberty to go where she pleased. That is to say, she was at liberty to go wherever mamma pleased. Down to the barn, over to auntie's, where Charley and Bertie lived, or in to see Grandma; but she was not to wander away or play in the public street, and she was on no account to go where she could not keep home in view. She might roam about the grounds all day if she liked; and there was the big tree down in the garden, with a broad seat around it, where she could play house or picnic, or anything that could be played with only Dinah to help her. But it often happened that she did not care to go to any of these places. She would have liked to open the big gate (but that was forbidden,) and follow the noisy ducks down to the pond, and now she looked with longing eyes to a group of merry boys who ought to have been in school, but were playing in the muddy street instead. She thought how nice it would be to have one's own way always, and not be obliged to ask mamma everything. She was strongly tempted to join the party of rough, rude boys. There was not a girl among them.

"I think it is too bad," she complained to Dinah, "and it ought to be a pity. Big girls know where they want to go better than mamma does. Don't they? Course they do. Did you say no? That is what mamma says. So you may turn your head round. If you don't look that way, you will forget all about it. And I will."

Flora was right. She turned her head and forgot all about it. There was something else to think of. Somebody was getting over the wall at the foot of the garden. Who was it? She ran to the other end of the porch to see.

"Is that you?" she called. No answer. "Is that *you*, I say?"

Bertie (for it was Bertie,) looked up and nodded. He came across the beds that were covered with the dry stalks and stems of last year's flowers, and up the path, quite slowly.

"Hurry," cried Flora, impatiently.

Bertie shook his head to signify that he could not hurry, and then she saw that he carried something in both hands, and he carried it carefully.

"What is it," she demanded.

"Hush!" said Bertie. "It is a timid little thing, and you must not make a noise. You can come up softly and look."

He cautiously parted his hands, and Flora looked in; but the space was very narrow, and she was so eager that she could not see very well. So he separated his hands a little more, and then she saw the bright eyes and round head of a bird.

"Oo!" she exclaimed.

"Robin," said Bertie.

"Alive?"

"Can't you see?"

He stopped, and Flora took another look.

"It *is* alive. I am so glad."

"But you must not clap your hands. That makes a wind, and he is awfully afraid of a wind. It makes him shake like everything. I wish you could feel his heart beat."

Flora eagerly held out her hands.

"Do let me," she pleaded, earnestly. But Bertie said, "Not yet; wait till he gets acquainted."

"Will he, do you think?"

"Oh, yes. He knows me first rate now. I have had him ever since last night. I was home yesterday, sick. I am home sick to-day. That is why I am here. I didn't go to school. I got my feet wet."

"Through your rubber boots?"

"Over them. I went in knee deep, filled my boots full. Took them off, and emptied out the water; but that didn't do any good. The cold stayed in. I had caught it, you know, and there was no shaking it out. When you once catch a cold, it sticks. There is something growing in my throat. Tonsils, mother calls it, I believe; but I guess it won't amount to much."

"Does it hurt?"

"Oh, no! It was awful in the night, though. You see I could not get out yesterday for the rain."

"No more could I."

"It was precious dull staying in the house with the tonsils, so I kept looking out of the window, and wishing it would clear off."

"Just like me," said Flora, gleefully.

"And I got awful tired of that window!"

"Me, too."

"I wanted to smash my fist through it, but that would not have been doing the proper thing, so I kept my feelings to myself. By-and-by I heard something go, peep! peep! I couldn't think at first what it was."

"It was the robin."

"Yes, but I did not know it was the robin. I thought it was some other bird up in a tree. By-and-by it came again. Peep! peep! right under the window, and then I began to look about me. But I did not see anything for a long time. At last I opened the window, and there, hopping about the wet piazza, was Mr. Robin. I went out and got him in a twinkling."

"Did he want to be caught?"

"Couldn't help himself."

"I should have fled away."

"With that?" Bertie pointed to a broken wing.

"With two of them."

"You could not fly if you had a dozen wings like that. It is broken."

"Oh!"

"And that accounts for his being on our piazza. I don't know what lamed him, but I think it was the gale or a stone."

"I guess it was something," said Flora, eagerly.

"And it was lucky that I happened to hear him when he cried peep, peep, instead of puss. If puss had been round, wouldn't she have snapped at him?"

"Wouldn't she?" echoed Flora.

"She would have made mince meat of Mr. Robin. There would not have been so much as a feather left. I tell you what I mean to do. Nurse him up till he gets well."

"Me, too."

"Yes, you can be the doctor, while I am at school; and if he *does* get well, won't I make a tip-top cage for him?"

"He will get well."

"Perhaps. But you must be careful about his diet. Don't give him anything hurtful to eat, you know."

"I won't. Give him milk and sponge cake."

"And worms. You must not forget the worms."

"Dig some?"

"Yes."

"Dig some now?"

"That wouldn't be a bad idea. He was not hungry last night, and he would not eat this morning. Perhaps a nice fat worm will tempt him."

Flora knew where to look for nice, fat worms, so she left Bertie to take care of Dinah and the robin, while she went in pursuit of a breakfast for the birdy. There was a family that lived under a certain plank, and as it was a large family there was always somebody at home. When she tried the door it would not open; that is to say when she got to the plank she could not lift it. The wet clay sucked it down so hard that although she tugged till she was red in the face, she could not move it.

"Oh, dear!" she cried.

And then she went to the other end of the plank and tried that. But it stuck fast. It would not move an inch. Then she got angry and talked to it as she sometimes talked to Dinah, and with no better result. She could not move it by force or by persuasion. There was no other way but to go back to Bertie without the robin's breakfast.

"I can manage it," said Bertie, "if you will take the chick. I should like to see the plank that could hold out against me."

Flora gladly took the chick, and her countenance brightened as she felt the little heart flutter against her hand. This was much pleasanter than hunting worms. She sat down upon the step and held the birdy very tenderly till Bertie came back.

CHAPTER IV.

"GOING TO HAVE A FUNERAL."

he plank did not hold out against Bertie, and he found several of the worm family at home. They were very much disturbed by his presence, and wriggled about in all directions, as if in pursuit of hiding places, or their company dress and manners. They were evidently not prepared to receive visitors. But that did not make any difference to Bertie. He hung as many as he thought the robin could relish across a stick, and with much difficulty—for the worms were constantly dropping off—he made his way back to the porch without the loss of a single crawler. But when he got there the birdy would not eat. Was not that a pity? They coaxed in every way. Flora even talked to him with tears in her eyes, but it was of no use. He did not open his bill or take any notice of the nice

breakfast spread before him.



"Too bad!" said Flora. "Will he die?"

"I am afraid he will."

Bertie gazed sadly at the writhing worms.

"He will starve in a land of plenty, and I don't see how anybody is to help it. Who could resist such a tempting breakfast as that?"

"I couldn't," said Flora.

"And I couldn't. And if he does not hurry up, there won't be any breakfast to eat. Look at that—and that."

Bertie pointed to a well-fattened, tender morsel, in such haste to be off that it was hanging over the very edge of the flooring, and to another whose thick-set body was fast disappearing between the boards.

"That is what I call a tight squeeze. They might stop to say good morning."

"Worms don't know everything," returned Flora.

"Not quite everything," said Bertie.

"What shall we do next?"

"Perhaps he is thirsty. Dinah is."

"And you are?"

"Yes, I are."

Water was brought; but the birdy would not drink, although he opened his bill so wide when Flora pushed his head into the porringer that she thought he was drinking.

"He is only gasping," said Bertie. "Birds cannot breathe with their heads under water. Nobody can."

"I can."

"No, dear."

"Minims can."

"Oh, yes, minims can. But minims are fishes, and they live in the water. That is their home. Birds live in the air. They build little houses in the trees."

"Live in the sky. I have seen them way up."

"They do fly almost as high as the sky; but when night comes and they are tired of flying, they go home to rest."

"In the little houses?"

"Yes, dear."

"Want to see them."

"They are high up in the trees, out of sight. By and by, when the leaves fall off and the birds fly away, I will get you one of the round nests."

"To put the robin in."

"If we have any robin."

"Got one now."

"But his wing is broken, and he will not eat."

"Too bad!"

"And if he will not eat, he may as well die. I do believe he is thinking about it now. Look at him!"

Flora had made a bed by robbing Dinah of her dress and shawl; but the bird had not moved since she placed him upon it. He was now lying on his side, with closed eyes, and he was breathing very hard.

"He is asleep," said Flora.

Bertie shook his head.

"Feel better when he wakes up."

"If he *does* wake up."

"Course he will! You do, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And I do. And Dinah does. Cover him up warm; course he will wake up!"

Flora covered him with her pocket handkerchief, which she called a blanket, and tried to wait patiently for him to finish his nap. But she could not help lifting a corner of the blanket, now and then, to see how he was getting on; and every time she looked he seemed to be breathing harder, until at last he lay quite still, and did not breathe at all. She took that as a good sign, because the eye that she could see was partially open; and she called to Bertie, who had gone to the barn for a box to keep the robin in till the new cage was made, to come quick and turn the birdy over, for he had waked up on one side. She did not like to disturb him; but she wanted to know if the other eye was open. Bertie came up, with the box in his hand. He watched the bird closely for a moment.

"No need to turn him over," he said, sadly. "He is asleep clear through."

"Waked up on one side," persisted Flora; but Bertie knew that the robin would never wake again. He dropped the box, and took up the poor little bird. It was quite dead.

