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**"O, WHAT A FASCINATING CREATURE!"**

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LITTLE PRUDY'S FLYAWAY SERIES  
PRUDY KEEPING HOUSE  
ILLUSTRATED  
LEE & SHEPARD, BOSTON.

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*LITTLE PRUDY'S FLYAWAY SERIES.*

## **PRUDY KEEPING HOUSE.**

**by SOPHIE MAY.**

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE PRUDY STORIES," "DOTTY DIMPLE STORIES," ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED.*

"What is home without a mother?"

BOSTON 1891

LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS

10 MILK STREET NEXT "THE OLD SOUTH MEETING HOUSE"

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**TO**  
**MY YOUNG FRIEND,**  
***BESSIE BAKER.***

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**PRUDY KEEPING HOUSE.**

**CHAPTER I.**

**A QUEER IDEA.**

One of Mrs. Allen's bay windows stood open. Between the ivies, tuberoses, and lilies, you caught a glimpse of gilded walls and rare paintings. Better than all, you saw four young faces looking out at a snow-storm; Dotty with eyes like living diamonds, Prudy fair and sweet, Horace lordly and wise; and the little one "with dove's eyes" following every motion of his head, as if she were a sunflower, and he the sun.

"Please shut the window, quick, Horace; the plants will freeze," said Prudy, drawing in her powdered head.

"Things don't freeze in cloudy weather, Prue; but you children will catch cold; so here goes."

"O, Hollis, don't those snow-specks look like little bits o' birdies, athout any wings or any feathers, too?"

"Droll birds they would be," said Aunt Madge. "That reminds me of an old riddle, children,—

"White bird featherless  
Flew out of Paradise,  
Lit on the castle wall;  
Came a knight breathless,  
Ate it up toothless,  
Rode away horseless."

"Why, auntie, the 'bird featherless' must have been the snow; but who was the knight!"

"Who rides over the sky without any horse, Dotty, and melts snow by shining on it?"

"O, the sun—the sun!"

"Hollis, I want to ask you sumpin. Does those snow-specks fly down out o' heaven? Does the little angels see 'em?"

"No, Topknot; they only come from the clouds; they are nowhere near up to the little angels."

"Not half so near as you are, Goldilocks," said Aunt Madge, brushing back the child's soft hair.

"I hope you don't mean Fly's going to die," cried Dotty, in sudden alarm, remembering how crossly she had spoken to the child two or three times since they had been in New York.

"No, Dotty; I only mean that we are told, in the Bible, there are 'ministering spirits,' and we believe they watch over good little children."

"O, my shole!" said Fly, folding her tiny hands, and raising her eyes to the top of the window. "Nice, pretty little spirricks out there, only but I can't see 'em."

"No, Miss Eyebright; not even you. Wait till you go where they live."

"Wisht I could go up there now, a-visiting; stay all night, and three weeks and then—"

"Hush, Fly Clifford; you're the wickedest girl to talk," said Dotty. "I shouldn't ever expect to go to heaven at all, if I said such things as you do.—O, auntie, I am so sorry it storms! Maria and her mother won't come—will they?"

Maria Brooks was a little blind girl with whom the family were just making acquaintance. A few days before, when she was walking Broadway, led by her "freckled doggie," Fly, lost on the street, had spied her, and been attracted by the dog, and Maria had persuaded the child to go home with her. Afterwards Mrs. Brooks had taken Fly back to Colonel Allen's; and in this way Aunt Madge had learned about Maria's blindness, and had offered to take her to a physician who could help her, if any one could.

"Yes, Dotty; I presume they will come to-day, for Maria can hardly wait to have the doctor look at her eyes."

"Of course they'll come," said Horace; "who ever heard of *brooks* minding the weather? Rain water agrees with 'em."

"If you please, Mrs. Allen," said Nathaniel, appearing at the door, "I—"

"O, they've come—have they, Nat?" asked Horace. Horace was already well acquainted with the waiting man, and called him Nat, though he was a very sober youth, with velvety hair, and a green neck-tie, as stiff as a cactus.

Nat only replied by handing Mrs. Allen a letter, with a hesitating air, as if he would much rather not do it.

"A despatch!" cried Mrs. Allen, turning rather pale.

Dotty Dimple and Flyaway crowded close to her, and overwhelmed her with questions.

"O, what is it?" said one. "Who wroted it? And why didn't Hollis bring the camphor bottle atout my asking?" said the other.

But the older children knew better than to speak just then. As soon as Mrs. Allen could get her breath, she said,—

"Don't be frightened, dears. It is only a message from your Uncle Augustus. He can't come home to-night, as we expected. He says, 'One of my old attacks. Nothing serious. Can you come?'"

"O, is that all?" said Dotty, and ceased fanning her auntie with a book-cover.

"O, is that all?" echoed Fly, and left off patting her cheek with a pencil.

"But, children," said Horace, "don't you understand Uncle Augustus is sick—wants auntie to go and take care of him?"

"Why, he can't have her."

"Indeed, Miss Dot, and why not?"

"She's got company, you know."

"There, little sister! I wouldn't think that of you? Poor Uncle Augustus!"

"But he says he isn't serious," said Dotty, looking ashamed. "Auntie, you don't think he's serious—do you?"

"No, dear; he's suffering very much, but I am not in the least alarmed. He has had just such attacks as this ever since he came out of the army. He is at a hotel in Trenton, New Jersey, and needs some one to wait upon him, who knows just what to do. I am very sorry to go and leave my company, Dotty, but—"

"O, auntie, you ought to go," cried Dotty.

"I dislike particularly not to be polite."

"O, auntie, you will be *'tic'ly* polite," cried little Echo. "Please let me go, too; I won't make no noise."

"How long do you think you'll have to stay, auntie?" said Prudy.

"I cannot tell, dear. These attacks are usually short, and I think quite likely your uncle can come home to-morrow night; but he may not be able till next day."

"How he'll feel if he can't be here to Christmas!" said Dotty; "and so much greens and things in the windows!"

"Yes; and how we shall both feel to know our little friends are keeping house by themselves!"

"Keeping house? O, may we keep house!" exclaimed Prudy, her eyes suddenly brightening.

"Why, yes, my child; you may be the lady of the mansion, if that is what you mean, and Horace the lord."

"But may I cook the dinners, and not ask Mrs. Fixfax? Because I really do know a great deal, Aunt Madge. You'd be surprised! I can cook cake, and pie, and biscuit, and three kinds of pudding. Please, this once, let me manage things just as I want to."

"Just as *we* want, you mean," said Dotty. "I can make gingerbread as well as you can."

"And I shaked a table-cloth once," put in the youngest. "Only I shan't be here if my auntie tookens me off."

"Yes, auntie," said Horace; "let the girls manage. They'll get up queer messes, but 'twill be good fun."

"Do you believe it?" said auntie, thoughtfully. And there entered her brain, at that moment, a singular scheme, which, to almost any other woman, would have seemed absurd.

"Poor little souls? Their visit has been a failure. I've a great mind to make an arrangement with Mrs. Fixfax to have them keep house in her room." (Mrs. Fixfax was Mrs. Allen's housekeeper.) "The novelty will amuse them. Of course they will waste flour and sugar, but not very much, probably, and Mrs. Fixfax will be on the watch to see that they don't get too hungry. It will tax her severely, but I can pay her for her trouble. Really, the more I think of it, the more I'm inclined to try it. They say I'm foolishly indulgent to children. Perhaps so; but I do want them happy when they come to my house visiting."

"Have you thoughted it all up?" asked Fly, peeping into her auntie's face; "I won't 'sturb Uncle 'Gustus."

"Yes, chickie; I've thoughted of talking to Mrs. Fixfax about letting you all keep house; that is, if she won't consider it too much trouble."

"Trouble?" said Prudy; "why, I should think it would be a real help, auntie. She has so much care, you know. And if I got the meals for us four, the cook could rest, too."

Aunt Madge only smiled at this.

There were five servants in all: John, the coachman; Nat, the waiting-man; Mrs. Fixfax, the housekeeper; Rachel Fixfax, the chambermaid; and Patty Diggles, the cook. They were all remarkably faithful, except pretty Rachel, the housekeeper's daughter, who was rather gay and flighty, and had been something of a trial to her mistress.

Aunt Maude went into the kitchen dressed for her journey. Mrs. Fixfax had just returned from market, and was talking with the cook about the dinner.

"That is a fine plump turkey," said Mrs. Allen; "I wish I were to help eat it; but I came to tell you, Mrs. Fixfax, that Colonel Allen is sick, and I must go to him at once, and leave you with the care of these children."

The housekeeper, who was a fat, comfortable-looking woman, twice as large as her mistress, said, "Indeed, mum!" hoped Colonel Allen "wasn't sick to speak of," and shook her broad sides with laughter at the idea of taking care of Fly.

"I'll give up going to church to-morrow, mum; for, light as the child is, I can but feel as if you was sitting a ton's weight on my shoulders. And I promise to keep her alive if the Lord's willing."

"You will hardly be obliged to give up your whole time Mrs. Fixfax. I shall absolutely forbid her going out of the house, unless you, or some other grown-up person, has charge of her. And really, with John, Nathaniel, and Patty to keep guard, I don't see what mischief can befall the little creature."

"We'll all do our best, mum," replied Mrs. Fixfax, heroically.

"I have perfect faith that you will. There is one more favor to ask. These children have had a strange visit thus far, and if I go away and leave them, I fear they will feel rather forlorn. Can you consent to let the little girls 'keep house,' as they call it? That is, cook their own meals, and set their own table?"

The cook, who was stuffing the turkey was so surprised that she spilled a handful of sage over her apron. She would not have dared say the words, but her thoughts ran like this: "Pretty doings, indeed! What does Mrs. Allen mean by letting children come into the kitchen to bother

me?"

But Aunt Madge had not finished speaking. "Mrs. Fixfax, there is a little old cooking-stove in the attic. Don't you remember you had it in your room when you were nursing Rachel through that fever?"

"O, yes'm, so I had; and it shall be set right up there again, mum, if you say so," said the obliging housekeeper; "and I'll carry up flour and sugar, and what not, and move out my own things, so the children can have the room pretty much to themselves."

"No need of that, Mrs. Fixfax," spoke up the cook, very pleasantly. "Let 'em come right into the kitchen. I should admire to see 'em enjoy themselves."

Patty Diggles was a singular woman. She was always full of polite speeches, just a minute too late.

"Thank you, Patty; but I think the children may feel more at home in Mrs. Fixfax's room, with no one to watch them. And now, good bye. I hope to come back to-morrow."

Mrs. Fixfax left the kitchen to find Nathaniel, and get him to help her move the stove. As soon as the business was over, Nathaniel came into the kitchen, and held up his sooty hands for Patty to see. She was stabbing the turkey with a darning-needle.

"Some folks know how to feather their own nests," said she.

"Why, what have I done now, Patty?"

"Not you, but Mrs. Fixfax; she's going to wait and tend on those children, and of course she'll get a splendid present for it. I should admire to have the little dears round me in the kitchen; but she spoke up, and took the words right out of my mouth."

The young man laughed in his sleeves, as he turned them back to wash his hands. He took care not to express his mind, however. He had a few fixed ideas. One was, that Mrs. Allen could do no wrong; and another was, that he must never bandy words with Patty Diggles, because Mrs. Allen had strictly forbidden it.

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## CHAPTER II.

### PRIDE AND ORANGES.

While Mrs. Fixfax was making her room ready for the little housekeepers, Aunt Madge went to her own chamber, and locked up her best dresses, and most valuable possessions. The children watched her with some curiosity.

"Are you afraid of *burgalers*, auntie?" asked Dotty. "Because, if you are, we shan't dare stay here."

"No, Dotty. I only thought, if you should play keep house, it might be rather amusing to come in here, and dress up in some of my old finery. You are welcome to whatever you can find, for I have locked up all that is worth much."

"O, you darling auntie, won't that be splendid? Now we shan't feel half so sorry about your going away."

"Sorry!" said Mrs. Allen, with a mischievous smile. "You are so delighted you don't know what to do."

"There, auntie, that isn't fair," laughed Prudy, "when we've been trying our best to cry. But somehow, how can we, when Uncle Augustus isn't very sick, and you're coming right back? But what made me laugh just now, was looking at that ruffled pillow-case, and thinking what a splendid cap it would make for an old lady, tied down with black ribbon!"

"A pretty uproar we shall find when we get back, Miss Prudy; but I am prepared for that. Only promise one thing—keep that baby in the house. Flyaway, darling, will you remember not to go out of doors?"

"Yes, um, I'll 'member," replied Fly, winking her eyes solemnly. She had expected, till the last minute, to go with her auntie.

"There is one thing I regret. If Mrs. Brooks and Maria come, they will be very much disappointed. Tell them I'll try to attend to them the day but one after Christmas. And now, good by, children. You know you're as dear to me as the apple of my eye. Do take good care of yourselves, and be good."

"The apple of your eye appears to be split in four quarters, auntie," remarked Horace; and on the strength of that joke, Mrs. Allen started on her journey to Trenton.

"Now I suppose I'm to be the head of the family," said Prudy, with a majestic air.

"We are the two heads, if you please, *mum*," said Horace, striking an attitude.

"What am I, then?" asked Dotty.

"You? The foot. You must run and tend."

"H'm!"

"What am I?" asked Fly.