When Flora saw the drooping head, and knew that the birdy would never hop about and chirp or eat worms any more, she cried bitterly. It was too bad for it to go and die just as she was getting acquainted. They would have had such nice times together when the new cage was done.

"Never mind," said Bertie; but he too felt very sorry. He had been looking forward to a tame bird in a pretty cage, singing the sweetest of songs. And now that could never be.

"Get well, some time," sobbed Flora.

"Never," said Bertie, at which Flora cried louder than ever.

"We must bury him, and forget all about it."

"Have a funeral?"

"Yes."

"In a pretty box?"

"Yes."

Flora wiped her eyes. The prospect of a funeral was consoling. It helped her to forget her loss.

"Tie a ribbon round your hat?"

"If you wish."

"Mine too?"

"Yes."

"And wait till Charley and Amy come?"

"Yes, dear."

"Goody!"

She caught up Dinah, and went skipping about the porch.

"Going to have a funeral. Did you know it? Why don't you ask who is dead? Course somebody is. Couldn't have a funeral without somebody dead! It isn't me, and it isn't you. Nor anybody in this house. Did you think it was? No. It is a robin. You can go because you have a black face. Always wear black to funerals. I will, and Bertie will,—round our hats. You mustn't laugh. Good folks don't laugh at funerals, and I don't. Only bad. There's a worm. Want to look? That is the robin's breakfast going home. He lives down there under a plank. I can't lift it, and you can't. Bertie can. He don't want no more breakfast. Course not! He is going to be dead. Bury him when Amy and Charley come. Somewhere. Do you know where? I don't. Bertie does."

With Dinah in her arms, she met Charley and Amy at the corner when school was done, with the cheerful tidings.

"Going to have a funeral!"

"No!" said Charley.

"Are too, Charley Waters."

"When?"

"Now."

"Where?" inquired Amy, anxiously.

"There," pointing towards home.

"Not at our house?"

"Yes."

"It cannot be. Nobody is dead."

"Couldn't have a funeral without somebody dead."

"Flora, is anybody dead?"

"He is."

"Who?"

"The robin. Died to-day. Going to have a funeral in the porch."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Charley.

"You have given me such a fright!" said Amy. "I have not strength enough left to take me home."

Charley offered to carry her on his back, but she declined the offer. After leaning against a tree for a moment, she was able to go on.

"I don't know what the dear child means, do you?"

"Haven't the least idea," said Charley.

"And what is Bertie so busy about?"

"Can't make that out either."

"What is Bertie doing, pet?"

"Making the box," said Flora.

"What box?"

"Can't bury the robin without making a box!"

"Oh!"

"Course not. You ought to know better."

"That's so. When did Mr. R. shuffle off, &c.?"

"Didn't go nowhere, only to be dead."

"Oh!"

"And when Bertie gets the box done, we must form a line and march. Me and Dinah will go first, because she is the blackest."

"Good. She shall be chief mourner."

"Me, too."

"You shall be the marshal."

"Well."

She had not the slightest idea what it was to be the marshal but she liked the sound of it. Bertie was not long in finishing the box. Before they put the birdy in, Amy brought a handful of hay and made a soft nest. She could not bear to see it lying on the bottom of the hard box. Bertie nailed the cover on, and bored a hole with a gimlet. "To look through," he said. But as the hole was very small, and it was very dark inside, you could not see anything.

Bertie wanted to march with the box under his arm and the spade over his shoulder, but Flora insisted upon the wheelbarrow, and as Flora was the marshal, the wheelbarrow was brought out to head the procession. Flora and Dinah followed as chief mourners, while Amy and Charley walked in single file to make the procession as long as possible. They marched round and round the grounds as long as Flora wished, and then Bertie dug a deep hole in the middle of Amy's garden, and buried the robin.

CHAPTER V.

BERTIE MEETS JACK MIDNIGHT AT THE SPRING.



lora enjoyed the funeral very much. She had never had a dead bird to bury before, and she thought it a very nice thing; so nice in fact, that she meant to come back some day and have it over again. So she marked the spot with a stick, that she might know where to find the bird when she wanted it for another funeral. That it was hid from her sight forever she had not the least idea, or that she could not re-bury it whenever she choose. So she planted the stick, and went away with a happy heart.

When she knew that the birdy could be buried only once, and that she was not to

disturb the spot, she mourned her loss afresh. But Amy told her she would plant a daisy on the little mound, and it should be her own, and she should think of her bird whenever the flowers bloomed. And Charley promised to buy a bright yellow canary, if he could ever save money enough, and it should be "a regular screamer." She wanted Bertie to make the cage at once, but Bertie thought he could not make a cage good enough for a canary. He would have a beauty on hand, however, by the time Charley got ready to purchase the bird. This was meant as a sly hit at Charley who never had any money. He fully intended to buy the bird, but canaries cost money, and Charley's pockets were always empty, so far as money was concerned.

Flora had little faith in Charley's promises. Bertie had a new idea in his head. He wanted to prepare a trap for a musk-rat. That was why he could not attend to making the cage. If he succeeded in catching one—and he thought he should, for the spring was full of them—Flora was to have all the perfumery she wanted. So she was comforted, and in time—a very short time—forgot all about the robin. Bertie set his trap, and waited. Nobody believed in the musk-rat but Flora. She had faith in the success of all Bertie's undertakings. Everybody else laughed at him for his pains. Charley said he was a "goney," whatever that may be, and Amy advised him to turn his attention to something sensible. He travelled down to the spring every morning before breakfast, and with quickly beating heart examined the trap. There was nothing in it, but there were tracks all around. He resolved to follow up those tracks, and see what would come of them. It was a long walk to the spring, and a lonely walk. Other traps were set thereabouts, but their owners lived near by, or came from the upper road. Of course he never asked for Charley's company. Charley had no faith, and he ridiculed the idea of going so often on a wild-goose chase. But Bertie reasoned within himself,—other fellows caught musk-rats, why should not he? His traps were as good as theirs, his bait the same. To be sure he never had caught one, but that was no reason he never should. There must be a first time for every thing. And when he did trap one, wouldn't Charley change his tune? The spring was alive with musk-rats. One *should* find the way into his trap. He hoped it would be a "buster." He was on the road to the spring, when these thoughts passed through his mind. There had been a white frost, and the air was keen. He thrust his hands into his pockets, and ran along, whistling cheerfully. His spirits were light, and his hopes high. He half expected to find a musk-rat in his trap. He had made the path to it so easy and inviting, surely something must have found the way thither. Not a musk-rat, perhaps, but something. When he got there, he was surprised to find a boy examining his trap. It was not an agreeable surprise, for the boy was Jack Midnight; the very last person in the world with whom he desired to have any dealings. It was the same Jack who dishonestly made way with Charley's calico rooster. Bertie was angry. Without stopping to inquire into the circumstances, as he would have done if it had been any other boy, he at once jumped to a wrong conclusion. He thought that Jack was plotting mischief, and without waiting for his hot blood to cool, he called, quickly,

"Come out of that!"

"Do you know what you are gabbing about?" queried Jack.

"I guess I do."

"And I guess you don't. Supposing you hold your horses a minute?"

"It is a mean thing, any how, to meddle with another fellow's trap."

"It is your trap, is it?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well, who's a meddling?"

"You."

"I ain't."

"You are."

"I say I ain't; and who knows best, I should like to know?"

You may know that Bertie was angry, or he would not have stooped to bandy words with such a boy. Besides he would have been afraid, for Jack was a big boy. He was larger, stronger, and a great deal older than Bertie, and he was much better qualified for fighting in every way. He had had a deal of practice. But when a boy is angry, he does not stop to consider consequences. It was fortunate for Bertie that Jack did not feel disposed to quarrel with him. He could have shaken him as easily as a dog shakes a squirrel, and resistance would have been of no avail. For once, Jack was doing nothing to be ashamed of, and he knew he was right. That helps a boy a great deal. When he knows he is right, he does not feel half so much like striking back. Perhaps you think he did strike back when he replied to Bertie's uncivil words; but you must remember that Jack was a desperate fellow, and if he had not been well disposed he would hardly have taken the trouble to strike with his tongue. And language that would sound very rough from the lips of a better bred boy, was not so bad, after all, coming from Jack Midnight. He was secretly very much ashamed of his conduct towards the rooster, particularly as Charley and Bertie had never taken any notice of it. They had simply allowed him to go his own way, taking care, however, that his track never crossed theirs. When they could avoid it, they did not speak to him; when they could not, they were civil in speech—never rude. This annoyed and humbled Jack. To have enemies that were not enemies, was a new experience. He looked upon all as against him who were not his avowed friends. But here were two boys who could not be friends, and, although he had deeply

injured them, he could not call them enemies. He wanted to do something to show that he was very sorry about the rooster; something to show that he was not bad, clear through. Bertie's quick temper flashed, and then went out.

"It looked very much like it, as I came up," he said, in a more gentle tone.

"Somebody's been a meddling," retorted Jack; "but 'twas not me."

"Who then?"

Jack pointed to the trap. The bait was gone! Yes, somebody had been meddling.

"I should like to know who," said Bertie.

Jack laughed.

"Follow them tracks, and may be you'll find him. It is easy getting out of your trap as well as in."

Bertie eagerly examined the tracks.

"Musquash," said Jack.

"You don't mean to say that there has really been one in the trap?"

"Been in and out again. He has had one good meal, perhaps he will come for another."

Bertie was so delighted at having caught something that at first he did not mind its getting away at all; but when he came to reflect, he was sorry to have lost such a prize. If he could only have carried it home in triumph, how Charley would have stared!