"Why, the little finger, pet. All you have to do is to curl up in one corner."

"H'm!" responded Fly, looking at Dotty's solemn face, and trying to draw her own down to exactly the same length.

"Pretty well, I should think," said Dotty, as soon as her injured feelings would allow her to speak. "What have I done to be put down to the bottom of the foot?"

"But you know, little sister, one woman has to manage a house; and I am older than you."

"But you can't make a bit better gingerbread, Prudy Parlin! If I've got to be *your* hired girl, I won't play."

"So I wouldn't," said Horace. "I'd show 'em what I thought of such actions."

Upon this there was a little whirlwind, which spun Dotty out of the room before you could count two.

"They stand very high in their own self-esteem. He's a hero, she a *hero-ess*! They think I like to be laughed at. She said it only took one woman to manage a house; but she never made any fuss when *Horace* spoke up, and wanted to help. It's *me* that can't manage—just because it's me. Who wants Horace for the head of the family? He don't know more'n the head of a pin! When'd ever *he* make ginger-bread?"

By this time Dotty had reached her own room in a tumult of rage.

"Prudy wouldn't 'low three heads to it, I s'pose? O, no; for then I could be one! If I was a great boy, with a silver watch, that wasn't her own sister, she'd let me! Yes, if I had five heads, she wouldn't have said a word."

Dotty paced the floor restlessly, with her hands behind her.

"I shan't go back. Let 'em keep their old house. I can keep house my own self up in this room—wish I'd brought Fly—she's too good for 'em. Wish I hadn't come to New York to be imposed upon."

As Dotty was crossing and recrossing the room, her eye fell on one of the illuminated cards on the wall, printed in red and gold, and wreathed with delicate lilies of the valley—"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

The angry child stopped short.

"Who put that there? What did auntie mean? She meant *me*. Everybody means me. I wouldn't have thought that of auntie."

Dotty turned away; but the words followed her across the room like the eyes of a portrait.

"'God resisteth the proud.' Well, who said I was proud? People are so queer! Always think it's me wants the best things. 'Giveth grace to the humble.' There, I s'pose that means Prudy. She's just as humble! Never wants to take the best parts when we play. O, no; Prudy's humble? Prudy's a *hero-ess*!'"

But scold as she might, those burning red words were looking right down into Dotty's soul. Though she shut her eyes, there they were still. "'God resisteth the proud.' Am I proud?—Yes. Does God *resisteth* me?—Yes, for the Bible can't lie. What *is* resisteth? Something that makes you feel bad, prob'ly. That's why I can't be happy. I won't be proud another minute."

Dotty winked fast, set her teeth together, pinched her neck, and swallowed.

"There, it's going down my throat like a pill,—its gone! Am I proud any more? No—*for* I really don't s'pose I can make gingerbread quite so well as Prudy! I never made any but once, and then Norah took it out of the oven and put in the ginger and molasses. No, I'm not proud. I don't want to keep house. I shouldn't know how. It would be very much better to go back and behave, for I can't stay here without being lonesome."

Dotty looked again at the red and gold text. "How different it seems to me now I'm humble! People needn't be proud if they'd swallow it down like a pill."

Dotty's reasoning was rather mixed; still it is worthy of notice, that she was doing a remarkable thing for her, as she slowly walked back to her auntie's room.

But all this while Prudy, too, had been suffering. She could never bear to have her young sister angry, and, if it had not been for Horace, would have gone to her with all sorts of promises—anything for peace.

"She's an outrageous little tyrant, Prue. She ought to have a sound whipping."

"O, Horace," said Prudy, quite shocked; "she can't help her temper; she has to be humored."

"Poh! that's just what ails her! Been humored to death."

"But, Horace, can't we change our play, somehow? It never will do for me to try to order her about."

"Nonsense, Prue! But if you're going to be so fussy, you might keep boarding-house, and have her for lady boarder."

Prudy's brow cleared.

"Just what'll suit her, Horace! A lady boarder is so fashionable,—like the one they had at Mrs. Penny's,—always washing out laces. Now I'll go tell Dotty."

Just then Miss Dimple appeared at the door with an uncertain smile.

"I—I—thought—"

"O, how kind of you to come back to us, my Lady Magnifico!" cried Horace, bowing himself double. "Your landlady was afraid you objected to your boarding-place."

"You see," said Prudy, eagerly, "we are making believe I keep boarders. I've 'seen better days,' or something of that kind, as they say in story-books—O, seems to me my husband died."

"Yes; I saw his death in the papers," said Dotty, briskly; "so you don't want me for your hired girl—do you?"

Then she thought, "How glad I am I came back! It's always better to be humble!" and added aloud, with a fine-lady drawl,—

"No, mim; it's not the style I've been subject to. I was *necessiated* to leave you, mim, because I can't eat out of anything but gold teaspoons."

"That sounds so like Mrs. Pitkin Smith!" said Prudy, laughing. "She used to board at Mrs. Penny's, Horace. Come, let's go and dress in our costumes. I'll be Mother Hubbard; and Horace, you go into uncle's dressing-room and see what you can find."





## CHAPTER III.

### BORROWED JEWELS.

"Of course I must take the best things," said Dotty; "for I'm to have the best part."

So she chose a blue poplin dress, a pink sash, a scarlet bow, and a green pin. The dress was half a yard too long, and she caught it up in front with some artificial flowers she found in a box. Her head she surmounted with an old chignon, which bobbed back and forth, as she walked, like a pedler's pack.

"O, see, Prudy," said she; "here is auntie's jewel cabinet. What cunning little sliding drawers!"

"Don't open it; don't touch it, Dotty. I saw auntie look it up in her safe once; but I suppose she took it out again to get her watch."

"No, she didn't; here's her watch," said Dotty, swinging open one of the little drawers.

"That's her other watch, Dotty. She says it needs mending."

"Then I'm going to wear it; it is just as good for a lady boarder, as a whole one."

"Don't, Dotty; that's the watch Uncle Augustus gave her when they were married, and she thinks the world of it."

"Well, he gave her the other one too—didn't he?"

"Yes; last Christmas: don't you know how she found it in an orange?"

"O, I remember. And she ought to think the most of that one, Prudy, because she loves him better now than she did when he gave her this one; ever so much better."

"It's of no consequence to you if she does, or if she doesn't, Dotty Dimple. What right have you with that cabinet, I *should* like to know? Shut it right up this minute. O please do, Dotty."

Dotty's contrary spirit began to rise. She opened every one of the drawers, and poured out the glittering jewels. Of course Fly was on the spot in a twinkling; but Prudy caught her, and playfully pinned her little arms down to her sides; so her prying fingers had no chance to do mischief.

"Didn't auntie tell us to dress up in her old finery?" said Dotty, thrusting the watch into her girdle.

"Old finery, Dotty Dimple!"

"And isn't this old? 'You're welcome to whatever you can find;' that was just the words she said, Prudy Parlin."

"O, how many ways there are for people to do wrong if they want to!" cried Prudy, in despair. "When you *do* get started, Dotty—Will you, or will you not, put up those things? If you don't, it's my duty to call Horace, and—"

"*Fore* I'd be a tell-tale!" said Dotty, slipping off half a dozen rings in haste. "There, I won't wear but just two—one on each thumb. Who wants the old watch? Tick's all out of it. You don't know, Prudy, how tight those rings fit. I could wear 'em on my forefinger, but I shan't, you make such a fuss."

Prudy answered by a look of unutterable contempt.

"I suppose," said she, speaking with a vehemence quite unusual to her—"I suppose you know auntie's jewels are worth more money than father has in the world! If you lose one of them, I don't know who's going to pay for it; that's all."

Dotty looked amazed, but answered coolly,—

"Of course I always knew that! Auntie has about as nice things as the governor's wife."

She was sure she was very humble, since swallowing her pride like a pill; but somehow she was determined not to take off those rings.

"Prudy needn't speak so sharp to me! I didn't care about wearing 'em in the first place; but now I'll do it to show her what's the use to preach!"

Prudy, having done her duty, said no more, but proceeded to look over her auntie's wardrobe in search of a dress.

"I s'pose she thinks I'm the awfulest girl," mused Dotty, fluttering in and out of the closet. "I s'pose she's thinking about that rag-bag last summer—how Jennie Vance no business to take

those three dollars out of the saddle-bag pockets! Grandma said, 'You're welcome to all you can find.' Well, but that didn't mean for Jennie to steal! Prudy needn't go to thinking this is the same kind of a thing, for it isn't. I guess stealing is pretty different from borrowing."

Dotty viewed herself in the glass with secret satisfaction. She really looked like a Fourth of July fantastic; but we do not see ourselves as others see us.

"She won't be the least help to me about the house," thought Prudy, with a feeling of envy. "I shall have every single thing to do; and I declare I don't know what to get for dinner."

She chose the worst looking wrapper her aunt's wardrobe afforded, and a gingham apron with pockets. Quite good enough for a woman keeping house without a servant. And as she had decided to call herself Mother Hubbard, she made an ample cap, by folding a "pillow-sham," and putting two of its ruffled edges around her face for a double border. Then, with green spectacles at her nose, a bunch of keys at her waist, and a pair of high-heeled slippers on her feet, she went to the door, and called for Fly.

"Fly! Why, isn't she in there?" responded Horace, appearing on the landing, "You didn't think I had her with me—did you?"

As Prudy wisely remarked, "How many ways there are for people to do wrong if they want to!"

Seeing her betters disagree, little Fly had taken her turn at pouting.

"They don't say nuffin' 'bout fixin' *me* up. Goin' to let me go to the party in my old clo'es? Wisht auntie'd tookened me with her. Might just's well not! Might a' worn soft slippers, and not 'sturbed Uncle 'Gustus!" Fly wafted herself to the top of the bureau, and gazed down on the girls in stern displeasure. But she might as well have scowled at empty air, for no notice was taken of her. Dotty was giving an extra touch to her chignon, and Prudy trying on her cap. "Hark! What's that?"

It was the street-cry away off in the backyard—"Fine fresh oranges."

"Guess I'll go see what's the matter with that man," thought Miss Fly. "Guess he's got hurted."

She slid down from the bureau, and stole softly out of the room backward; but her feet made no more sound on the carpet than the fall of a rose-leaf, and neither of the girls looked up.

"For course I shan't go ou'doors, 'cause I *solomon* promised I wouldn't," said she, pattering down the basement stairs.

The fact was, she had no idea any one would let her go. But it so happened that thoughtless Rachel was the one who unlocked the basement door, and it was an easy thing to slip out behind her.

"'Cause I spect she'll send me ri' back."

But when Rachel looked around, and saw the pretty child with her fair hair blowing wild, she only laughed and went on gossiping with the orange boy. She saw no harm in letting Fly hop about the pavement on one foot sucking oranges, till she herself felt chilled by the keen wind; then she drew the little girl into the house, and shut the door against the snow-storm, saying,—

"Why, how happened you out here, little Miss Fly?"

"She sawed me the whole time; she ought to sended me in," thought Fly, dancing up and down to shake off the snow. "Twasn't me was naughty; 'twas the rest the folks. They didn't pay no 'tention where I went to."

But though she pretended to herself that she had done no wrong, she did not wish to be found out, and crept very softly up stairs, even as far as the cupola, and looked out of the windows with all her might.

"Cold room up here, athout no fire," thought she, by and by, with a shiver; and just then she heard the girls calling.

"Here I is," a voice replied, far up the height; and down ran Fly in a trice.

"You haven't been 'up attic' all this time, Topknot?"

"Well, you ought to paid 'tention where I's going to," returned Fly, sharply. "Nobody knows what I'll do next—auntie said there didn't!"

Horace laughed. "Come, fix her up, girls; she's my baby."

"I thought you were the 'Man in the Moon,'" said Mother Hubbard, "and he isn't married."

"I've been a widower some time," sighed Horace, laying his hand on the left pocket of his blue swallow-tail coat.

His costume was as droll as the girls'; for Uncle Augustus, who had figured the week before in some private tableaux, had a full Brother Jonathan suit.

"The man in the Moon, if you please, Mother Hubbard, come down to inquire the way to Norridge."

"Ah! I'm afraid you've 'come down too soon.' Didn't you forget your whiskers?"

Horace rubbed his upper lip thoughtfully. "Will you inform me, ma'am, where I can get a boarding-place? I'm sort of turned round. Growing place. Last time I was down, there were only a few houses here; now it's pretty thick settled back of the meeting-house."

"I'll take you," said Mother Hubbard, putting her handkerchief to her face. "How would my dog feel if he knew I had come to this!"

"Come to what, ma'am?"

"Why, to New York, to take boarders."

"Are you in *indigenous* circumstances, madam? And have you seen the first society? If so, I may possibly conclude to come too," said Dotty, sweeping forward, and losing a hair-pin out of her chignon.

"O, what a fascinating creature!" said the Man in the Moon, making an eye-glass of his thumb and forefinger, and gazing at the lady boarder. "Are you a widow, ma'am?"

"Well, they don't say nuffin' 'bout fixin' *me* up! Guess I shan't go to the party!" exclaimed Fly, opening and closing her eyes in token of outraged dignity.

Prudy took her into auntie's room, and proceeded at once to robe her in her own night-dress, with a lace night-cap, and a cologne-mat for a bib.

"Hollis didn't say for me to be such a *long* baby," sniffled Fly, trying in vain to clear her feet from the trailing skirt.