"If that was my trap," said Jack, "I'd fix it."

"What would you do?"

"Tinker that spring so that it wouldn't hold fire, you bet."

"I did not know it needed tinkering."

"It would puzzle a musquash to get out of *my* trap. I'd fix it so that it would go off if he touched it with a whisker."

"I don't know how," said Bertie.

Jack gladly offered his services. Here was a chance to make a small payment on account.

"If you would be so kind, and not mind my speaking cross just now."

"That's nothing," returned Jack, shortly. "Now if I can find anything to 'couter' with."

He searched his pockets and brought up a coil of wire, some string, a file, a pair of pincers, and so many different articles that Bertie laughingly inquired if he was a travelling tool-chest.

"Pockets is handy," said Jack, "if they ain't holey. Whenever I come across anything, I jest drops it in."

And so he did. Many things went into Jack's pockets that did not belong there.

"Now hand us the trap, and we will get ready for the musquash."

"Will he come again, do you think?"

"What's to hinder? He knows what good grub is as well as you do. He will be poking his nose in again as sure as you're born."

"I hope he will," said Bertie.

"Did you ever catch one?"

"No."

"Never skun one, I suppose?"

"Never."

"I have, heaps of all kinds. Sold 'em too. That's a neat trade."

"Selling them?"

"Skinning 'em."

"I expect it is," said Bertie.

CHAPTER VI.

A DEADLY SNARE FOR THE MUSK-RAT.

have been in the business, off and on," continued Jack, "ever since I was the size of a hop toad."



"It pays, doesn't it?"

"That depends. Sometimes it does, and then again it don't. It's accordin' to the critter. Mink, now, fetches a fancy price when you can catch 'em. They are a mighty scarce article now-a-days. But rabbits ain't worth shucks. It is a job to skin 'em, they are so tender; and they won't fetch nothing."

"How about musk-rats?"

"Got an eye to business, eh?"

"If I am lucky enough to catch one, I should like to sell the skin."

"Well, musquash pays if it is skun right."

"How is that? A skin is a skin, isn't it?"

"Yes; but a skin with the head on is one thing, and a skin with the head off is another, as you will find out if you ever try it on."

"I shouldn't think that would make any difference."

"It does a heap. A quarter is the most you can get without the head."

"And with it?"

"Fifty cents for a big one."

"Is that so?"

"Well, it is."

"I am very glad you told me," said Bertie.

"It is a little thing worth knowing," returned Jack. "Never caught a pole-cat, I take it."

"I never caught anything," said Bertie.

"Seen 'em?"

"I don't know that ever I did."

"Smelt 'em?"

Bertie confessed that he had no acquaintance whatever with the animal, but mentioned that once they found a skunk in Charley's chicken-house sucking eggs, and they killed it.

"Him's um," said Jack.

"Oh!"

"Didn't cook it, I suppose."

"Cook it!"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Eat, of course."

Bertie could not conceal his disgust.

"You needn't turn up your nose at *him*," continued Jack. "Good eating *he* is. Tender as a sucking pig, and tastes so nigh like I'd stump *you* to tell the difference."

Jack was going to say "tender as a chicken," but he remembered the calico and so avoided the use of the word.

"I am sure you are joking," declared Bertie.

"Not a bit of it," said Jack. "I wouldn't ask for a better dinner. The critter is like some other folks, not half so bad as you try to make him out. He has got a bad name, and that is the worst thing there is about him."

"Except his odor."

"That's not so bad either after you get used to it."

"Ugh!"

"Musquash is no better, if they do pay a good price for it."

"Do they?"

"They do. To make scent of for the ladies. One of them little bags will make gallons and gallons, they say. I know a man that buys all he can get. There you are! A heap better off than you was

before. I reckon that trap will hold a musquash next time it catches one."

"Thank you," said Bertie.

"And if the spring don't happen to kill him, just touch him on the head with a stone. A little tap will do it, for he is mighty tender about the head."

Bertie said "Thank you" again, and Jack helped him bait and set the trap, and this time a deadly snare was laid for the musk-rat. Bertie was late to breakfast. Charley looked up inquiringly as he walked in and took his seat at the table; but Bertie had not a word of explanation to offer. Charley had laughed at him so often that he meant to keep his own counsel till the game was sure; but he could not help showing in his face that something unusual had happened.

"Catch anything?" said Charley.

"No."

"Trap sprung?"

"No."

"Nothing in it, eh?"

"No."

"I thought so."

Bertie laughed as he considered how *very* empty the trap was.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I was thinking," said Bertie.

"Meet anybody up there?"

"One fellow."

"Who?"

"Jack Midnight."

"What was he doing?"

"Looking round."

"Give you any of his impudence?"

"No. He was very civil and obliging. He offered to fix the spring of my trap."

"You didn't let him?"

"I could not refuse without hurting his feelings, and I did not want to do that."

"I should, plump. My feelings are not seared over yet. I have not forgotten the calico."

"And he has not."

"Do you believe it?"

"I do, Charley. I think he feels awful cheap about it."

"I hope he does."

"I know he does."

"He didn't say so?"

"No; but he acted so."

"If he feels cheap I hope he will stay so and keep his distance."

Bertie hoped so too. He was very much obliged to Jack for helping him with the trap, but he did not care to be on familiar terms with him. He was not the right sort of boy for a companion. On the whole he was sorry to have met him at the spring.

"I hope I shall not fall in with him to-morrow morning," he said, half to himself, half to Charley.

"You won't if you stay at home."

"I shall not do that."

"You intend to follow up the trapping business then?"

"I do."

"If you meet Jack Midnight every morning?"

"Certainly."

"How long?"

"Till I catch something."

"If it takes all summer?"

"Yes."

"Well, you *are* a goose."

"You have told me that so often, I begin to believe it."

"I wouldn't take that early walk for nothing."

"No more would I. But if you felt sure of your game, you wouldn't mind the walk."

"No," said Charley.

"Well, I am sure."

"Whew!"

"I am as sure as I can be of anything that has not really happened."

"Ho, ho! That is very well put in. I wish I had as many dollars as I know you won't catch a musk-rat. I could buy the Baby Pitcher's canary to-morrow. Couldn't I, pet?"

Flora had come in, as she did every morning, to inquire about the musk-rat.

"Buy it to-day," said Flora.

"Couldn't buy it to-day for want of money."

"You must not think anything about the bird," said Bertie, "for Charley never will have any money."

"What a prospect!" said Charley.

"Not a very bright one for Flora, I must confess."

"She has my word, and that is as good as gold."

"Mustn't tell a story," said Flora. "If you don't have any money that will be a story."

"And if Bertie does not catch a musk-rat, that will be a story."

"Yes. He said he would."

"And I will. You believe that I will keep my word?"

"I do, and Dinah does."

"Do you believe in the musk-rat?"

"I do. Is he in the trap?"

"He was not in the trap this morning."

"May be there now."

"Yes, dear, he may be."

"And then again he mayn't," said Charley. "If I were in the Baby Pitcher's place I would give up looking for that animal. Her poor little black eyes will be all faded out."

"Won't either, Charley Waters. I am going home."

"Say good by, dear."

Flora would not say good by. She did not like Charley's manner. She wished to be treated with proper respect as she informed Dinah on the way home.

"Gemplemen don't talk so, and ladies don't. Gemplemen say 'Yes, I thank you,' and 'If you please.' And I do. Charley Waters don't. But you must not mind what he says. He don't know nothing. Bertie does."

CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING IN THE TRAP.

he next time Bertie went to the spring, he expected to find Jack awaiting him. No one was there, however; not even the musk-rat. The trap remained just as he left it, and the bait was undisturbed. He was glad not to meet Jack (who had been and gone); but he was not a little disappointed about the musk-rat. He began to cherish hard feelings towards it. It was too bad of him not to come into the trap and be caught, when such pains had been taken to receive him

properly. The trap was as inviting as trap could be. It said quite plainly, "Will you walk into my parlor?" and never dropped a word as to getting out again. What more could a musk-rat ask? He examined the tracks in the wet ground, but could not make out that any of them were fresh. He did not believe that anything had been near the trap during the night. It was quite provoking, for to-morrow would be Sunday. Of course he could not travel down to the spring on Sunday, and Monday was so far off! He declared that he could not wait till Monday. But there was no help for it. The hours were not at all disposed to humor his impatience. They moved along at their usual slow pace, and wore away minute by minute, as was their custom. But they brought Monday morning at last. He rose early, and set out in quite a hopeful mood; but as he walked, his spirits began to flag. The nearer he got to the spring, the less hope he had. He was trying to prepare himself for the very worst that could happen—a trap with nothing in it—when somebody called "Hooray!" It was Jack, who had been waiting almost an hour. When he saw Bertie coming, he danced and threw his arms about in a manner wonderful to behold. Bertie started into a run, for he inferred from Jack's antics that something unusual had happened.



What have you got to say to that critter? [p. 78.](#)

"Hooray!" cried Jack again, as Bertie came up, panting and blowing equal to Jack himself, who always breathed as if he had been running.

"What have you got to say to *that* critter?"

Bertie could hardly believe his eyes, for they rested on the biggest musk-rat he had ever seen. It was a beauty, too! Such dark fur! And such a length of smooth, hairless tail! Bertie was delighted; and though the musk-rat was a large one, his eyes magnified it to such a degree that it looked three times as large as it really was.

"That is a sight worth looking at, ain't it now?"

"It is a buster!" said Bertie.

"It is the biggest fellow that has been trapped this season. You won't catch nary 'nother like *him*. He is a whopper!"

"And it is alive, too!"

"Half and half. He is hurt that bad, it won't take much to finish him. He would show fight if he wasn't dead beat. Shall I pop him over?"

"I don't want to kill him," said Bertie.

"Have you had a fair squint at him?"

"Yes."

"I won't be long settling of his hash."

Jack tapped him on the head with a stone, and after a few shivers the animal was still.

"That killed him so sudden he didn't know what was a hurting of him."

"Why did he shiver then?"

"They always do that. They always wiggle when the heart's a-beating. They are dead all the same, though. Now you want to take his hide off."

"Not yet," said Bertie, quickly.

"Better be a doing of it while he is warm."

"I must show him up first."

As he raised the musk-rat tenderly by the long, bare tail, his heart swelled in his breast. What would Charley say to musk-rat catching now? He himself had never dreamed of luck like this, and Charley would be astounded. He was absently moving off, when Jack called:

"Here, you young trapper! Don't be a-dodging off without making ready for more of the same family!"

"I shall not set the trap again," said Bertie.

"What's the reason?"

"It is a long walk up here, and I am satisfied with my game," he added, proudly.

"Do you mind lending of it to a feller?"

"Certainly not. You can keep it as long as you wish."

"That is clever, now. I'll set it in the same place, jest for luck. I say, don't you want some help about skinning the critter?"

Bertie thought he could manage it alone.

"It will be an awkward job, if you never tried it."

"I suppose it will," said Bertie.

"And you may spile the head. I don't mind showing of you how it's done."

Bertie thanked Jack, but declined to trouble him. The fact was, he was in a hurry to get home with his prize. He could not stop to talk about anything, for Charley had not seen it. Didn't he open his black eyes when he saw what Bertie had brought?

And didn't Bertie feel proud and happy? But he did not make much ado about his good fortune, as Charley would have done under similar circumstances. He allowed the game to speak for itself. At first Charley was inclined to doubt that it was caught in Bertie's trap; but Bertie asked—with some vanity, we confess—if he could mention any boy who would be likely to give up an animal like that, and Charley could not.

Everybody came out to examine Bertie's prize, and everybody said it was a beauty. Flora clapped her hands, for now she was to have all the 'fumery she wanted. It lay at full length on the piazza, until it had been duly admired by every one on the premises, and then it was carried over to Grandma's.

"Bless me!" exclaimed the old lady, as the children rushed in and laid the musk-rat at her feet.

"Bless me! Open that window, Amy dear. I never can breathe with a creetur like that in the house. Take it right out, dears."

"But we want you to look at it, Grandma. Bertie caught it."

"In the trap," added Flora.

She patted Bertie on the head, and said he was a dear boy, but she should stifle if they did not carry the creetur out. So to please Grandma they carried it out and laid it on the door-stone. She could look at it from the open window with a handkerchief at her nose.

"Ain't it a stunner?" said Charley.

"It is a proper large one," said Grandma. "It makes me think of your father, Amy, dear, when he was a boy. He was always fetching home some sort of a creetur. La! how natural it does seem. I remember once he took to killing black cats. He fetched home as many as twenty altogether, and their skins, stretched out to dry on the side of the barn, stared me in the face every time I went into the yard. How this creetur does carry a body back, to be sure."

"This fellow wears a pretty jacket," said Charley. "I wish we knew the easiest way of getting it off. Do you know, Grandma?"

"La, child, I never was no hand for such doings."

"What a question," said Amy. "Of course Grandma does not know."

"We had better commence operations, if we expect to get through before school time," said Bertie. "That is, if Grandma has looked at him long enough. Have you, Grandma?"

"Bless the child!" said Grandma, who had endured the creature simply to please her darlings. "Never mind staying longer on my account. But drop in as you go to school, and get your luncheon."

"Tarts?" queried Bertie.

But Grandma smiled and closed the window, to shut out, if possible, the stifling odor of musk.

"I almost wish I had taken up with Jack's offer," Bertie said to Charley, as they carried the muskrat home.

"What was that?"

"He wanted to skin the fellow for me."

"I can boss that job," said Charley.

"And so can I?"

That was a part both understood, and it was the only part.

CHAPTER VIII

JACK PULLS OFF THE WARM JACKET.



Bertie sharpened his knife and prepared to commence operations, Charley, Amy and Flora looking on.

"You begin on the inside of the hind leg," said Charley.

"Oh, I know where to begin and where to leave off; but the thing is to do it neatly, without making a botch. Here goes."

Bertie flourished his knife and began to cut. He made a long slit on the inside of one hind leg.

"Treat them both alike," said Charley.

Flora, who had been watching the operation, suddenly cried out:

"Take your arms down and go away. You are a bad boy. Charley Waters says so; and I do."

Bertie turned quickly to see what, was the matter; and there stood Jack, with folded arms, resting upon the fence. He tried to call Flora off; but she flew at Jack with all the fury of a little terrier, her light curls flying and her dark eyes flashing.

"You are a bad boy, and you must go away. You cut his head off and his feet. I looked under the table. He hadn't any clothes on. Had drumsticks on. Couldn't walk with drumsticks on. Bad boy!"

Here was a revelation that made Jack feel very small indeed. He came as near blushing as was possible. The red blood actually showed through his dark, grimy skin. Bertie was sorry for him. He hastened to open the gate and bid him come in, a movement that astonished Flora. She had not another word to say. When the boy that killed the calico-rooster was invited to walk in at the gate, as if nothing had happened, she was struck dumb.

"You were very good to look in upon us," said Bertie, kindly, trying to make Jack comfortable. "Walk right along. You are in the nick of time; we had only just started."

Jack was completely taken aback by Flora's reception, for he was sure now that the fate of the calico was well known. There had been a pleasant doubt in his mind before. He had always said to himself, "They can't prove nothing." He hung his head in an awkward way, and blamed himself for getting into a scrape.

"I thought I'd peek in and see how you were getting along," he answered, sheepishly; "and now I am here, I may as well be a-lending a hand. Give us yer knife."

"I had barely got his stockings off," said Bertie, passing the knife. Jack felt the edge and then examined Bertie's work.

"Pooty well done to begin with, I call it."

"Do you, though?"

"For a green-horn, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know."

Jack began where Bertie left off, and he worked so skilfully that in a few minutes legs and arms were free, and the warm jacket was turned and pulled over the animal's head.

"He isn't quite so much of a beauty, come to peel him," said Jack.

"He is frightful!" declared Amy. "What a net-work of blue veins! They make me shudder."

"He looks like a map, with rivers running all over him," said Charley.

"And how he shines. Ugh!"

Bertie held up the empty skin.

"He is as much beholden to dress as anybody that ever I saw, and he wears the best of cloth too. Custom made, and no danger of a misfit. None of your slop work about *that* garment!"

"I hope you don't call that a garment," said Amy.

"It is a wardrobe in itself, hat and boots included. He did not carry a 'Saratoga' when he went journeying."

"Not much," said Charley.

"What is Jack doing now?"

He was detaching the little sacks that hold the musk, and he passed them to Bertie, with the remark that they were worth as much as the critter's hide.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Charley, examining them curiously.

"Flora ought to be here. I suppose the 'fumery' belongs to her."

"To the little miss, is it?"

"Yes."

"There is scent enough in one of them bags," said Jack, "to drive the whole family out of the house."

Bertie thought if that was the case, one would be better for Flora than two; so he put one aside and gave the other to Jack, who carefully wrapped it in paper and dropped it into his roomy pocket. The skin was then stretched on a board to dry, and, after receiving hearty thanks for his timely assistance, Jack left the garden, feeling much better satisfied with himself than when he entered it. He felt that he had shown his good will, and that the score against him was partially rubbed out. And so it was. Charley and Bertie were more kindly disposed towards him than they had ever expected to be, and they concluded that he was not such a very bad boy, after all.

"I believe there is good in every one," said Bertie, "if you can only get at it."

"Of course there is," said Amy, quickly. "Have you just found that out?"

"I admit that I have always looked upon Jack as bad clear through."

"Same here," confessed Charley.

"Nobody is," declared Amy, with emphasis.

"It takes these girls to stand up for a fellow, doesn't it?"

"That's so, Charley. Girls in general, and our Amy in particular."

"She always did side with Jack; but she was down on me when the poor calico turned over her garden."

"Why, Charley!"

"It is a fact. I leave it to Bert."

"Don't ask me," said Bertie.

"You flared up and were truly eloquent on the subject."

"I never was eloquent in my life."

"And you never flared up?"

"I did not say that. But whatever I may be, I am not a genius of any sort, not even a poet."

"There's a sly dab at you, Charley."

"I have not made any poetry lately," said Charley, dubiously.

"Perhaps the fire in your soul has gone out," said Bertie. "Can't you kindle it up again?"

"I am out of kindlings at present. Can I borrow of you, Amy?"

"It wouldn't be the first time," observed Amy, with a merry twinkle in her eye.

"Stabbed again!" declared Bertie, who knew that Charley was in the habit of borrowing.

Amy's purse being well fed, was always fat, and Charley's was ever lean and hungry. Amy was obliging, and Charley not backward in asking favors, so the lean and hungry purse often brought its pressing needs to the notice of its rich relation.

"Amy is a trump!" said Charley, penitently, "and I take it all back. I am as good a friend to Jack as she is, but I can't exactly swallow the rooster. He sticks in my throat yet."

"That will wear away in time," said Bertie.

"If the rooster troubles you, what do you think of Jack? He has a bigger lump in his throat than you have, and one that will not go down in a hurry, I'll warrant."