"This is your slip, dear. You're only a baby—musn't try to walk."

"Then my papa must carry me down stairs," said Fly, entering into the spirit of the play. "You tell him so—I can't tell him, for I can't talk. *Argoo-goo*. My teeth haven't camed."

"If you please, Master Clifford," said Nathaniel, appearing at the head of the stairs. Then he stopped short with surprise, hardly knowing the children in their strange attire; but being too dignified to laugh aloud, added, with a grim smile,—

"The woman that brought Miss Fly home the other day is down in the dining-room, and says, 'Can she see one of the family?'"

"A little girl with her, Nat?"

"Yes, sir; the blind girl is with her."

"And the freckled doggie!" asked "the long baby," suddenly raising her head from her father's shoulder. "I meant to told 'em to bringed that doggie."

"Let's all go down and see," said Mother Hubbard.

When they entered the dining-room, Mrs. Brooks started up in dismay. She had left her sick husband, and come a long distance through the storm, only to find Mrs. Allen gone, and a parcel of children decked out like circus-riders. It seemed like a cruel mockery.

"Beg pardon," said she. "Maria, we'll go home now."

Maria was sitting near her mother, trying to force back the tears which would find their way through her closed eyes.

"You poor dear girl," said Mother Hubbard, going up to her, and taking her hand. "My auntie was so sorry to go off to-day, just when you were coming! but she had to, for Uncle Augustus is sick. And it looks funny to you—I mean to your mother—to see us dressed up this way; but auntie said we might, just to keep us from being so lonesome. And Mrs. Brooks, she wants you to call again the day after *the day after* to-morrow. She thinks she'll be home then."

"Yes'm," struck in my Lady Magnifico! "She thinks she'll come then with Uncle 'Gustus. He isn't much sick. If he was going to die, we wouldn't dress up so, certainly."

"No," replied Mrs. Brooks, smiling. "It's just as well; my Maria must have patience; that's all."

"Patience!" thought Maria; "haven't I had it, and had it?—But I do suppose God will attend to me when He thinks best. Is this what they call waiting on the Lord?"

"When you come nex' time, I hope you'll bring that doggie," said Fly.

Then they went away, and the last thing Maria listened to was Fly's melodious voice; and the last thing Fly looked at was Mrs. Brooks's nose moving up and down.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### GOING TO HOUSEKEEPING.

It was nearly noon before Mrs. Fixfax had made her room ready for housekeeping. She turned up her bed into a press that stood beside the wall, brought in a high chair, a small rocking chair, two ottomans, some pictures and picture-books, and nearly all the curiosities she could find in the house. A cunning little cooking-stove, highly polished, was set against the chimney, and the drollest shovel and tongs seemed to be making "dumb love" to each other across the fireplace, like a black Punch and Judy. Then there was a pair of brazen-faced bellows, hanging, nose downward, on a brass nail; a large table in one corner, with a cake-board on it, and near it a cupboard made out of an old clothes-press, with dishes in it, and flour, sugar, raisins, spices, rolling-pin, "aerating egg-beater," yellow bowls, wooden spoons, and everything that could be needed in cooking for a very large family. There were five rugs spread on the carpet, and a large oilcloth under the stove. Last, but not least, Mrs. Fixfax brought Mrs. Allen's tortoise-shell cat, and set her in a stuffed chair by the west window.

Then she called the children; and Mother Hubbard and Lady Magnifico rushed in, followed by the Man in the Moon and his baby.

"Good morning, all; I hope I see you well," said Mrs. Fixfax, as sober as Nathaniel himself. "This room is yours as long as you like. Make yourselves perfectly at home."

"Thank you ever so much," replied Mother Hubbard, bobbing her head, while the "pillow-sham" ruffles waved this way and that, like a field of ripe grain.

"Whenever you want anything, just ring this bell, and I will come; or, if you ring the other one, it will bring Rachel. And, Miss Prudy, here is the 'Young Housekeeper's Friend;' perhaps you would like to look it over."

Mother Hubbard blushed to her cap-border, and took the book with another "Thank you ever so much," but did not know what else to say to such a dignified woman.

The truth was, Mrs. Fixfax was trying so hard to keep from laughing, that her manner was rather stiff and cold.

"I have left the ventilator open," thought she. "The children are full of talk, and I don't want to lose a word. Besides, Mrs. Allen would consider it safer for me to know all that's going on."

"There, glad she's gone," said Lady Magnifico, as Mrs. Fixfax's stately form disappeared.

"She isn't as pretty as the *new* Miss *Fixfix*. 'Spect she's got the toothache," suggested the talking infant, who was trying to lie and coo on a rug, but was unable to do it.

"Well said, little Toddle; false toothache, hey?"

"Are they false, Mr. Moony? Then that was why she puckered up her lips so funny," said Mother Hubbard; "it was to keep 'em in!"

"Yes; and take her, teeth and all, her face has about as much expression as a platter of cold hash. I'll leave it to you if it hasn't, Prue."

"Why, there, Miss *Fixfix* never asked me to kiss her one time," said Fly, with sudden astonishment.

"Reckon you'd have wanted a lump of sugar after it, Topknot."

The good-natured housekeeper shook with laughter as she listened to these remarks from the next room.

"What a terrible creature this *Miss Fixfix* is!" thought she. "Well, if they've got such an idea of me, I won't try to change it. Not for the rest of the day, at any rate. I'll keep my distance, and let 'em work."

Mother Hubbard began to look about her with the mien of a housekeeper.

"Let us see: what are we burning here?" said she, taking off a stove-cover. "Wood, I declare. Mrs. Fixfax is afraid I couldn't manage coal!"

"And here's a 'normous big box full of sticks," said Lady Magnifico. "I didn't s'pose wood grew in New York. What now, Mr. Moon? Don't I know wood is sawed out of trees? Well, what you laughing at, then?"

"Laughing, my lady? Why, who can help it, to see such a jolly room, big enough to hold a mass-meeting? That's a loud-spoken clock up there. Wonder if Mother Hubbard notices it's just going to strike twelve?"

Prudy looked up, but did not take the hint.

"I'm so glad I remembered to bring that clock. I always used to tell my dog I prized it as much as he did his dear little tail.—Why, what's burning? That child has scorched her slip. Do take care of her, Mr.—what may I call you?—while I look over this cupboard."

"Call me Dr. Moonshine, if you want to."

"I'm glad I was so thoughtful as to order sugar," continued the landlady. "It's excellent to drop medicine on. What's this in a bowl? Ice-cream?"

"Why, don't you know what that is?" said Lady Magnifico, sweeping along to the cupboard, and dipping in her dainty finger; "that's *condemned milk*."

"*Condensed* milk, her ladyship means," said the doctor, "boiled down, you know, and thickened. When you make a custard for dinner, you'll have to put in a tea-kettle full of water."

This was the second hint the young man had thrown out concerning dinner; but Prudy was not to be hurried.

"What's this in a little caddy? O, it's rice. No; it's what Dotty used to call *coker whacker*."

"What does she call it now, may I ask?" said the doctor, with an irritating smile.

"*Patti-coker*—what you s'pose?" was the rash reply. Poor Lady Magnifico! Little tingles of shame ran down her fingers as soon as she had spoken, for she saw, by the glances between her landlady and the doctor, that she had made another mistake.

"O, I like to keep house," cried Fly, holding up her trailing robes, and dancing over a carpet seam. "What's this goldy thing?"

"Bellows, Toddlekins, to blow up the fire. See me fill out their leather cheeks."

"What pretty little *blozers*! Let me blow 'em!"

There was a second dash upon the stove, and another scorch in the slip.

"There ought to be a fence built round that stove," said the anxious father.

"Come, Mother Hubbard, have you seen all there is in the cupboard? Can't you give this poor old dog a bone?"

"Well, here I am with the care of the family on my shoulders," thought Mother Hubbard, winking fast behind the green spectacles, and recalling uneasily the couplet her father often repeated:—

"Think well before you pursue it;  
But when you begin, go through it."

"Now what'll we have for dinner?"

Lady Magnifico was walking languidly about, admiring herself in the mirror, Dr. Moonshine rummaging an old closet, and Baby pulling out the bureau drawers.

"They have the easy part. But never mind; I'll show them what I can do. Mother says I have a great deal more taste for cooking than Susy has. Didn't I make pickles all one vacation?"

Then Prudy sat down with the "Housekeeper's Friend," and began at the first page to read. Half an hour passed, and no signs of her moving.

"I'm hunger-y," whispered Baby, taking a sugar-coated pill out of a box, and touching it with her tongue. It was sweet till her teeth went into it, when out rolled the little ball upon the floor.

"O, my shole! How bitter!" groaned she, wiping her mouth on a lace cuff. "'Spect that's a pill, and they cooked it in sugar; but I shan't eat it."

"Little daughter, what are you doing there? Mustn't meddle with other folks' things." Dr. Moonshine sneezed as he spoke, having breathed some of the "dust of ages" into his nose off a top shelf, where Mrs. Fixfax kept a few herbs. Ten minutes more. The doctor stepped down from the chair-back on which he had been standing, and gazed hard at his landlady. She was turning the sixteenth page.

"My Lady Magnifico!"

"Sir?"

"My lady, do you happen to have such a thing as a peanut in your pocket?"

My lady shook the cat out of the armchair, and seated herself.

"It isn't polite to carry round peanuts."

"I was only thinking," continued the doctor, with a side glance at Mother Hubbard, "how nice a peanut would be to keep anybody from fainting away."

Mother Hubbard started from her chair. "What unfashionable boarders! You don't expect dinner in the middle of the day, I hope! In the city of New York we don't have it till five or six o'clock. I'm afraid you came down too soon, Dr. Moonshine."

"Afraid I did. Wish I was 'the man in the South.' I'd like to 'burn my mouth' on a little 'cold plum porridge.'"

"Haven't any for you; but I'll give you a lunch. What say to omelettes and coffee?"

"Excellent," said Dr. Moonshine, reviving.

"Exquisite," drawled my lady.

"*Exquit*," quoth Fly.

"Only there isn't any coffee," said Mother Hubbard, going to the cupboard.

"Call it tea," said the doctor, "and hurry up."

"No, chocolate is better. How do you make chocolate?" said the landlady, turning to her cook-book.

"I don't know, and don't care," fumed the doctor. "Baked in a *slow* oven, most likely, with a top crust. Let the chocolate slide."

"Well, I will. And now I'll make the omelette. Eggs? yes; there are eggs enough; but dear me, where's the milk? This *condemned* kind my lady tells about won't do to make omelettes. I shouldn't dare try it."

"Well, well, give us a little bread and butter. I've got past being particular."

"O, Dr. Moonshine, such biscuits as I'm going to bake for you at five o'clock! But now I really can't find a speck of bread!"

"I'll warrant it! I always heard that when old Mother Hubbard went to her cupboard she found the shelves were all bare."

"Then you needn't have come here to board. Won't crackers and raisins do?"

They had to do; and the boarders tried to be satisfied in view of the coming dinner.

All the afternoon Mother Hubbard spent between the cake-board and the mouth of the oven.

"Queen of the rolling-pin, can't you hush up this fire?" said Dr. Moonshine, looking at the thermometer; "we're nearly up to 'butter melts,' and I suppose you know that's ninety degrees."

"Dr. Moonshine," replied Mother Hubbard, nervously, "I can't help it if the butter does melt. We've got to have something to eat."

"Papa, pin up my dress," said the baby. "I want to do sumpin. I want some pastry to paste a book with."

"You're a real failure, Toddlekings. Your teeth have come, and you talk and keep talking. I'm afraid Mother Hubbard will charge me full price for your board. You hear what she calls for, ma'am? Can you make her a little paste? Here's an old Patent Office Report; and I'll run the risk of her spoiling it. I'll cut some pictures for her out of these papers."

"Lucky I don't keep a file of my newspapers," thought Mrs. Fixfax, listening from the next room. "If I did, those children would hear from me."

"Yes, I'll make her some paste," said Mother Hubbard, dropping the aerating egg-beater, and setting the spice-box on the stove.

Dr. Moonshine laughed. Mother Hubbard had never dreamed a boarder could be so disagreeable. She snatched off the spice-box, and setting a kettle on the stove, boiled paste enough to paper the walls of a room.

Meanwhile Fly was making free with the nutmegs and soda, and the little cook could not remember how far along she had got with the cake.

"Children don't annoy you, I hope," said the doctor, seating the baby at the side of the table, opposite Mother Hubbard, and giving her a stick with a rag wound around the end of it, in order to paste pictures into a scrap-book.

"Thank you, doctor. I never did like children half as well as dogs," replied Mother Hubbard, forcing a smile. Then she tasted her cake slyly, to make sure whether she had put the butter in or not.

"Madam Hubbard, mim," said Lady Magnifico, "may I trouble you for a glass of water?"

"Mamma Hubbard, may I have a hangfiss to wipe off the pastry?"

Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard, and got a goblet for the lady; to the closet, and found a rag for the baby.

By that time she smelt something burning; it was eggs. She had left the patent egg-beater on the stove by accident, and its contents were as black as a shoe.

"O, what a frightful, alarming odor!" cried Lady Magnifico. "If somebody doesn't throw up a window! Madam, do tell us what's afire now!"

"Mother Hubbard's got a dumb chill," said the doctor; "she won't speak."

But Prudy was saying under breath, "Please, God, let me keep pleasant. They don't mean any harm, and I *should* be ashamed to get angry just about a play."

"What ails you, Mother Hubbard? 'You look as blue as the skimmiest kind of skim-milk.'"

"Do I? Well, no wonder, with such troublesome boarders. Suppose you and my lady go down to

the parlor. I don't believe I'm a bit interesting, you know. I'll call you when dinner is ready."

"Agreed! Sharp five, remember."

"There," said Mother Hubbard, taking off her spectacles; "now I can cook."

Could she?

"Little folks we is to keep house—isn't we?" buzzed the little torment that was left behind. "Hush! don't you talk, Prudy. When you shake the table, then I make blots with my pastry."

Prudy said nothing, but thoughtfully tasted the cake again. How could she tell whether she had left out the soda?

"Are you *blind of your ears*, Prudy, Can't you hear nuffin what I say? Rag's come off the stick. Please to tie it on. And *I* want to eat some o' that dough."

Mother Hubbard did her blundering best; but ill luck seemed to pursue the cooking.

"Needn't call that book the 'Young Housekeeper's Friend.' It's an enemy, a real bitter enemy," cried she, in great excitement. "Wood is hotter than coal, too. Mrs. Fixfax must have given it to me to plague me. How it does burn things up! I hope beefsteak is cheap. I won't ask anybody to eat this, all covered with ashes. I'll never try to broil any again on top of a stick of wood! I won't try that 'steamboat pudding.' Sounds as if 'twould burn, and I know it would. Let 'em go without pudding."

After the most tiresome afternoon she had ever spent in her life, Mother Hubbard went down with Fly, whom she dared not leave by herself, to call her boarders to dinner.

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## CHAPTER V.

### MOTHER HUBBARD'S DINNER.

This was Mrs. Allen's "reception-day," the day on which she always staid at home, that her friends might be sure of finding her in.

"Not at home," Nathaniel had kept saying to visitors that afternoon. But one of them, a queenly-looking lady, would not be satisfied with the answer.

"Are the children here?" demanded she. "Those nieces and nephews?"

Nathaniel did not know exactly what reply to make; so he invited the lady into the parlor, and went to inquire.

Dr. Moonshine and Lady Magnifico were in the drawing-room, looking over engravings.

"Gnat, gnat, you troublesome insect," said the doctor. "I heard auntie tell you we were not to be disturbed."

"But what could I say?" asked the insect, humbly. "I couldn't tell her 'not at home.'"

"You must say, 'Beg to be excused;' those are the proper words," said my lady.

"Yes," added the doctor; "go, there's a good gnat, and sting 'em like sixty, if they don't start quick."

Nathaniel obeyed, looking as dignified as ever, though nothing but a strong sense of propriety kept him from smiling.

He had not crossed the hall before Mother Hubbard entered the parlor, dragging Fly, who was pinned to her skirts.

Mother Hubbard was flushed and excited, her nose dusted with flour, her cap pulled entirely over her forehead; and she was saying, in a loud tone, "I can't take any peace of my life, Fly Clifford, you know I can't, unless I get you fastened somehow."

"I don't 'low folks to *fassin* me," responded Fly, shaking her lace cap in a blaze of wrath; "the next that *fassins* me, I'll *scwatch who did it!*"

It was not at all like either of the children to talk in this way, any more than it was like them to be dressed in such ridiculous costume. The effect upon the lady visitor was quite startling. She started, smiled, rose from her chair, and held out her hand.

"Now tell me if this isn't Miss Prudy Parlin. I have seen your picture, my love."

What eyes, to spy out a likeness under all the flour and furbelows, not to mention the green spectacles! Prudy quivered like a frightened mouse, but could not get away, for a trap was sprung upon her; a steel-gloved hand was holding her fast.

"I am Madam Pragoffyetski, a Polish runaway. You may not have heard of me, but I know all about Prudy and little Thistledown Flyaway."

"Nicely, thank you, m'm," responded Miss Fly, in a voice as faint as the peep of a chicken; at the same time darting forward and tearing a piece out of her slip. "If she runned away I'd be 'shamed to tell of it."

"How awful for her to come here!" thought Mother Hubbard, stealing a timid glance at the lady's ermine muff. "She looks nice, but I don't want anything to do with such people."

"Don't be afraid of me, dears," said the lady, laughing; "I call myself a runaway just in sport. I am a warm admirer of yours, and my dear friend, your auntie, has promised me a visit from you. I came on purpose to ask you, and your sister, and your cousins to my house to dinner to-morrow. Will you come?"

Mother Hubbard gazed doubtfully at the steel-colored glove. What could she say?

"Thank you ever so much, Mrs.—Mrs. Pradigoff, but Fly is not allowed to go out."

Flyaway was greatly chagrined.

"Well, I—I *solomon* promised," said she, casting down her guilty eyes, as she remembered the orange man; "I *solomon* promised I would't go ou' doors, *athout* somebody *lets* me."

"There's a tender conscience for you," laughed the Polish lady. "Why was she not to go out, Miss Prudy?"

"Because she is so quick-motioned, ma'am. Before you know it she's lost. That's the reason I pinned her to my dress. You see, ma'am, we are playing 'keep house.'"

"O, if her quickness is all the trouble, I'll take the responsibility that she shan't get lost. I'll bind her fast with a silken chain. Really, children, my heart is set on your coming. My house is full of things that make a noise—a canary, a paroquet, a mocking-bird, a harp, a piano, and a guitar. And—"

Mrs. Pragoff did not add that she had invited a little party to meet them. She was afraid of frightening the timid souls.

"Would you like to come, Miss Prudy? Tell me honestly, now."

There was no need to ask Fly. She was dancing for joy—the absurd little image.

"O, yes'm; I'd be delighted," replied Mother Hubbard, a smile lighting up her face even to the floury tip of her nose. "And I think Horace and Dotty would, too. Shall I go and ask?"

Yes, Horace and Dotty were both pleased with the idea.

"She's a foreigner," said Prudy, doubtfully; "but she talks our language beautifully. She's a dear friend of auntie's, too."

"What I object to," said Horace, "is taking Toddlekins; but I may possibly hire her to stay at home."

It was finally decided that Mrs. Pragoff should call next day and take the children to church with her, and thence home to a Christmas dinner. She laughed, as she rolled away in her carriage, thinking what droll figures they were, and how Prudy blinked through her glasses.

"So I shan't have to cook but one meal more, and that will be breakfast," thought Mother Hubbard, her tired heart leaping up with something like joy.

They sat down to dinner at last.

"Tea urn been standing on the table all this while?" asked Dr. Moonshine, resuming his critical manners; "'twould take the tea some time to freeze on here, Mrs. Hubbard, if that is what you're trying to do with it!"

Mrs. Hubbard pretended not to hear.

"She's blind of her ears, papa; you have to speak loud."

"What makes your child's face so red, doctor?" asked the landlady, pouring hot water till it overran the cup; "don't the darling feel well?"

"Yes'm, pitty well; only but the white tea gets in my cheeks and makes 'em too hot."

"White tea, I should think," remarked Dr. Moonshine; "why, Mother Hubbard, the tea-leaf in your urn must feel rather lonesome."

Mother Hubbard took off the cover and peeped in.

"None there, as true as you live! I'll jump right up, doctor, and stew two or three handfuls."

"Don't rise for me, ma'am; don't rise for me. We'll swallow the will for the deed, ma'am; the will for the deed."

"It's always so, doctor," said Lady Magnifico, in an undertone; "we've had to swallow these mistakes from time *immortal*."

Her ladyship meant "immemorial." She was surprised at the ease with which she used large



words.

"All the mistakes are owing to the eccentricity of genius," said the doctor, bowing to Mother Hubbard. "Our landlady is what is called 'absent.' Here's a health to our *absent* friend."

"You'll have to excuse the biscuit," said Mother Hubbard, nervously. "I mixed 'em too tight, and I think the flour's half corn, they look so yellow; it *can't* be all soda."

"I presume not *all* soda; some mixture of flour and water. But where are they, ma'am?"

"O, I put them in the cupboard. I thought you'd like crackers better."

"But these are the *mizzerble* kind, that don't split," said Lady Magnifico, in tragic tones; "I told you so to-day noon."

"Stop a minute, Miss Hubbard; my coffee's too sour," cried the youngest, determined to scowl as hard as Dotty did, if it was a possible thing.

The worried landlady passed the sugar, and the small boarder corrected the *sourness* of her white tea with three teaspoonfuls, heaping measure.

"My little Toddlekins is eating nothing," said the doctor. "I hope her red cheeks don't indicate fever."

"There's great quantities of sickness just now among children," said Lady Magnifico, crooking her little finger genteelly. "*Nervous Exhaustion* is going about."

"Nervous what, my lady?"

"*Exhaustion*. I am well acquainted with a lady in the first society that had it dreadfully. She called in twenty-five doctors, if my memory *preserves* me right; and *then* she like to died."

"You know it for a fact, my lady? I hope it won't come here (or the doctors either). Is it catching, Dr. Moonshine?"

"Well, yes, Mother Hubbard; it's apt to catch fine ladies. Goes hard with 'em, too."

"Ah me, then I'll never dare go out," drawled Lady Magnifico, looking at her rings.

Here Mother Hubbard timidly passed the cake. "White Mountain; but I suspect it's a poor rule."

"A poor rule that don't work both ways, hey? If this was ever white, ma'am, 'twasn't a fast color; faded to a rusty black. And as to it's being a mountain, ma'am, it looks to me like a pretty hollow valley."

"I'm so sorry, doctor! But your little girl dusted my soda over the cat, and that was why the cake didn't rise."

"Just so, ma'am; but did the cat rise?"

"O, Dr. Moonshine, I see you're making fun of my cooking. And now I'll tell you something more. I got the butter ready, and forgot to put it in, and that's why the cake's so tough."

"Never mind," said the doctor, very amiable as long as he could make his joke. "It is pretty tough cake, ma'am; but it's always tougher where there's none."

"There's one thing about it," said Mother Hubbard, a little relieved; "it's sweet in the middle, and you needn't eat the bitter part, where it's burnt."

"It's my practice to mix the bitter with the sweet," said the doctor, waving the butter-knife. "In this way, Mother H., your black-valley cake is almost as good as pills."

"I ate a pill," observed Fly, "and 'twas worsen this!"

"You ate a pill, child? When? Where? I'll warrant that's what ails you."

"No, it don't ail me now. I spitted it out."

After nibbling a few crackers, and the inside of the cake, the happy family moved away from the table, hungrier than when they had sat down.

"What is home without a mother?" sang Horace, in a plaintive voice; and Dotty joined in, with emphasis.

Prudy looked as low-spirited as the "black-valley cake."

"I hope Uncle Augustus will be able to come home to-morrow. I declare, we are real cruel not to feel worse about his being sick away off there in a hotel."

"You'd better believe he gets things to eat," responded Lady Magnifico, aside to the doctor. "I'd rather be some sick than have a landlady that's purblind and *purdeaf*, and such *owdrageous* poor cooking! Glad I'm going out to Christmas dinner."

## CHAPTER VI.

### PRUDY IN A NEW LIGHT.

Mother Hubbard was heated, and tired, and hungry, and cross. It was all very well for a lady boarder to loll on an ottoman, play with her rings, and find fault. It was all very well for a gentleman boarder to fire poor jokes; but they couldn't either of them know how every word cut like a lash. When the doctor said, carelessly, "Some people think themselves great cooks, my lady; but the proof of the pudding's in the eating," why, that speech was "the pin in the end of the lash."

Prudy saw now that she had pretended to know a great deal more than she really did. Pretension is very apt to get laughed at. She had always scorned Dotty's self-conceit; but hadn't she shown quite as much herself? Making her auntie suppose she understood cooking, and putting Mrs. Fixfax to all this trouble for nothing? How horrified auntie would be, and the housekeeper too, if they should dream that this little family was starving, with a cook-book lying open on the floor!

"But I declare, it's real mean in you two to make fun of me," cried the young landlady, tipping the sugar-basin plump into the dish-tub; "you couldn't get any better supper yourselves, nor half so good; so there!"

Surprised at the sharp sound of her own voice, dismayed at sight of the wet sugar, and completely discouraged by the aspect of things in general, Prudy burst out into a sort of frenzy. She was ashamed of herself, but she couldn't stop.

"You think I can bear everything—you and Dotty both! People are careful what they say to Dotty, for her temper's just like live coals; but they talk to me, and say anything; anything they've a mind to."

"Why, Prue," exclaimed Horace, as astonished as if Mother Hubbard's dog had spoken; "why, Prue!"

"Yes, you think it's awful if I speak; but sometimes it seems as if I should bite my tongue out."

"Don't, Prudy," exclaimed Dotty, looking on with awe and alarm, as if there had been a sudden eclipse of the sun; "I didn't mean to."

"Don't Prudy," said Fly, clutching at the brown dress; "and I'll give you sumpin what I buy."

There is an old saying, "Beware the fury of a patient man." Prudy had tried all day to

"Smile and smile,  
While secret wounds were eating at her heart;"

but now she could scarcely bear the touch of little Fly's hand. She did not care what she said, if she could only find words bitter enough.

"I always have to bear, and bear, and bear. Nobody else does. I've noticed how different it is with Susy. She frets, and then people let her alone. And Dotty, how she tosses up her head like Aunt Martha's horse Lightning-Dodger! Haven't I always pacified Dotty, and humored her? Had to alter the play to suit her. And what does that child know or care, any more than if I was a common sister, that hadn't been giving up, and giving up, and *giving up*, ever since she was born?"