"And I pity him," added Amy. "He stole the poor rooster and murdered him in cold blood, but he is sorry for it, and would bring him to life again if he could. But he cannot do that. He must be haunted forever by its ghost instead."

"Ghost of a rooster!" murmured Charley, in an undertone. But Amy heard it.

"Ghost of an evil action," she said, looking at Charley, severely. "He would be rather a respectable boy, if he was not a Midnight. You cannot expect much of a born Midnight."

"No," said Charley.

It was agreed that to be a born Midnight was a serious misfortune, which might happen to anybody. It did happen to poor Jack, and so they pitied him.

CHAPTER IX.

FLORA AN EXILE.



Flora did not wait to receive her perfumery. When Jack appeared on the field she left it, to express her views to Dinah on the subject of bad boys; and as Dinah had not the power of expressing her sentiments in return, she was not disturbed by the spirit of contradiction.

When she got tired of talking to Dinah, she walked over to state her grievance to Grandma, and to be on hand when the tarts were distributed. Flora was not old enough to go to school. Her troubles in that direction had not yet begun, but lunch with her was a very important matter, and she never failed to be present when it was passed round. Grandma always had something good ready for the children.

"The dear things get so hungry studying," she said. When she was young, three months schooling in the winter was enough for any one.

It was early in the day for lunch, (breakfast was a little more than an hour old), but Flora could not be put off. She did not possess the virtue of patience. So when the children happened in as they were going to school, she stood at the window eating her way through an enormous tart, which had been made expressly for her: but why the Baby Pitcher should have the largest tart, only Grandma could tell. The children came in bringing the full odor of musk in their clothes and in their hair, and Bertie had the little bag in his pocket. Grandma gasped and opened all the windows, for she could not breathe the stifling air.

"Bless the dear things!" she exclaimed. "How they do smell, to be sure!"

"Smells good!" said Flora, holding out her hand for the "fumery."

Bertie gave it to her, and as Grandma could not bear it in the house, she was obliged to take it out of doors.

"The air is better now, isn't it, Grandma?" said Bertie, feelingly.

It was not much better, though Grandma did not say so. The small particles were floating about, and she was inhaling them with every breath. She passed round the tarts as speedily as possible, and then the Little Pitchers were in a hurry to be off. But they did not carry all the musk away; they left enough to pervade Grandma's house for several days. But that was only a beginning. Everybody grew tired of the odor before the skin of the musk-rat was carried away and sold. There was musk everywhere, in doors and out; and wherever Flora was, the perfume was sickening. But she would not give it up. She carried the little sack, which had become dry and hard, in the pocket of her dress from morning until night, and mamma waited in vain for her to weary of it. At last it was banished from the house. Mamma decided that it could not longer be endured. Flora hid it somewhere in the garden, (the place was known only to herself and Dinah,) and every day enjoyed it as best she could, in the open air and alone. Even Charley and Bertie were tired of musk, and they tried first to coax and then to bribe Flora, without success. Finally they laughed at her, and called her a little cosset.

"I ain't that," she said to Charley, who gave her the name. She always doubted Charley. "I ain't anything but a little girl."

"And a cosset."

"No."

"You are turned out to grass, any how."

"Am I, Bertie?"

"Not exactly. We will play you are an exile."

"Well."

"She had no clear idea of an exile, nor of a cosset; but she had faith in Bertie, and she felt that an exile must be something very nice."

"You are an exile," said Charley, "because you cannot go into Grandma's house."

"Am I, Bertie?"

"Yes, dear."

It was true. She could not go into Grandma's house. She had to choose between Grandma and the perfumery. But she could stay out on the door-stone, as the musk-rat had done; and when Grandma talked to her from the window, she was not obliged to hold a handkerchief to her nose, as she did when the musk-rat was there. She well knew how to make amends to the dear child for her cruelty in keeping her out of doors; and such tempting sweetmeats passed through the window, and such wonderful shapes of gingerbread, that Flora was very happy in her banishment. The little exile was not wholly deprived of society, for it happened, fortunately, that the black baby had no sense of smell. Whether she had lost it or was born without it, Flora never knew; but she did not possess it, and so was not annoyed by the odor that troubled everybody else. It was not long before she was as highly perfumed as her mistress, and could not be tolerated in the house even for a nap. The black baby was in disgrace, and she was knocked about so roughly that her complexion was spoiled and her fine figure very much injured. Flora had serious thoughts of sending her to be repaired; but she wondered how she got so many bumps. She did not know that everybody took the liberty of tossing her out whenever she was found in doors. It was a common thing to come upon her in unexpected places. Sometimes Flora met her at the foot of the steps, sometimes at the bottom of the garden; and once, after a long search, she was discovered hanging from the bough of a tree, with arms extended as if pleading for help. Flora could not reach her, and she was brought down from her perilous position by Charley and a ladder.

"I don't blame her for trying to hang herself," said Charley, who saw the housemaid when she threw her out of an upper window, "and I hope she will have better luck next time."

"Didn't hang herself," replied Flora.

"Wanted to fly."

"Like a bird."

"She did."

"Thought she was a blackbird, may be."

"Yes," said Flora, clapping her hands and laughing, "thought she was."

"She was flying away from the musk."

"No!"

"I believe she was," said Charley, solemnly, "and if you take your eyes off I am afraid you will lose her. You must watch her closely."

"I will."

Flora held the baby tightly in her arms, to prevent her soaring out of sight.

"Can't fly now, Charley Waters."

"No, but you must hold on."

Flora held on tighter than ever.

"And I would not let her go into the house any more," continued Charley. "It does not agree with her. She cannot stay in the house."

"Keep her in the garden."

"I would."

"In the arbor?"

"Yes," said Charley, after pausing to weigh the matter, "I would keep her in the arbor."

So Dinah was forced to give up her old quarters in the house for a new home in the arbor, and Flora informed her why the change was made. For a time she was closely watched, but as she did not again attempt to fly away, Flora concluded she was contented in her new situation, and, after a while, ventured to carry her indoors occasionally. But Charley was right. Dinah could not stay in the house. She was sure to be tossed out by somebody, though Flora did not know that. She thought the black baby was pining for the outer air.

CHAPTER X.

FLORA GOES TO RIDE IN THE LITTLE BLUE CART.



Flora began to grow tired of staying so much alone, but she was not ready to give up the "fumery," so she had to continue an exile. Dinah was no longer good company, for she had lost many of her faculties, and one eye. She glanced at Flora, with the one that was left, in a very singular manner. Perhaps she wanted to explain to her mistress that somebody had taken a fancy to the blue button, but you must remember she could not talk. She could only stare in a very startling way. Flora did not like it at all, and at Amy's suggestion tied a bandage round her head, which completely hid the defect, and softened the expression of the blue button remaining. She was supposed to be sweetly sleeping in the library this pleasant afternoon. She was really lying in a heap on the kitchen door step, and Flora, for lack of something better to do was hanging lazily on the big gate, gazing down the road. She was in that critical condition when mischief "takes."

She had climbed the gate and was hanging there, ready to be swayed by the first wind that blew, whether fair or foul. It happened to be a foul wind, and it came in the form of a queer little cart drawn by a limping horse moving slowly up the road. The body of the cart was a square box, and it was painted blue. The wheels were red. The old horse had been gray in his palmy days; he was now a dingy white. Flora liked him because he looked sober, and because he jumped so high when he walked; and when the cart got near enough for her to see its bright colors, she concluded to take a ride. So she got down, drew the bolt and opened the big gate (thereby breaking one of mamma's rules), and then she went out and waited at the side of the road for her carriage. The limping horse jumped so high at every step that he did not get over the ground very fast, and Flora had some time to wait. Long enough to realize that she was about to do a very wrong thing, and grieve mamma. But she did not once think of that; her head was turned by the little blue cart, and the old white horse. When the driver came within speaking distance, she nodded as a signal for him to stop, and he, thinking the child had business with him said "Whoa!" and the horse stopped.

"Anything in my line to-day, little girl?"

"Yes," said Flora. "I should like—"

"Any soap grease, old boots—iron, bottles, rags, newspapers? Carry the best of soap, and pay cash on the nail. Eight cents for white, three for colored."

"To take a ride," said Flora, somewhat bewildered, but finishing her sentence.

"Hey?"

"If you please, I should like to take a ride."

"Not with me?"

"I should."

"Not in this cart?"

"I think it is a very pretty cart, and I like your horse very much."

"You do, eh?"

"Yes," said Flora.

"And I don't. That's the odds. He is rayther antiquated even for my business. The crows will have a bone or two to pick with him one of these days. Think they won't?"



If you please, I should like to take a ride? [p. 109.](#)

"If you please I should like to take a ride," said Flora, for the third time.

"Polly want a cracker?"

Flora did not understand what the driver meant by that, so she again repeated her request, at which he laughed heartily and said,—

"Polly does want a cracker."

"Then why don't you give it to her?" queried Flora.

"Would you?"

"I would."

"You are particular who you ride with, I reckon."

"I am."

"You pick and choose your company, you do."

"I do."

"Well, then, scramble up. The seat is rayther narrow, but we can stow close."

"That is not polite. Gemplemen don't do that way."

"They don't, eh?"

"No. They get down and help ladies up."

"You don't expect me to get down!"

"I do."

"What! when I have been bobbing round all day?"

"Yes!" said Flora.

"Can't do it. I've got the rheumatiz."

"My Grandma has that,—in her back."

"She does, eh?"

Flora nodded.