Prudy's cap-strings shook violently, her teeth chattered, and the sharp words seemed to rattle out like hail-stones. Horace had never seen her in such a mood, and was half inclined to run away; but when she took her hands down from her face, and he saw how pale she was, his heart was moved.

"Come, Prue, you're sick abed; that's what's the matter. Lie down, and let that lazy Dot take off her diamonds, and go to work."

Prudy dropped upon the sofa and covered her face with her handkerchief, while Dotty, strange to relate, actually slid the rings off her fingers and thumbs, and began to put away the crackers.

"O, dear," thought Prudy, blushing under the cap-border, spectacles, and handkerchief; "what did possess me to talk so? I had been holding in all day; why did I let go? If I ever do let go, I can't stop; and O, how shameful it is!"

It seemed as easy for Prudy to be good as for a bird to sing; but it was not so. She had a great deal of human nature, after all. She liked her own way, but she never had it unless Dotty was willing. Was that a pleasant way to live? If you think so, dears, just try it. The secret of Prudy's sweetness was really this: In all trials she was continually saying, under breath, "Please, God, keep me from doing wrong." She had found that was really the only way—the only *safe* way.

"Everybody calls me amiable. They wouldn't if they knew how I have to grit my teeth together to keep from scolding. I like to be called amiable, but nobody'll do it again; and Horace sees now I'm not the girl he thought I was."

All Prudy's hail-stones of wrath had melted into tear-drops, and she was sobbing them into her

handkerchief. She did not clearly know whether she was crying because she had done wrong, or because Horace would see she "was not the girl he had thought she was."

"Bless your dear little soul," said Dr. Moonshine, kneeling before her, while his blue swallow-tails swept the floor, "you've told the truth. Everybody knows Dot's a spitfire, and you're an angel; and she does impose upon you most abominably."

Dotty stood staring, with a plate in her hand, too much astonished to defend herself.

"And I'm ashamed of firing so many jokes at you, Prue; I am so. I'm a great joker (he meant a great *wit!*), but this is the first time I ever mistrusted you cared—you always take things so like a lamb,—or you'd better believe I wouldn't have done it. For there isn't a girl in the world I like so well as I do you, nor begin to."

"O, Hollis," moaned the little one, stirred by sudden jealousy.

"Hullelo! I forgot you, Topknot.—You're my heart's jewel; that's generally understood. When I say I like Prue, I mean next after you."

The jealous Fly was satisfied, and folded her little wings against Horace's breast. Prudy felt greatly soothed, but her cap-strings were still shaking, and she could not trust her voice to speak. Nothing more was said for some time. Dotty clattered away at the dishes, kitty purred by the stove, and Horace rocked his little sister, who clung about his neck like an everlasting pea. Presently he stopped rocking, and exclaimed,—

"Why, what's the matter with my Toddlekins? What makes her breathe so short?"

"My froat's short; that's what is it," replied the little philosopher, closing her eyes, as if she did not choose to talk.

"But how does your throat feel, Topknot?"

"Feels bad; why?"

"Girls, this child has a sore throat, and a high fever. Her hands are as hot as pepper."

Dotty wrung the dish-cloth tragically.

"She's going to have the measles; you see 'f she don't."

"Hush!" said Prudy, springing up, and tucking back her sleeves. "Let's give her a warm bath. That's what mother does when we are sick, before ever she sends for the doctor."

"I'd *ravver* have a *turkey-wash*," said Fly, rousing a little, and then dropping her head again.

"There, she's lost her senses; I knew she would," said Dotty, walking the floor.

"Do stop that, Dot. She has her senses as clear as you have. When she says *turkey-wash*, she means a Turkish bath; it takes me to interpret. She had a very gentle Turkish bath once. Liked it—didn't you, Fly? Can't you rub her real hard with a crash towel, girls? That will be almost as good."

"Of course we can," said Prudy, forgetting her gust of indignation entirely; "and what could be nicer than this little bathroom, with the silver faucets and ivory tub. Come, Fly, and have your turkey-wash. 'Twill make you feel a great deal better."

After a nice bath, at which Prudy and Dotty presided, the little one was dressed in her nightie, and set on her brother's knee again.

"Prudy said I'd feel better to be baved," said she, looking thoughtfully at the gas-light; "but now I was baved, and I don't feel any diffunt; I feel just's I did by-fore."

"When can she have taken such a cold?" said Horace; "don't you see, Prue, she can't breathe out of her nose?"

Then Fly remembered the orange-man, and something made her face grow red in a minute; but it was not the white tea.

"Pitiful about my signess," sighed she, and thought she would never, never tell of her own disobedience. But Horace saw the blush and heard the sigh.

"I am glad Fly always minds," said he, looking straight into the little guilty face. "For God sees everything she does," whispered he, solemnly.

Horace never spoke of such subjects to other people; you would not suppose they were much in his mind; but to this precious little sister he gave his best thoughts, so far as he could make her understand them.

"For God sees everything she does."

Fly did not speak for as much as a minute, and then she said, timidly,—

"Hollis, I want to ask you sumpin; does God wear spetticles?"

"No, dear; no, indeed."

"O, I thought He did."

"But He sees us in the light and in the dark, Topknot."

The child winced.

"Can He see Hissself athout looking in the glass?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then, when I go up to God, I'll find He has four eyes,—two to see Hissself, and two to see other things. O, dear, I'm so sick, I guess I will go up to God."

The housekeeper was listening from the next room.

"That child's voice is growing hoarse. I must go and look into this business," thought she.

She knocked at the children's door.

"I came to ask if I can do anything for you, young ladies."

Mrs. Fixfax had heard a great deal of the play, and had been in a state of amusement all day, without seeing the actors; and when she caught sight of them now, she had to twist her mouth very hard, "to keep her teeth in."

The magnificent Lady Magnifico, the ridiculous Dr. Moonshine, and the becaped Mother Hubbard, all replied in chorus, "O, yes'm, we were going to ring for you. Do you see what ails the baby."

Mrs. Fixfax approached the child in such a tender, motherly way, that Horace was ashamed of having compared her face to "a platter of cold hash." She had a strong, sensible look, as if she were capable of carrying a whole hospital full of children through all sorts of diseases; and Prudy and Horace, who had begun to have an unpleasant feeling of responsibility, were greatly relieved.

"You don't think it's anything but a cold—do you, Mrs. Fixfax? I don't know much about sickness."

Mrs. Fixfax allowed herself to smile this time, as her eye rested on the Mother Hubbard cap.

"No, I don't see anything alarming yet. If this was my child, I should just gargle her throat with salt and water, wrap a pork rind round her neck, and put her to bed."

Fly objected to nothing, if she could only sleep with her own brother Hollis. When told she might do so, she tried to clap her hands; but her heart was heavy, and her throat was sore; so all she could do was to kiss him and cry.

"And now, my dears, how do you enjoy housekeeping?" asked Mrs. Fixfax, carelessly, as she attended to Fly's throat.

"No—ot very much," returned Dr. Moonshine, faintly; for no one else seemed ready to speak. "Rather hard on the head of the family. Don't you say so, Prue?"

But Prudy could not answer, on account of a throbbing at the roots of her tongue.

"I see you have been taking an early dinner," contined Mrs. Fixfax, very coolly, as if she had no idea the children before her were half starved.

"Ye—es'm."

"So, perhaps you wouldn't object to going down and finishing off on roast turkey? I ordered the table set for you."

"You did? O, thank you, ma'am!" cried Lady Magnifico, ready to throw herself on the housekeeper's neck.

"I never object to roast turkey myself," said the doctor, his eyes gleaming with delight.

Mother Hubbard said nothing; but she thought she should relish a good dinner as well as her boarders. They all went down but Fly, who was by this time fast asleep in Mrs. Fixfax's arms.

"I reckon the servants thought we'd been wrecked on a desert island, by the dash we made at that turkey," whispered Horace, as they returned to the housekeeper's room.

"How good you were, Horace Clifford, not to tell Mrs. Fixfax about my awful cooking."

"And I didn't tell, either," said Dotty. "But wasn't it *mizzerble*?"

As if Mrs. Fixfax didn't know, and wasn't that very minute laughing over the "tight biscuit" and low-spirited cake!

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A FLY IN TRINITY CHURCH.

The children went to bed that night cheered by a remark which Mrs. Fixfax dropped as if by accident.

"The cook is to fry buckwheat cakes in the morning. I dare say you would like omelettes, too. Do you drink chocolate?"

"She takes it for granted we are going to eat down stairs," thought Prudy. And now her troubles were over. Life bloomed before her once more like a garden of roses.

Horace did not rest remarkably well. In the first place, the bed was too warm. Mrs. Fixfax had rolled Fly into a big bundle, with nothing out but the end of her nose, and was toasting her with soapstones.

"Buried alive," Horace said, "with gravestones at her head and feet."

"I'm all of a *personation*," gasped the child. "My mamma never did me so, Hollis. She gave me little tinty tonty pills,—sugar clear through,—not the big ones Miss Fixfix eats."

"Well, lie still, Topknot, and don't roll towards me."

For an hour or two Fly lay gasping; then she said, softly,—

"Hollis, Hollis, is He looking now?"

"Yes, dear; but don't be afraid of the good God."

"I didn't, Hollis, if I wasn't naughty. When I'm good I'm willin' He should look."

"Naughty, Topknot?"

"Yes, Hollis; I *solomon* promised I wouldn't go ou' doors; but that new Miss Fixfix, she let me gwout, athout nuffin on my head, 'n' I got a awful cold."

"O, little Fly!"

"I know it, Hollis. I was defful sorry all the time. I ate ollinges, too; so for course I got the sore froat."

"I'm glad you told me, Fly; now I know what ails you. But you mustn't ever disobey again."

"Yes, um," said Fly, rolling towards her brother, and crying till the tears ran down on the flannel which was bound around her neck. A few moments after she whispered,—

"Now I don't feel any 'fraid, Hollis; I've telled God. I feel better, 'n' I'm willin' He should look."

"Well, then, dear, that's right—go to sleep."

"And now, Hollis, do you s'pose He'll send my spirrick back to me?"

"What are you talking about, Topknot? Your spirit's in your body, child. Go to sleep."

"No, it isn't in my body, too! I want my nice good little spirrick to come back," murmured the child. "Auntie said 'twould stay to me if I's good."

Fly was thinking of her unseen guardian angel.

It was a troubled night for Horace. Fly waked him no less than three times, to ask him if she had the measles.

"No, child, no; don't wake me for that again."

"Well, you ought to not go to sleep 'fore I do. You're a fast boy, Hollis!"

Morning came, and Fly was rather languid, as might have been expected after such a night.

"I don't see," mused Mrs. Fixfax, "where she caught this dreadful cold, unless it was your keeping the room so hot yesterday, children."

Fly hid her face in her brother's back hair, for she was riding pickaback down stairs.

"And can we go to see that Poland lady?" said Doty.

"If you asked *me*, I answer, No," said Horace, bluntly. "At any rate, Fly mustn't stir a step out of the house to-day."

"I didn't ask you, Horace. I asked Mrs. Fixfax. She is the one that has the care of us."

"I really don't know what to say about it," replied the housekeeper, hesitating. "We will wait and see how she seems after breakfast."

"Rather a cool way of setting my opinion one side," thought Horace, indignantly.

Fly ate only two small buckwheat cakes, but seemed lively enough, as she always did when there was a prospect of going anywhere.

"I don't suppose it is exactly the thing, after steaming her so," said Mrs. Fixfax, as if talking to herself,—she did not even look at Horace;—"but really I don't know what else to do. I couldn't

keep her at home unless the rest of the children staid; and if I did I presume she'd get killed some other way. She's one of the kind that's never safe, except in bed, with the door locked, and the key in your pocket."

"Let her manage it to suit herself," thought brother Horace, deeply wounded; "she knows *my* opinion."

When Madam Pragoffyetski came, the housekeeper went down to the parlor to introduce the children—a step which Horace thought highly unnecessary. He was charmed at once with the foreign lady's affable manners, and would have liked to go with her, if only Fly could have been left behind. Mrs. Fixfax explained that the child had been sick, and must be treated like a hot-house plant.

"We thought last night she was in danger of her *life*," said Dotty. "You expected she was going to die, Horace; you know you did."

"Well, I wasn't going to," returned Fly, coughing. "I knew I should live—I always do live."

"What was the matter?" said Mrs. Pragoffyetski, in alarm; for she knew as much about children's ailments as she did about the volcanoes in the sun.

"Only a little sore throat," answered the housekeeper, still looking anxious, and not at all sure she was doing right.

"Yes'm, sore froat. And Dotty wanted me to have the measles, too; but I wouldn't."

"That is right," said Mrs. Pragoffyetski, with a musical laugh. "Indeed, your little cousin was cruel to ask such a thing of you. I'm glad you didn't do it."

They took a street-car, and Dotty pressed her face against a window, expecting to see gay sights all the way. But no; the shops had their eyes shut. Yesterday how quickly everybody had moved! Now, men and women were walking quietly along, and there was no confusion anywhere.

"How strange!" said Prudy. "I should think it was Sunday, only the boys are blowing tin trumpets."