"Well, you may give my respects to the old lady, when you see her, and tell her I have got it too."

"I will. Want to go to ride, now."

"And you won't scramble up?"

"Want you to get down."

The driver laughed, but held out his hand, and bade her take a good hold. The hand was very red,

and it was greasy; but Flora did not mind that. She grasped it firmly, and was lifted to the narrow seat, and then the lame horse started into a jog. Beside being narrow, the seat was so short that Flora had to sit very close to the greasy driver, and her pretty blue dress was not improved by contact with his frock, which was blue, also.

"Papa's horse does not dance that way," she said, regretfully.

"It isn't every horse that can be trained to that sort of thing," returned the driver, gravely. "Mine, now, is one out of a thousand. How will your pa swap?"

"I wish he would," she answered earnestly, for the first time looking her companion full in the face. "Why!" she exclaimed, joyfully, "It is you, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes! it's me. Have you just found that out?"

"I thought you was a stranger."

"You did, eh!"

"I did."

"I knew you was a stranger all the time."

"But I ain't."

"No?"

"No. I am Flora Lee."

"And who am I?"

"You are Mr. Podge."

"Podge?"

"You are."

"Not if I know myself."

"You are, too, Mr. Hodge Podge. That's what you told me. Don't you remember your own name?"

He remembered all about it now, and he laughed so heartily at the recollection, that he dropped the reins, and had to get down to pick them up, which pleased Flora very much. When the reins dropped, the limping horse stood still.

"I didn't know it was you, Miss Fiddle-de-dee," he said, as he mounted to his seat, and urged him into a jog again.

"How is Deacon Brown?"

"He is pretty well, I thank you. My name is Flora Lee."

"And how are all the Sunday children?"

"Oh! they are pretty well, I thank you too. And I am; and Dinah is. She is asleep."

"You have had your face washed since I saw you last. That is the reason I didn't know you. I never saw you with a clean face before."

"Hands, too," said Flora, holding out one plump hand. She was holding on with the other.

"How we are slicked up!" he exclaimed, "and it isn't Sunday, either!"

CHAPTER XI.

SHE SAYS GOOD-BY TO THE SOAP MAN.



he readers of the Little Pitcher stories will recognize this young man. Flora met him one day in a crowd around a peddler's wagon, drawn thither by a poor blind kitten that had been brought to light from the depths of the peddler's rag-bag. She had not forgotten him, but he never would have thought of her again, if she had not addressed him by the odd name he had given her as his own. That refreshed his memory, and he laughed to think that she really believed him when he told her his name was Hodge Podge.

As the little cart was jerked along over the rough ground, Flora became very chatty. She did not in the least mind being jolted, and she was not afraid of falling from the seat for she held fast to the driver's greasy frock. The blue box behind her was full of soap grease, but the cover was down, and the baskets that hung upon the iron hooks that bristled from all sides, were filled with bottles and scraps of various kinds, that made a pleasant jingle as they were jostled against each other by the motion of the cart. She had never enjoyed a ride so

much. Her father's easy carriage, with cushioned seat and elastic springs, could not be compared to the soap man's little box on red wheels. Besides, papa's horse could not dance, he had never learned how; and he ran so fast that she could not see the flowers and the pretty sights as they rode along. She was not at all concerned as to how the ride would end, and where she was going she had not the slightest idea. So the old horse jogged along, carrying her farther and farther from home every minute, and she chatted sociably with Mr. Podge, and never felt so happy in her life.

The soap man was going home. He felt good-natured and comfortable, for he had had a prosperous day. It was only four o'clock, but his little cart was well loaded, and his last call had been made. And that was the reason he did not stop at any of the houses in the village. If he had, somebody would have recognized Flora. And they passed a very few persons on the road, but not one who knew that the little girl in the blue dress did not belong to the man in the blue frock. When he thought Flora had rode far enough, he stopped the cart and told her to "hop down." But she was not ready to hop down; she was just beginning to enjoy the ride.

"You won't know the way back," he said, warningly.

"I shall," said Flora.

"And if you ride any farther, I may not let you go home at all. You don't know where you are now."

"I do. Going to take a ride."

"It will be dark by-and-by."

"Not dark now."

"And it is going to rain."

"Make the horse jump."

The old horse started off once more, and this time a little faster. He seemed to know that he was heading towards home. The driver was really troubled about Flora, for he knew the little girl had rode far enough. He was willing to indulge her by carrying her a little way but he wanted her to get down when he said the word. He tried to frighten her by saying he should not stop the horse again.

"Don't want to stop," she answered, taking the musk from her pocket and holding it to his nose. "Smell?"

He started back and made a wry face.

"What is that?" he asked.

"My 'fumery."

"Your fumery."

"It is. Bertie caught it in a trap."

"*That's* what I have been smelling all along."

"Yes," said Flora.

"I thought there was a musquash somewhere near."

"It is only me."

She took a prolonged sniff, and restored the precious perfume to her pocket.

"Mamma don't like it, and Grandma don't. I do. And Dinah does. And you do."

"Not much, I don't."

"Smells good?"

"Good and strong, yes. Now little musquash, farewell."

"No," said Flora.

"Look here, miss. Won't you catch it for running away?"

"Why, Mr. Podge! What a funny man! Ain't running away. Taking a ride. Runned away once. To Deacon Brown. Had dinner and a nap."

"Didn't you tell me you was one of the Sunday children?"

"I did."

"Don't believe it."

Flora's eyes flashed. Not believe that she was one of the Sunday children!

"I don't," he repeated solemnly. "They know how to behave. Sunday children don't run away, they don't, and good girls mind their mother."

"I do."

"A tough one to mind you are."

"Do, too, Mr. Podge. Want to go home now."

"You can't stop the horse."

"I can. Whoa!"

But he did not stop, for his master slyly urged him on. She was in earnest now: she really wanted to go home, and she called "Whoa!" again, but the old horse still jogged on.

"I told you so," said the driver.

"Oh, Mr. Horse!" she cried in alarm. "Won't you please to stop. I want to get out. Just one minute, dear Mr. Horse, if you please."

This appeal seemed to touch his feelings, and, to her great delight, he stopped.

"He knows what politeness is, he does," said the driver. "Now look sharp before you get down, and see if you ever were in this place before."

Flora did as she was bid, and she saw orchards white with blossoms, a rustic bridge, a few scattering houses; but not one familiar object. They had passed out of the village, and the country was strange to her. In vain she looked for papa's house, or Grandma's; they were nowhere to be seen.

"Well, Miss Fiddle-de-dee?"

Flora sighed heavily.

"You are lost, eh?"

"Can't see papa's house. Too bad!"

"I thought so."

He took up the reins, and the poor tired horse turned about unwillingly. He did not want to go back, and would not believe his master was in earnest till he felt a sharp tingle from the whip.

"Don't want to ride any more," said Flora, wearily; "want to get out."

"Getting scared, eh?"

"Flora is tired."

She was beginning to realize her situation, and felt in a hurry to see home again.

"I shan't dump you here, miss," said the man, "so you may as well set still a while longer. If you are lost, likely as not somebody will blame me. I will carry you back a piece, and when you think you know the road I will put you down. Lean your head against my arm if you are tired."

Flora would not do that for she suddenly discovered that the sleeve was greasy, and she moved as far away from it as the narrow seat would permit. But she did not dare let go for the cart jolted worse than ever. The man drove slowly along, and she anxiously scanned the houses as they passed. Once or twice he stopped, but Flora could not tell where she was, and not till they got into the village did the surroundings look familiar. Then she exclaimed—

"Goody! I know now."

"You are sure?"

"I am. Go that way," pointing in the right direction.

"Well, then, hop down; and when you beg a ride again, be sure you know the driver before you get in. Do you hear?"

"I do. Good-by, Mr. Podge."

CHAPTER XII.

AND LOSES HER WAY.

Flora jumped down and ran away without thanking the soap man for the ride, or for his kindness in bringing her so far on her journey home. She was glad to get away from the cart and the limping horse, and the poor old horse was glad too. You ought to have seen him when his head was turned the other way again. He trotted along so briskly with the little blue cart, that anybody could have told he was running away from Flora. Perhaps his supper was waiting for him, as Flora's was for her, and he was in a hurry to eat it. They went so fast in opposite directions that in a few minutes they were out of sight of each other.

Flora was now glad to walk. She had been so long cramped upon the narrow seat, that it was a pleasure to stretch her limbs and skip about; or would have been, only she was so hungry. It is dreadful to be hungry when there is nothing good to eat in your pocket. There was nothing good to eat in Flora's pocket. She turned it wrong side out, hoping to find a few crumbs in the corners, but there was not one; and then she remembered that it was her blue dress which had been worn but a few days; not long enough to gather woolly crumbs.



"Too bad!" she murmured, and the tears came into her eyes, for she was now more hungry than before. And at that moment a bowl of nice bread and milk was on the table waiting for her; but between her and it was a long, weary walk. It would not have seemed far to Charley or Bertie, and it really was only a mile, but a mile is a long journey for little tired feet, and Flora was hungry too. She could not see very well as she put the things back into her pocket, the tears blinded her. Perhaps that was the reason she left something out. And what do you suppose it was? She walked away and left her precious "fumery" lying on the ground. Of course she did not know it, and she felt dreadfully about it afterwards, but she never could tell where she lost it.