"Yes; and the babies are going to visit their grandmamas," said Mrs. Pragoff; "look at the one in the corner in its nurse's arms, with a point-lace bib under its chin. That pretty blanket, embroidered so heavily, must weigh more than the baby."

Dotty kept her gaze steadily fixed on the streets.

"It seems so funny for a steeple to be *preceding* from the middle of those stores. 'Tisn't a very pious place for a church!"

"Now I hope Dotty isn't going to be pert," thought Prudy.

"I know what street that is, down there," added Miss Dimple, jumping out of the car with both feet; "that is Wall Street. Did they use to have walls both sides of it? Horace, you scared me so yesterday, I like to screamed. You said there were bulls and bears growling all the way along; but there wasn't a single bear, only a stuffed one sitting on top of a store, and he wasn't alive, and not on this street either."

Here Prudy gave her sister's little finger a squeeze, which was meant for "hush;" but Dotty never could understand why it was not proper at all times to say what she had on her mind, especially when people listened so politely as this Polish lady.

"Mrs.—Mrs. Pragoff-yetski, I hope you'll excuse me, but I can't remember your name."

"That is it; you have it exactly; but never mind about the last part, my love. Pragoff is enough."

"Yes'm.—Well, I was going to ask you, Mrs. Yetski, will you please sit between me and Fly when we go into church? O, you don't know how funny she acts, or you never'd dare take her. I wouldn't laugh in church for anything in this world; but Fly always makes me."

"Does she, indeed! Ah me, that is very unfortunate!" said the queenly lady, looking down on little Miss Toddlekens as if she were actually afraid of her. She took care to put Dotty out of harm's way, by placing the untamable Fly between Horace and Prudy.

The interior of Trinity Church was so magnificent, the Christmas decorations so fresh and beautiful, and the service so imposing, that no one thought of such a thing as smiling.

"How could I have been so impatient, yesterday?" thought Prudy, as she listened to the plaintive chant, "He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

"Why, if you only think of that, how our Saviour had trouble every minute, it doesn't seem as if it makes so much difference whether we people and children have a good time or not."

Here, as they were about to seat themselves at the close of the chant, Fly, who, in spite of her brother's warnings, had been tilting back and forth on a stool, suddenly tipped forward, and hit her nose furiously. Blood flowed from the wound; and the sight of it, together with the pain, made the child frantic. She forgot where she was and screamed. Poor Mrs. Pragoffyetski! Though a good woman in the main, she was rather proud of appearances, and had just been thinking the

four children did her credit. But now! The shrill cry of distress called everybody's attention to her pew. The whole audience were looking up from their prayer-books in astonishment.

"Tut, tut! My dear! My love! Hush, my babe, lie still,—O, can't you stop crying?"

Horace, too, was trying to quiet the child; but Fly sincerely believed she was bleeding to death; so what did she care for proprieties?

"O, my shole!" piped she aloud, plunging both hands into the stream of blood, and afterwards into her hair.

Thus, by the time Mrs. Pragoff and Horace got her into the aisle, she looked as if she had been murdered.

"I wish I was twenty-one," thought Horace, bitterly. "Mrs. Fixfax had no business steaming this child. I believe it has gone to her brain."

The party of five marched out of church, for Mrs. Pragoff did not wish to make a second sensation by coming back after Prudy and Dotty.

"I never go with Fly but I get mortified," thought Miss Dimple; "and now, O dear, I shan't hear those Christmas chimes!"

But Prudy was thinking how sorry she was for Mrs. Pragoff and Horace.

They all went into a druggist's, and, after a few minutes spent in the use of a sponge and water, poor Fly ceased to look like a murdered victim, but very much like a marble image. When they reached Mrs. Pragoff's, she was placed on a sofa, and for once in her life lay still. Horace bent over her with the wildest anxiety, thinking some terrible crisis was coming. As soon as she felt a little better, she began to cry. "O, darling, what is it?" said he, glad to see her in motion once more.

"Cause my Uncle 'Gustus is sick."

"Poh," said Dotty; "crying about that? See! *I* don't cry."

"Well, you don't love Uncle 'Gustus so hard as I do," said Fly, with another burst.

Mrs. Pragoff looked on with interest, and tried to remember whether she had ever heard that children shed tears when they were "coming down" with scarlet fever. This elegant mansion was a very interesting place to visit. To say nothing of things which "made a noise," there was no end of curiosities from the four quarters of the globe; and Mrs. Pragoff was so truly well-bred that the children soon felt at home. Dotty was deeply engaged in examining a sea-horse, when Prudy suddenly whispered,—

"Dotty, what did you do last night with those two rings?"

"Rings? What rings?"

Then a look of absolute terror spread over Dotty's face. She remembered slipping off her auntie's rings when she washed the dishes; but where had she put them?

"Why, Prudy, I *persume* I left 'em in—in—where I ought to leave 'em."

"O, I'm glad you did," returned Prudy, quite satisfied, for she was listening with one ear to the liquid notes of "The Wandering Sprite."

"Why didn't Prudy Parlin ask me before?" thought Dotty, in much agitation; "and then I could have gone all round and looked to see if I'd put them in the right place."



"DOTTY DIMPLE, YOU HERE?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### DOTTY'S WINDPIPE.

It mattered little to Dotty, after this, what happened. She cared nothing about the elegant masters and misses who dropped in to dinner, though Prudy was too frightened to speak; nothing about the paroquets, and dried butterflies, and Japanese canoes she pretended to look at; nothing about the chatting and laughing, and very little about the Christmas plum-pudding, the oyster-pies, and ice cream. Dotty had no heart for any of these things. She was thinking continually, "Where are those rings?"

Fly did not dine, and Dotty had begged to stay with her.

"No," said Mrs. Pragoff, patting Miss Dimple's cheek with her dainty hand, which did not look as if it had ever been soiled with anything coarser than rose leaves; "I am glad to see you so kind to your dear little cousin; but she is asleep on my bed, and does not need you."

Prudy sat at her hostess's right hand, and in spite of her bashfulness, was as happy a child as ever broke a wish-bone. No one who has not had the care of a family can imagine the relief she felt now the cooking was off her mind. But Dotty was wringing her hands under the table-cloth, and thinking, "I don't want to see anybody. My heart is certainly broken."

"Why, Dot, what's the matter? What are you scowling at so?" said Horace, in a low tone.

Upon that Dotty began to smile. No one must know her heart was broken, for fear the question might arise, "What broke it?" Of course her smile was a make-believe, nothing more nor less than a simper. The large boy across the table looked at her in surprise. "Handsome as a picture," thought he, "but no brains."

"O, my sorrows! What'll I do? I can't remember whether I put those rings in my blue pocket, or carried 'em up stairs. Seems to me I dropped 'em in a salt-cellar. No; I thought I'd lay 'em in a book, but we flew round so when Fly was sick, that I shouldn't wonder if they got into the wood-



box."

All the while Dotty went on simpering and saying, "If you please, sir," every time a dish was passed her. Her singular behavior surprised Horace, and when she took three olives, which she very much disliked, and immediately afterwards tucked them under her plate, he said,—

"Dot, I believe you are crazy."

It was an unfortunate remark. A little more, and there would have been a scene at the table; but Dotty, with all her self-control, forced back the tears. "Wonder if he wanted to make me cry," thought she; "but I won't cry. And he needn't think he can make me 'mad' either. S'pose I'd show temper right before these people?"

On the whole, Dotty contrived to keep up appearances, and no one but Horace and the youth opposite noticed her much, or suspected her of being an idiot. But the moment dinner was over, she stole away from the party, and found her way up-stairs to Mrs. Pragoff's room. There, on the outside of the bed, lay Fly, half undressed, and still very pale.

"Gas-light makes folks look *gas-ly*," thought Dotty, "but she isn't much sick, or Horace wouldn't have eaten any dinner. There, when I first got a peek at this bed-quilt, I thought it was so queer; and now I'm going to see what it's made of."

Instead of a common coverlet, the bed was adorned with two enormous crimson satin cushions stuffed with swan's down. The cushion on the lower half of the bed was two feet deep, to cover the lower part of the body, and the one at the upper part not quite so thick, for it was to cover the shoulders. Then a sheet of the finest linen was turned over at the top and sides, and buttoned on to the cushions. The pillows were of crimson silk, the bedstead enormously high, and carved all over with figures of gods and goddesses.

Dotty stood gazing with surprise, and almost forgetting her trouble.

"She must have brought it over from Poland when she ran away, only it's so heavy. But then I don't s'pose she ran on foot. Came in the night, in the cars, prob'ly. Poland's up by the North Pole. I'm going to ask auntie about it."

But the moment auntie came into her thoughts Dotty was wretched again. She went to a window, drew back the damask curtain, and gazed out.

"The night came on alone,  
The little stars sat, one by one,  
Each on his golden throne."

"Those stars twinkle like auntie's rings. Let's see: one was full of little pieces of glass, about as big as raspberry seeds. I shouldn't think glass would cost much. And the other was red, like a drop of blood, with ice frozen over it. That can't be so expensive, should you think, as a string of beads?"

Dotty tried hard to comfort herself, but could not stay comforted.

"You don't s'pose auntie's jewels cost more than my papa is worth? How he must feel to be so poor! If he has to pay for those rings, we shan't get enough to eat. Have to live on crackers and olives. And when we come to the table, father will look at me, and say, 'This is on the account of your naughty conduct, child!' O, dear! I can't speak one word, for it will be true, what he says. Grandma Read will have enough to eat; Norah will set it on her end of the table. Grandma is rich; I've seen her counting over bills in her desk; but how could I ask her for any, when she'd look right in my eyes, and say, 'What was thee doing with other folks' rings on thy thumbs?'

"Well, I know 'twasn't right; but 'twas Prudy's fault some. If she hadn't told me not to so hard, I *persume* I shouldn't. What made her speak up, and get me started?"

"O, did you ever see such a beautiful string of beads? One, two, three,—I guess there are a thousand."

Dotty threw the necklace over her head, and the air became as fragrant as a garden of spices.

"I don't mean to meddle with other peoples' things any more; mother has taught me better. But there's one thought keeps coming into my mind: Isn't it wicked to have so much jewelry? The 'postles didn't wear any, nor Job didn't wear any, nor Moses.

"Well, nor auntie don't, either. Nothing but a watch and wedding-ring. Horace says that's so queer.

"Now, what's the use of it, just to lock up away from the *morths*? I don't believe auntie knows how many rings there were in that casket!"

This was a new idea. Dotty's eyes began to sparkle. They would have made a jeweller's fortune if he could have put them in a gold setting, and sold them for sapphires.

"The rings are somewhere round. I'm sure I can find them; but if I can't, will it be very wrong not to tell, when 'twouldn't make the least difference, and auntie never wears 'em? Ought never to have 'em at all; ought to have the ornaments of meek and quiet spirits, instead of rings.

"Prudy would think 'twas awful not to tell; but Prudy can't say anything to me. Didn't she get mad yesterday, real, shaky mad? 'Twas a great deal wickeder for her than it is for me—her disposition is real good, and mine was born awful. So Prudy can't say a word to me about anything I do.

"And I declare, who wants to eat olives and fried pork? Prudy wouldn't like it any better'n I do. She would *think* she'd tell, but p'haps she wouldn't any quicker'n me.

"All just for two old rings, that never did me any good, and didn't have much of a time keeping house, either."

"Dotty Dimple, you here?" said Prudy, appearing at her sister's elbow, like an accusing angel. "Why, I've been hunting you all over the house. You mustn't wear that on your neck; it is a rosary; it doesn't belong to you."

"Prudy little knows how my heart's broken," thought Dotty, "or she wouldn't talk about beads. And me wanting to go home so I could 'most fly, just to find those rings."

"I have been hunting for you," repeated Prudy. "Mrs. Pragoff sent a man over to Uncle Augustus's to find out whether they came to-night in the cars; but they didn't. There was a letter that uncle wasn't able; but they'll come to-morrow afternoon."

"That's splendid," thought Dotty; "now I'll have to-night and all to-morrow forenoon to hunt."

"And then Mrs. Pragoff said we might just as well stay here all night as to go home," continued Prudy.

"O, dear, dear! we're not going to stay here. Prudy Parlin? Why didn't you come and ask if I was willing?"

"I did hunt for you, Dotty, but I couldn't find you. I thought you'd like to stay. They are playing so beautifully down stairs. I'm just proud of Horace; he acts like a little gentleman."

"I don't care how Horace acts, and I don't want to play with people that have their hair frizzed. I want to go back to auntie's."

"But you can't, Dotty. Mrs. Pragoff has sent to Mrs. Fixfax for our night-dresses."

Dotty rolled herself up in the curtain, and screamed into the folds of it.

"Why, Dotty, what am I going to do with you? Please come down, and behave."

"O, Prudy, I don't want ever to go down again. I don't want ever to see folks, or behave, as long as I live."

"But, Dotty, all these little boys and girls came here just to see us. It is our Christmas party. You'll mortify Mrs. Pragoff. You know how Fly mortified her this morning. Please *don't* be contrary."

Dotty unrolled herself from the curtain with a triumphant smile.

"You needn't say anything, Prudy Parlin! You got mad your own self, I s'pose you know!"

Prudy's eyes dropped suddenly.

"But, Dotty, why do you want to go back to auntie's to-night?"

"I want to go for something particular. I—" Prudy's mouth was opening for another question. "Because I—I've swallowed something the wrong way."