While she was putting the things back, she felt some spatters on her head. She looked up, and there was such a black cloud overhead. It was true, then, what the driver of the blue cart had said. The rain was coming, and it seemed to be growing dark, too. What if the rain and darkness should both overtake her before she got home? She must make haste now. She hurried on as fast as her little feet would carry her. She was running away from the rain and the night. She did not think of applying at any of the houses for shelter, or of asking for food; she had but one wish, to get home to dear mamma. By-and-by the tired feet began to flag, but she felt no more spatters, and she was glad that she had left the shower behind. It was lighter, too; she could run faster than the night. As there was to be no rain, she concluded to rest if she came to a nice place, and soon she came to a very nice place just off the road, which looked so inviting that she sat down and leaned her head against the smooth, grassy mound. It was sheltered by fine old trees, and the new grass and the fresh earth smelt sweet, as she laid her wet cheek against the cool pillow, that she could not make up her mind to leave it. She said to herself that she would rest one little minute, but when the little minute was gone, she had forgotten the night was following so fast upon her footsteps. She lay drowsily watching the shining bugs and creeping things that shared her green pillow, and thought how happy she should feel if it were not for being so very hungry. And then she was no longer hungry, for sleep stole upon her unawares, and no one in passing noticed the curly-haired child lying on the damp ground, with tears upon her cheek, and the night that was creeping on so surely, overtook her and passed by, dropping his mantle of darkness upon her as she lay asleep. And the shower came next, and tried to wake her by sprinkling her with gentle drops. It said quite plainly, "The night has come, and the rain. Hurry, little one!" But Flora did not wake till the north wind shook her roughly, asking, in gruff tones, "What are you doing here?" Then she sat up, rubbed her eyes, and tried to collect her scattered ideas. Why was the wind shaking her so roughly? And what made her pillow cold and wet? She thought she was at home in her own bed, and she called aloud, "mamma!" But there was no mamma to answer. Then she felt the raindrops upon her face, and heard them pattering on the leaves of the big trees, and the wind whistled among the branches, and shook them as it had shaken her, making them cry out with pain, and she remembered all at once that she had laid down for one little minute to rest, but what made it so dark and cold she did not know.

She was certain that she had left the night far behind; yet here it was, and the rain. Her pretty blue dress was wet through, and the dampness had taken the life out of her garden hat, so that its broad rim flapped about her face in a very uncomfortable way. Little rivulets trickled down from it upon her neck and shoulders, and her wet curls clung closely; but they could not keep her warm. She got up and tried to find the road. She had wandered from it in search of a resting place, and now it was lost. She could not find it anywhere. She was afraid to venture far from the grassy mound, yet the road was but a short distance away. A few steps more, and she would have seen friendly lights glancing from two or three houses; but the darkness confused her, and sleep had benumbed her senses. Oh, if some one would come and carry her to mamma! It was so dreadful to be alone in the night. It was worse than hunger and cold. If she only had Dinah! Dinah would be sorry. Poor Dinah! She was in as bad a plight as her mistress. No one had taken her from the door-step where she was lying in a heap, soaked through and through by the rain. All her faculties were gone now, all her members disordered. There was nothing about her worth preserving but the one glass eye. Flora happily was spared this knowledge, and the very thought of the black baby was a comfort. Suddenly, something cold touched her hand and startled her. It was the nose of a large dog. She was not at all frightened when the great creature looked up at her and inquired what the trouble was. She was overjoyed at finding something to speak to. She clasped her arms around his neck and kissed him twice on the forehead, and he was much pleased with the reception. He kissed her many times, and wagged his tail with vigor. He was telling her that he was very sorry to find such a nice little girl out so late; but that he knew she was a nice little girl, and he should like the pleasure of seeing her home. And Flora understood him perfectly. She was no longer alone. She held the dog's shaggy head close to the bosom of her wet dress and told him she was lost, and that he was a splendid old fellow to poke his nose into her hand, and that if he would show her the way to mamma's house he should have as many bones as he could eat. And the bones made her think of her own bowl of bread and milk, waiting on the table at home. Was it waiting there now, or had somebody carried it away, thinking she would never need it? She sighed, and patted her friend's cold nose, and whispered that she was very hungry. He understood all about that, too. Many a time he had gone to bed without any

supper; but he said nothing to Flora of his own sufferings. He licked her hand in silent sympathy.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHARLEY SWALLOWS THE ROOSTER.



They went out into the road together, Flora clinging closely to the dog's shaggy coat and talking pleasantly as they trotted along, side by side.

"Do you live somewhere? I do. When I get there. Don't know the way. You do, nice doggy. I like you. Are you all wet? I am. And cold? I am too. Musn't cry if you are wet. I don't, and good dogs don't. Get home pretty soon."

When she saw houses and the lights shining, she was rejoiced, for now she would have supper, dry clothes and a warm bed. She fell on her new friend's neck and embraced him again; but for him, she would not have found the road. She might have wandered about all night in the cold and rain. The dog started off with a purpose. There was no doubt in his mind as to the best course. Finding a brisk trot unsuited to Flora's weak condition, he toned down and trudged along steadily at a moderate pace till he reached a shabby dwelling, with ricketty steps in front, that creaked as he went up, and an old door that shook when he pressed his nose against it. There was one small window through which the light of the fire was dancing, and it looked very pleasant to Flora. The dog gave a short, quick bark, and a woman appeared at the window; but no one opened the door. Flora saw the woman very plainly, but she could not see Flora. The dog waited patiently a moment, and then barked again, at the same time scratching upon the door with his big paw. It opened this time, and a sharp voice said: "Come in."

Doggy simply looked in and wagged his tail.

"Well, then, stay out."

The door was about to close when another voice said, "Old woman, the brute is a-telling of us something. Can't you sense nothing?" and Flora clambered up the steps as well as she could with her wet clothes hanging about her, and went in with her new friend, who introduced her as a young lady in distress he had taken the liberty to bring home.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the woman Flora had seen at the window. "Did you rain down?"

"I did," said Flora.

"And who do you belong to anyhow?"

"Belong to mamma, and I want to go home, if you please."

"Jack?"

"What is it, old woman?"

"I can't make it out. Come here."

Jack, who was in the pantry eating his supper, came in with his mouth full. Flora knew him at once. It was Jack Midnight; but he did not recognize her till she cried, "Oh, I am so glad!"

"Well, if it ain't the little miss!" said Jack. "Whatever have you been a-doing?"

"What little miss?" queried the woman.

"Mr. Lee's little miss. She belongs to the white cottage."

"You don't say!"

"Appears like quality folks, don't she?"

"Set right up and dry yourself off a bit," said the woman, bustling about to make Flora comfortable; "you are as wet as a drowned rat. Have you had your supper?"

"No," said Flora. "Want to go now."

"Take a bite first," said Jack, offering a piece of his bread and butter.

But Flora would not eat, and she would not sit by the fire; she stood with her arms round the dog's neck, and waited for Jack to carry her to mamma. When she refused the bread, Jack remembered that Towzer was hungry and gave it to him; but it was a very light meal for Towzer, and Flora whispered to him that he should have a whole supper when she got to mamma: and her friend wagged his tail as if he should enjoy that very much. When Jack got ready to go, the dog was ready too. Jack took the poor child in his arms, and Towzer trotted by his side. There was quite a pool of water where Flora had been standing, which had dripped from her wet clothes.

"Well!" said Jack. "If you ain't a sippy bundle! Where *have* you been?"

"Been to ride," said Flora. "In a blue cart with Mr. Podge."

"Run away?"

"No. Got lost."

"And Towzer found you."

"He did."

She reached over and patted Towzer's cold nose.

"He is a good dog. I like him."

Then out of gratitude to Jack, who was carrying her in his arms, she added, "I like you too."

"You can sing more than one tune, can't you?" said Jack, laughing. "Which do you like most now, me or Towzer?"

"Towzer, a little bit; because he *is* a dog, you know, and you are a boy."

"A bad boy."

"Not a bad boy."

Flora had suddenly changed her mind; and when Jack opened the big gate and she had found her dear old home once more, she actually kissed his grimy face and said she should "member him long as she lived."

What a commotion he created by walking in, with Flora clinging to his neck! Charley was the first to cry out, "There she is!" and everybody flocked to hear all about it. But Flora crept into mamma's lap and had not a word to say, and all that Jack knew was told in a few words.

"My dog picked her up somewhere and fetched her home," and then Flora asked for Towzer, who had been shut out, and Charley went out and invited him in. Inquiries had been made in all directions; but no one could give any clue to Flora, and papa had gone to the town crier with a "Lost" notice, describing the little girl and the dress she wore when she left her home. Bertie was sent after him with all despatch, and Amy ran over to relieve the anxious heart of Grandma. The little pet was found, and she had been guided to a place of safety by Jack Midnight's dog! They could not praise him enough. They had never noticed him before, because he belonged to Jack; but now, both Jack and his dog were in high favor.

Charley declared to Bertie, afterwards, that there was no longer a lump in his throat. He had swallowed the rooster. While mamma was making her little girl dry and warm, Towzer was being feasted in the kitchen, and for the first time since he was a puppy he had what Flora called "a whole supper." He was generally put off with a few scraps or a crust; but to-night he had all that he could eat, and he was not bashful about having his plate re-filled or backward in asking for more. Jack protested against such a waste. There was "enough to victual him a week," he said; "the brute never would know when he was full." But Charley was determined to give him a chance to know, and at last he poked over a dainty morsel with his cold nose, left it, went back to it, left it again, unable to clear his plate.

"Lost his appetite," said Bertie; but Amy said he was a sensible dog and left the last piece for manners' sake, which was probably true. After his hearty meal, Towzer made himself at home, and laid down before the fire with his shaggy head upon his paws, as if he had been used to high living from puppyhood.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAPPY TOWZER.



Towzer lay on the warm hearth and blinked at the fire, while his thick coat was drying.

"I tell you what it is," said Bertie; "if there is any virtue in good living, I mean to put a streak of fat on that fellow's bones."

"You can't do it," returned Jack. "I have been a-working on him these two years. He is one of your lean kind."

"I intend to try it, to pay for his kindness to Flora."

"How would it do to plaster him all over with beef steak?" queried Charley.

"That is my plan," said Bertie. "What do you think of it, my dog?"

He thought it the best piece of news he had ever heard, and he left his warm corner to thank Bertie in his dumb but eloquent way. He looked up into Bertie's face and wagged his tail, and said as plainly as a dog could say, that he was grateful. Mamma exchanged the blue dress for a

flannel wrapper. It never could be called pretty again. Then she brushed out the wet curls and chafed the rosy feet with her own warm hands. Under such treatment, Flora began to revive.

"Going to be a good girl," she said, gratefully.

"And mind mamma?"

"I will. Never open the big gate again."

"Did you open it?"

"I did. Flora is hungry."

How happy she was, sitting on papa's knee with a bowl of bread and milk in her lap!

When Amy brought it, she grasped it eagerly with both fat hands and took a long, deep draught.

"The little pet is nearly starved," said Amy.

"The little pet will never forget this day," said papa; "she has had a hard lesson."

After she had eaten all the bread and milk, Jack and Towzer were brought in to say good night; and Towzer poked his nose against the rosy feet, to make sure that they were no longer cold and wet, and rested his head for a moment upon papa's knee.

"Come again," said Flora.

"He will be a-fetching up here every other thing," said Jack. "You needn't bother about asking of him. All is, if he gets sassy you must kick him out."

"I should like to see anybody kick that dog when I am round," said Charley, doubling up his fist and looking warlike. "He would find that he had got his match."

"We will shake hands on that," said Bertie. Which they did quite solemnly.

And then they shook hands with Jack, and Towzer went back to have more last words with Flora, and a parting embrace: and after they were gone Flora was so drowsy, that she could not tell about her ride in the soap man's little blue cart, her head drooped upon papa's shoulder, and her eyelids were very heavy.

"She has not said her prayer," observed Bertie, who hoped she would keep awake long enough to tell the story of her adventure.

"Try," said Charley.

"Yes, darling, try," urged Bertie.

But Flora was too far gone even to try; so mamma laid her gently down in her own comfortable bed, where the rain and the wind could not disturb her slumbers, and lovingly stroked the fair hair and the soft cheek. She was very thankful that her little daughter was safe once more under the dear home roof. But Flora thought she was lying out under the old trees, and in her dreams could smell the sweet grass and the fresh earth, and once she laughed aloud in her sleep; she was running away from the rain and from the night.

When Charley and Bertie went home it was still raining fast. But they had not far to go. They lived in the new brown cottage over the way, you will remember, that was built to take the place of their old home, destroyed by fire. When they were going down the steps, Charley struck some object with his foot. "Holloa!" he said, and Bertie asked "What now?"

"I have run against a snag," said Charley.

"Where away?"

"Down here next the bottom step. I have sent something flying."

"I don't see anything," said Bertie, groping about in the dark. "It can't be good for much, if it has been out in this shower. Where did she land?"

"Somewhere in the path. I should say you could not go far wrong, if you were to follow your nose."

"Indeed!"

"It is precious damp."

"Awful!" said Bertie. "I cannot bear to think of Flora wandering round in such a storm."

"It was rather rough on the Baby Pitcher," asserted Charley.

"It is bad enough to be lost in fair weather with daylight before you."

"I believe you. What is this?"

Bertie had stumbled upon the object.

"That must be the article," said Charley. "Bring it to the light."

They carried it into the hall and threw it upon a mat, for it was dripping, and Charley turned it over with his foot.

"What do you make of it?" queried Bertie.

"It is the black baby," said Charley.

"Or her remains?"

"Yes, there isn't much left of her."

"It does not look much like Dinah, and that is a fact."

"She is pretty well used up, all but one eye. That looks natural."

"Yes," said Bertie, "very. Can't she be brought round?"

"I am afraid not. One sound eye isn't enough to build on."

"What a pity!" said Bertie. "If she cannot be patched up what are we going to do?"

Charley shook his head.

"We must keep it from Flora."

"Yes."

"We will hide it."

"Where?"

"Anywhere so that Flora may never find it."

"Good!" said Charley. "We will hide it, and she will think her baby has turned into a blackbird and flown away."

So they carried the black baby home with them, and Flora never saw her again. But they saved the blue glass button; it would do for an eye if Grandma should chance to make another Dinah.

What had become of Dinah was a wonder. Flora sought her first in the library, where she had left her sleeping, then in every place she could think of; but the baby was gone; there was not a trace of it anywhere. And the perfumery was gone too. Flora was not long in making that discovery, and she felt worse about the perfumery than she did about Dinah. She knew that was lost when she put her hand in the pocket of her blue dress, but she did not give up Dinah for a long, long time. In fact she never felt certain that the black baby would not return to her. If she had gone to be a blackbird, as Charley suggested, why, she might be coming back some day. Perhaps she would get tired of being a bird, or she might break a wing as the robin had done, and if she did, she should never get another chance to fly away.

Grandma did not make another Dinah. It would have been a new one, and could never take the place of the old; and as Flora was so hopeful, Grandma thought she would be happier in looking forward to the return of her long-tried friend than she could ever be with a new favorite. But Dinah's place was not long vacant. Towzer fitted into it quite naturally, and, as he was in many respects a more pleasant companion, Flora did not miss the black baby as she otherwise would have done.

CHAPTER XV.

FLORA NEVER OPENS THE BIG GATE.



Flora seemed to be none of the worse for her perilous adventure. After a refreshing sleep, she awoke happy and bright, not the least like the miserable child of the night before. And indeed, she could not remember how miserable she had been. When she tried to think how cold and wet and lonely it was out there in the night, she could not; for now it was no longer cold; the sun was shining, and there was no more darkness. Papa had said she would never forget that day; she had almost forgotten it already. So hard is it to realize our perils, when we look back upon them. But there was the blue dress that never could be worn again, and the water-soaked garden hat. The sight of these brought back a momentary feeling of loneliness, and when she looked out upon the pleasant morning, there was Jack Midnight's dog, with his nose between the bars of the big gate. It was really true, then, the groping about in the dark, and all the rest; and Towzer had not forgotten yet. When Flora appeared at the window, he dropped his ears and turned sadly away. He was looking for his friend of the night before, the little girl that clung so closely around his neck, and begged him to take her to mamma. He did not know Flora. But when she called to him, he answered with a joyful cry. He knew the voice.

"Keep away from the big gate," she said, warningly. "Must not open that."

"Bow-wow!" said Towser; "I don't care a straw for the big gate. I would jump over it if I was younger, and I would squeeze myself through the bars if the space was only wide enough. Bow-wow, who cares for the big gate?"

"Go round the other side," said Flora, "and I will let you in."

Towser wagged his tail, and started off, as if he meant to go round, but he was only making believe. He was back again in a moment, dancing about like a young puppy. You would never have supposed him to be the old, sedate dog that he was.

"What makes you so frisky," asked Flora.

"Bow-wow," said he. "Cannot a poor old cur be frisky when he is happy?"

He was happy, because a stream of sunshine had struggled into his sober life. It promised him friends and kind words, and that which he needed most of all,—a streak of fat to cover his bare bones. Flora said they were "nice, fat bones;" she called them fat because they were so large; and indeed they were sadly large and prominent. Bertie's plaster proved to be the proper remedy.

Under its influence the bones gradually disappeared, and, according to Flora's theory, became leaner and smaller. Jack declared that the way that dog was a picking up, beat all nature! Flora never admitted Towser at the big gate, and he very soon learned to go round. It was the big gate that opened the way to Flora's troubles, and she had a wholesome fear of it in consequence.

"Never open it again," she said, when she had finished the story of her trials.

And she never did, without permission. The little blue cart and the limping horse sometimes passed, and, although the soap man was always on the lookout, he never again found Flora waiting to take a ride. She did not forget what mamma told her: "Ladies do not ride in carts, and they never ask to ride with strangers. Little girls cannot be expected to *do* right always; but good children always *try* to do right."

"I am glad I did not see you riding with the soap man," said Amy. "I should have felt ashamed of my little sister."

"She would have come off that box in a hurry if I had been anywhere about," added Charley, in a threatening tone.

That stirred up the Baby Pitcher.

"Wouldn't either," she answered, tartly.

Charley tossed his head in a provoking way, that made Bertie say "Don't!"

"I shall do so again," said Flora.

"I wouldn't," said Bertie.

"Wouldn't you, truly?"

"No," answered Bertie, seriously, "not if I were a little girl."

"Then I won't, and Dinah won't. Oh! She has gone to be a blackbird—I forgot."

Amy kissed her little sister and talked to her in a gentle, soothing manner, that smoothed out all the wrinkles. And then Charley felt sorry he had roused the "Leo spunk," and he told such funny stories that Flora felt very placid and comfortable, and quite at peace with everybody. In losing the perfumery she lost a treasure, and for that she was sorry; but she was glad to be restored to all her social rights and privileges. She was no longer obliged to stand out on the door-stone when she talked to Grandma, for the odor of musk was dying out. Grandma's doors were thrown wide open, and no one was more welcome than the Baby Pitcher.

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