"O Dotty, not a pin!"

"No; what you s'pose? Guess I've done something to my windpipe. Wish you wouldn't talk."

Prudy, in spite of her vexation, could not help smiling at Dotty's fierce grimaces, of which she got a vanishing view as the child went into the curtain again.

"If we don't go home, Prudy, I'll have to go right to bed. I don't feel like sitting up."

"Then I must ask Mrs. Pragoff where we are to sleep."

And next minute Prudy was half way down stairs, thinking,—

"What's gone wrong? I never can find out by asking *her*. She don't think or care how impolite she is, and how hard she makes it for me."

It was a very brilliant party, composed of some of the most refined and accomplished little people in the city of New York. Such fine dresses and such die-away manners overawed Prudy. She did wish her mamma had sent a thin summer dress in the trunk. It was dreadful to have to wear woollen, high-necked and long-sleeved. It cost her a great effort to cross the room. She felt as awkward as a limping grasshopper in a crowd of butterflies. But reaching her hostess at last, she timidly whispered,—

"My sister *says* she isn't very well, Mrs. Pragoff, and that's why she stays up stairs. If you please, perhaps she'd better go to bed."

Prudy was very much ashamed to say this; but politeness required her to make some excuse for wayward Dotty's behavior.

Of course Mrs. Pragoff went up stairs at once. At the sound of her steps, and the words, "You poor, forlorn little dear," Dotty came out of the curtain, looking as miserable as could be desired.

"I am so sorry, darling! I wished you to become acquainted with these nice little gentlemen and ladies."

"But I—I—it hurts me to talk, ma'am."

"*Your* throat, too? O, my love!" cried Mrs. Pragoff, seeing a dreadful vision, with her mind's eye, of two cases of scarlet fever. She was a childless widow, and children puzzled as well as interested her. She did not know what to make of Dotty's confused statement that she "wasn't sick and wasn't well," but undressed and put her to bed as if she had been six months old, resolving to send for the doctor in the morning.

"What have you on your neck, precious? O, that rosary. It is one of my curiosities. Do you fancy it?"

"Here is the box in which it belongs. I give you the box and the beads, my charming dear, for a Christmas present and a consolation. See the card at the bottom of the box:—

"Life is a rosary,  
Strung with the beads of little deeds  
Done humbly, Lord, as unto Thee."

"I hope your life will be the most beautiful of rosaries, darling, and all your little deeds as lovely as these beads.

"And now, good night, and may the Christ-Child give you your dreams."

As soon as Dotty was alone, she covered her head with the bed-clothes, and made up faces. She wished she could push herself through the footboard, and come out at Portland. She never wished to set eyes on the city of New York again, or anybody that lived in it.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### TWO LIVE CHILDREN.

As Dotty lay tossing on her bed, she heard the laughing, and the lively music of the piano, and began to find she had missed a great deal by not going down stairs.

Horace and Prudy were getting a taste of fashionable society. True, Prudy did tire of the fixed questions, "How do you like New York? Have you been in the Park?" asked by girls in pink, and girls in blue, and boys in wondrous neck-ties, with hair parted very near the middle. She was astonished when Mrs. Pragoff proposed games. How could such exquisite children play without tearing their flounces and deranging their crièped hair? But games were a relief to Prudy. When she was playing she forgot her thick winter dress, and appeared like herself.

"I don't believe Dotty can get to sleep in all this noise. Here's a nice chance to slip out, and I'll run up and see."

She was not quite sure of the room, but the words, "Is that you, Prudy?" in an aggrieved voice, showed her the way.

"How do you feel, darling?"

"Feel? How'd *you* feel going to bed right after dinner?"

"But you said you were sick."

"Well, yes; my—windpipe; but that's done aching. I can talk now. You get my clothes, and I'll dress and go down stairs."

"Why, Dotty, I've excused you to Mrs. Pragoff, and it wouldn't be polite to go now."

"Why not? Mother went down once with her head tied up in vinegar. Besides, it shakes me all over to hear such a noise. And it's not polite to stay away when the party's some of it for me."

Prudy resigned herself to this new mortification, and helped the child dress.

Dotty went down stairs with such an appearance of restored health, that Mrs. Pragoff was quite relieved, and gave up her fear of scarlet fever. But Miss Dimple's friends were all sorry, half an hour afterwards, that she had not staid in bed.

Among other games, they played "Key to Unlock Characters;" and here she proved herself anything but polished in her manners. The key coming to her as "the girl with the brightest eyes," she was told, in a whisper, to give it to the person of whom she had such or such an opinion. The little boys were interested to know which one of them would get it, for it was usually considered a compliment. But Dotty did not notice any of the boys; she quickly stepped up to a young girl with frizzes of hair falling into her eyes, and gay streamers of ribbons flying abroad. Little miss took

the key with an affected smile and a shake of her shaggy locks, never doubting she was receiving a great honor.

But when, at the close of the game, the players explained themselves, Mallie Lewis was startled by these words from the little Portland girl:—

"I was told to give the key to the most horrid-looking person in the room, and *I did so!*"

Dotty had not stopped to reflect that "the truth should not be spoken at all times," and is often out of place in games of amusement. But to do her justice, she was ashamed of her rudeness the moment the words were spoken. Prudy was blushing from the roots of her hair to the lace in her throat. "Why hadn't Dotty given the key to Horace or herself? Then nobody would have minded."

Ah, Prudy, your little sister, though more brilliant than you are, has not your exquisite tact.

Mrs. Pragoff tried to laugh off this awkward blunder, but did not succeed. The moment Dotty could catch her ear, she said, in a low tone,—

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Pragoff-yetski. Will it do any good to go and tell her she made me think of a Shetland pony?"

Mrs. Pragoff laughed, and thought not. But afterwards she took Mallie into a corner to show her some "seven-years" African flowers, and said,—

"Mallie, dear, I wish you wouldn't veil those bright eyes under such fuzzy little curls. That was why you got the key. Dotty Dimple isn't used to seeing young ladies look like Shetland ponies."

Mallie's face brightened, or that part of it which was in sight. O, it was only her hair the country child called horrid! After this she actually allowed Dotty to sit beside her on the sofa, and look at the fan which Mrs. Pragoff said Marie Antoinette had once owned. Miss Dimple was remarkably polite and reserved.

"Safe as long as she stays in a corner," thought Horace; and he took care to keep her supplied with books and pictures.

He enjoyed the party, not being overawed, as poor Prudy was. Wasn't he as good as any of them? Better than most, for he didn't have to use an eye-glass. "These fellows are got up cheap. What do hair-oil and perfumery amount to?"

The boys, in their turn, looked at Horace, and decided he was "backwoodsy." Nobody who sported a silver watch could belong to the "first circles." However, when he allowed himself to be "Knight of the Whistle," and hunted for the enchanted thing which everybody was blowing, and found at last it was dangling down his own back from a string, and they were all laughing at him, he was manly enough not to get vexed. That carried him up several degrees in every one's esteem. In his own, too, I confess.

As for Prudy, the girls could not help seeing she had no style; but the boys liked her, for all that. If they had only known what their hostess thought, there would have been some surprise.

"These little misses look to me like bonnet flowers made out of book-muslin. Prudy, now, is a genuine, fresh moss rose bud. There is no comparison, you dear little Prudy, between artificial and natural flowers!"

Mrs. Pragoff was called a "finished lady." She was acquainted with some of the best people in Europe and America. What could she see in Prudy? The child was not to be compared with these exquisite little creatures, who had maids to dress them, and foreign masters come to their houses and teach them French, music, and dancing. Why, Prudy did not know French from Hebrew; she had only learned a few tunes on the piano, and could not sing "operatic" to save her life; her dancing was generally done on one foot. What was the charm in Prudy?

Just one thing—*Naturalness*. She was not made after a pattern.

"It was a great risk inviting them here, and that youngest one seems very delicate; but let what will happen, I make a note of this: I have seen four live children."

Live children indeed! And here comes one of them now—the unaccountable Fly, darting into the room very unexpectedly, rubbing her eyes as she runs.

"Why, Topknot!" cried Horace, making a dash upon her; for her frock was unfastened, and slipping off at the shoulders, and her head looked like a last year's bird's nest.

"Scusa me," whispered the "live child," very much astonished to see such a crowd.

"But you ought not to come down here half undressed, you little midget!"

"What if I wanted to ask you sumpin'?" stammered the child, more alarmed by her brother's sternness than by the fire of strange eyes. "'Spec' I mus' have my froat *goggled*; have some more *poke-rime* round it, Hollis!" added she, in a tone loud enough to be heard by half the party.

Think of mentioning "poke-rime" in fashionable society!

"Tell her she must dance 'Little Zephyrs,' or you'll send her right back," suggested Prudy, who was famous for thinking of the right thing at the right time, and so making awkward affairs pass

off well.

"Yes, Fly, come out in the floor, and dance 'Little Zephyrs' this minute, or you must go back to bed."

Anything for the sake of staying down stairs. Hardly conscious of the strange faces about her, the child flew into the middle of the room, rubbed some more sleep out of her eyes, and began to sing,—

"Little zephyrs, light and gay,  
First to tell us of the spring."

She seemed to float on air. There was not a bit of her body that was not in motion, from the tuft of hair a-top of her head to the soles of her twinkling boots. Now here, now there, head nodding, hands waving, feet flying.

"Encore," cried the delighted hostess. "Please, darling, let us hear that last verse again."

Mrs. Pragoff was curious to know what sort of jargon she made of the lines,—

"Where the modest violets grow,  
And the fair anemone."

Fly repeated it with an exquisite sweetness which charmed the whole house:—

"Where the modest *vilets* grow,  
And the *fairy men no more know me*."

"The fairies do all know you, darling," exclaimed Mrs. Pragoff, kissing her rapturously.

"Your feet are more light than a faery's feet,  
Who dances on bubbles where brooklets meet."

"There! Dancing on bubbles!" said Prudy aside to Horace. "That's just what I always wanted to call it, but never knew how."

On the whole it was a pleasant evening, and Mrs. Pragoff had no reason to regret having given the little party. Everybody went to bed happy but Dotty, who could not shut her eyes without seeing the blaze of two rings, which burned into her brain.

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## CHAPTER X.

### RIDING ON JACK FROST.

Fly slept in a little cot beside her hostess's bed. Mrs. Pragoff, poor lady, reclined half the night on her elbow, watching the child's breathing; but, to her inexpressible relief, nothing happened that was at all alarming. Fly only waked once in the night, and asked in a drowsy tone, "Have I got a measles?"

But just as Mrs. Pragoff was enjoying a morning nap, a pair of little feet went pricking over the floor, towards the girls' room, but soon returned, and a sweet young voice cried,—

"O, Miss Perdigoff, I can't wake up Dotty!"

"Can't wake her, child!"

"No'm, I can't; nor Prudy can't: we can't wake up Dotty."

Mrs. Pragoff roused at once, with a new cause for alarm.

"Why, what does this mean? Did you try hard to wake her?"

"Yes'm; I shaked her."

Mrs. Pragoff now remembered, with terror, that there had been a little trouble with Dotty's windpipe. Could she have choked to death?

Rising instantly, she threw on her wrapper, and was hurrying across the passage, when Fly added,—

"Haps she'll let *you* wake her; she wouldn't let me 'n' Prudy."

"You little mischief, is that what you mean? She won't *let* you wake her?"

"No'm, she won't," replied artless Fly; "she said she wouldn't be *bovvered*."

Mrs. Pragoff went to bed again, laughing at her own folly.

Dotty, it seems, was feeling very much like a bitter-sour apple. It had always been a peculiarity of hers to visit her own sins upon other people. Prudy did not suspect in the least what the matter

was, but knew, from experience, it was safest to ask no questions.

"I'm going back to auntie's, this morning."

"Why, Dotty, Uncle Augustus and auntie won't be home till night. Mrs. Pragoff said she would take us to the Park and the Museum, you know."

"I don't care how much you go to parks and museums, Prudy; I want to be at home long enough to get my hair brushed and put away my things."

Prudy looked up in surprise; but the rousing-bell sounded, and both the little girls had as much as they could do to get ready for breakfast. When Mrs. Pragoff met them in the parlor, she saw two lovely dimples playing in Dotty's cheeks; for the child was old enough, and had pride enough, to conceal her disagreeable feelings from strangers. All very well, only she might have carried the concealment a little farther, and spared poor Prudy much discomfort.

Not that Prudy thought of complaining,—for really her younger sister's temper was greatly improved. For a year or two she had scarcely been known to get seriously angry, and Prudy did not mind a sharp retort now and then, or even an hour's sulks.

While Dotty sipped her chocolate from a cup so delicate that it looked like a gilded bubble, she was wondering how she could get home. She did not know the way, and could not ask any one to go with her without making up an excuse.

"I could say I am sick, but that wouldn't be true, and me eating muffins and honey. I'm afraid 'twasn't quite true last night. I did feel rather funny, though, in my windpipe, now honest."

There seemed to be no other way but to wait and go home with the rest of the children. Dotty tried to think there might be time enough, after all, to find the rings.

They started for the Park.

"May I depend upon you, Master Horace, to take the entire charge of your little sister!" said Mrs. Pragoff, fastening her ermine cloak with fingers which actually trembled; "I confess I haven't the courage; and I see you understand managing her perfectly."

Of course Horace always expected to take care of Topknot. He would gladly have done a much harder thing for a lady who was so polite, and appreciated him so well.

Mrs. Pragoff gave a hand to Prudy and Dotty, saying gayly, as they all five took a car for the Park,  
—

"Sound the trumpet, beat the drum;  
Tremble, France; we come! we come!"

There was just enough snow to whiten the ground, but none to spare. Everybody was determined to make the most of it while it lasted, and the Park was full of people sleigh-riding. It was really a wonderful sight. There were miles and miles of sleighs of all sorts, shaped like sea-shells, cradles, boats, water-lilies, or any other fanciful things. The people in them were so gay with various colors, that they looked like long lines of rainbows. Many of the horses had silver-mounted harnesses, and on their necks stood up little silver trees, branching out into sleigh-bells, and sprinkling the air with merry music.

"See, children, let us ride in this beautiful sleigh; it is shaped like a Spanish gondola, and we ought to have music as we float."

"Fly can sing the 'Shepherd's Pipe coming over the Mountains,'" said Dotty; and forthwith the child began to warble the softest, sweetest music from her wonderful little throat. Dotty queried privately why it should be called the shepherd's *pipe*: how could a shepherd smoke while he sang?

"O, how beautiful!" said everybody, when the music ceased.

They meant that everything was beautiful. The air was so balmy, and the sky so soft, that you might fancy the sun was walking in his sleep, writing his dreams on the white clouds.

"Splendid!" exclaimed Fly, forgetting, perhaps, that she was not a flying-fish, and trying to dive head first out of the gondola.

"Tell me, children, if you don't think our Park is very fine?"

"Yes'm," was the faint reply in chorus.

"Why don't you say, 'We never saw the like before?'"

"O, we have, you know, ma'am," said Prudy; "it's just like riding round Willow-brook."

"Fie! don't tell me there's anything so beautiful in Maine! I expect you to be enchanted every step of the way. Look at this pond, with, the swans sailing on it."

"O, yes; those are beauties," cried Dotty; "I never saw any but cotton flannel ones before. But do you think the pond is as pretty as Bottomless Pond, Prudy, where Uncle Henry goes for pitcher-plants?"

"You prosy little creature," said Mrs. Pragoff, laughing; "I am afraid you don't admire these picturesque rocks and tree-stumps as you should."

Dotty thought this was certainly a jest.

"Pity there's so many. Why don't they hire men to dig 'em up by the roots?"

Horace smiled on Dotty patronizingly.

"They'll do it some time, Dot. The Park is new. Things can't be finished in a minute, even in New York."

Mrs. Pragoff smiled quietly, but was too polite to tell Horace the rocks had been brought there as an ornament, at great expense.

"I like the Park, if it isn't finished," said Prudy, summoning all her enthusiasm; "I know you'll laugh, Horace, but I like it better for the rocks; they make it look like home."

The ride would have seemed perfect to everybody; only a wee sleigh passed them, drawn by a pair of goats, and Fly thought at once how much better a "goat-hossy" must be than a "growned-up hossy, that didn't have no horns." She thought about it so much, that at last she could contain herself no longer. "There was little girls in that pony-sleigh, Miss Perdigoff, with a boy a-drivin.' 'Haps they'd let me go, too, if *you* asked 'em, Miss Perdigoff. My mamma don't 'low me to trouble nobody, and I shan't; only I thought I'd let you know I wanted to go, Miss Perdigoff."

Mrs. Pragoff laughed heartily, and thought Fly should certainly have a ride, "ahind the goat-horses;" but it was not possible, as the cunning little sleigh was engaged for hours in advance.

A visit to the Zoological Gardens comforted the little one, however, after she got over her first fear of the animals. There they saw a vulture, like a lady in a cell, looking sadly out of a window, the train of her grey and brown dress trailing on the ground. Horace thought of Lady Jane Grey in prison.

There was a white stork holding his red nose against his bosom, as if to warm it. A red macaw peeling an apple with his bill. Brown ostriches, like camels, walking slowly about, as if they had great care on their minds.

Green monkeys biting sticks and climbing bars. A spotted leopard, licking his feet like a cat. A fierce panther, looking out of a window in the same discontented mood as the vulture.

"See him stoop down," said Dotty; "he makes as much bones of himself as he can."

A horned owl, with eyes like auntie's when she looks "stonished."

An eagle, with a face, Horace said, like a very cute lawyer.

A "speckled bear," without any spectacles. A "nelephant" like a great hill of stone, and a baby "nelephant," with ears like ruffled aprons.

An anaconda that "kept making a dandelion of himself."

A great grizzly bear hugging a young grizzly daughter.

"Who made that *grizzle*?" asked Fly, disgusted.

"God."

"Why did He? I wouldn't!—Miss Perdegoff, which does God love best, great ugly *grizzles* or hunkydory little parrots?"

"O, fie!" said Mrs. Pragoff, really shocked; "where did a well-bred child like you ever hear such a coarse word as that?"

"Hollis says hunkydory," replied Fly, with her finger in her mouth, while Horace pretended to be absorbed in a monkey.

Mrs. Pragoff turned the subject.

"Tell me, children, which do you consider the most wonderful animal you have ever seen?"

"The lion," replied Prudy.

"The whale," said Dotty. "Which do you, Mrs. Pragoff?"

"This sort of animal, that *thinks*," replied the lady, touching Dotty's shoulder: "this shows the most amazing power of all."

"You don't mean to call me an animal," said Dotty, with a slight shade of resentment in her voice.

"Why, little sister, I just hope you're not a vegetable! Don't you know we are all animals that breathe?"

"O, are we? Then I don't care," said Dotty, and serenely followed the others up stairs, "where the dried things were."

Next they went to Wood's Museum, and saw greater wonders still.

The "Sleeping Beauty," dreaming of the Prince, with lips just parted and breath very gently coming and going. Dotty would not believe at first that her waxen bosom palpitated by clockwork.

There were distorted mirrors, which Horace held Flyaway up to peep into, that he might enjoy her bewilderment when she saw her face twisted into strange shapes.

The Cardiff Giant, which Horace said "you might depend upon was a hoax."

An Egyptian dromedary, which Fly "just knew" had a sore throat; and a stuffed gorilla in "buffalo coat and leather gloves."

Then they had a lunch at Delmonico's, quite as good, Prudy admitted, "as what you found in Boston."

After this, to Dotty's dismay, they went to the Academy of Design, and criticised pictures.

The statue of Eve Horace regarded with some contempt. "No wonder she didn't know any better than to eat the apple! What do you expect of a woman with such a small head as that? Look here who do you suppose was Eve's shoemaker? Cain?"

"Shoemaker? Why, Horace, she's barefoot."

"So she is, now, Dot; but she's worn shoes long enough to cramp her toes."

"Strange I never noticed that before," said Mrs. Pragoff. "I think the sculptor ought to know your criticism, Master Horace."

"She's a woman that understands what a boy is worth," thought Horace, very much flattered. "Tell you what, I never saw a more sensible person than Mrs. Pragoff."

"Now, dears, shall we go to Stewart's?"

"O, no'm; please don't," cried Dotty. "Because," added she, checking herself, "their curtains are all down; and don't you s'spose Mr. Stewart and the clerks have gone off somewhere?"

Mrs. Pragoff laughed, but, concluding the child was very tired, proposed going home; and, to Dotty's great joy, they started at once.

"I shall so grieve to part with you!" said Mrs. Pragoff, as they went along. "I wish you were mine to keep, every soul of you."

But Dotty noticed that while she spoke she was looking at Prudy.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE JEWEL CABINET.

Alas for the diamond and the ruby rings! New York is "a city of magnificent distances," and by the time the children were safely at home, there was a great stir through the house. Colonel Allen and wife had come. Too late now to think of hunting for anything.

"Where are my little folks?" rang Uncle Augustus's cheery voice through the hall; and in he came, not looking ill in the least. His eyes were as black as ever, and he carried just as much flesh on his tall, large frame. Somehow, he cheered one's heart like an open fire. So did Aunt Madge. There wasn't so much of her in size, but there was what you might call a "warm tone" over her whole face, which made you think of sunshine and fair weather. So in walked "an open fire" and a "ray of sunshine," and "took off their things." Of course there were laughing and kissing; and Fly, without being requested, hugged Uncle Gustus like a little "grizzle."

"Sorry I cried so 'bout you bein' sick. Didn't 'spect you'd get well."

"Beg pardon for disappointing you. How many tears, did you waste, little Crocodile? Why, children, you're as welcome, all of you, as crocuses in spring. But no; it's you who should bid *us* welcome. I understand you are keeping house, and auntie and I have come visiting?"

"O, no, no, no," cried Prudy; "we've got all over that; and I tell you, auntie, now you've come home, I feel as if an elephant had rolled right off my heart."

"Why, I hope nothing serious has happened," said Mrs. Allen, looking at the pile of nutshells Fly had just dropped on the carpet, and at Dotty's cloak, which lay beside Horace's cap on the piano-stool.

"Yes'm, there is sumpin happened," spoke up Fly from the floor, where she sat with "chestnuts in her lap, and munched, and munched, and munched." "I've had the fever, but I didn't die in it."

"She wasn't much sick, auntie; but it frightened us. Mrs. Fixfax rolled her up six yards deep in blankets, and we thought 'what is home without a mother?' And then, you see, I didn't know the least thing about cooking, for all I pretended. I tell you, auntie, it's very different not to have anybody to ask how to do things."



"Such messes, you ought to seen 'em, auntie," struck in Dotty, without the least pity.

"Pshaw! we didn't starve, nor anywhere near it," cried Horace. "I wouldn't say anything, Dot, for Prue worked like a Trojan, and you dawdled round with rings on your thumbs."

At the mention of rings, Dotty blushed, and stole a glance at Mrs. Allen.

"See, auntie," said she, taking off her rosary, "this is my Christmas present; but it doesn't make me a Catholic—does it?"

"How beautiful, my child! A full rosary of one hundred and fifty beads. It is called 'a chaplet of spiritual roses.' Red, white, and damask. Pray, who could have given it to you?"

"A lady that ran away from Poland. Now don't you know? Sleeps with a feather bed over her, covered with satin."

"Mrs. Pragoff? You haven't been to her house?"

"Yes'm, we did, and to her church in Trinity; and she made a party for us, and we staid all night."

"That's a remarkable joke," said Colonel Allen, rubbing his hands. "She must have had a bee in her bonnet with all these rollicking children round her."

"No'm, she never; but I had the nosy-bleed on the *pew-quishon* awful. Had to be tookened home. Didn't eat no supper."

"You don't tell me there was a scene in church," cried Aunt Madge, looking at Uncle Augustus, who rubbed his hands again, and laughed heartily. "How happened you to go, Horace?"

"It wasn't my doings, auntie. Topknot had been lying in a steam all night, and I told Mrs. Fixfax she wasn't fit to go out of the house; but no attention was paid to what *I* said. Notice was served on me to take the little thing off visiting, and I had to obey. But I tell you I was thankful she didn't do anything worse than to bump her nose, though she did scream murder, and we followed her out in a straight line."

"And this transpired at Trinity Church," said Colonel Allen, intensely amused. "Rather severe for a woman who worships Saint Grundy."

"Saint who? I thought she was queer, or she wouldn't run away," said Dotty, much shocked.

"Fie, Augustus!" said Aunt Madge, who was laughing herself. "I wouldn't have had this happen on any account. Mrs. Pragoff asked me, before the children came, if I would let them visit her; but I gave her no decided answer; thought, perhaps I might go with them just to drink tea. But the idea of her taking them while I was gone! And her house so full of elegant little trifles! How much did Fly break?"

"Nothing, auntie," replied Horace. "I didn't let her stir but I was after her. I flatter myself I saved considerable property."

"There, Margery, don't mind it," said Uncle Augustus. "Mrs. Pragoff needed all this mortification to humble her pride. Come here, Fly; here's a bonbon for you. They say you are going about doing good without any more intention of it than the goose that saved Rome."

"That reminds me to inquire," said Aunt Madge, "if Fly's blind girl came that day?"

"Yes, auntie, and she was so sorry you were gone; but they will be here again to-morrow."

"It was too bad to disappoint her," said Aunt Madge, with such lovely pity in her face that Prudy seized one of her hands and kissed it.

"I tell you what it is," broke in Dotty; "I always thought Mrs. Pragoff must be queer as soon as I heard she came from Poland, where grandma's cropple-crown hen came from; don't you remember, Prudy? the one that hatched the duck's eggs. But I didn't know she worshipped things. Only I noticed that she didn't buy any black pins when those pitiful little boys ran after us, and said, 'O, lady! please, lady!' I thought that was mean."

"Miss Dotty Dimple, come sit on my knee, and let me explain. Mrs. Pragoff is no heathen. She only loves to dress elegantly, and your auntie and I sometimes think she cares too much about it, and about what other people say. That was what I meant by her 'worshipping Saint Grundy;' but it was ill-natured of me to criticise her. As for the black pins, she is a remarkably benevolent woman, Puss; but she can't buy black pins *all* the time; you may set that down as a fact. Why, Fly, what now?"

The child had snapped her bonbon, and, instead of candy, had found a red paper riding cap trimmed with gold fringe; with this on her head, she was climbing the drop-light, à la monkey. Fortunately the gas had been lighted only in the chandelier; but three inches more, and Fly's gold tassels would have been on fire. Uncle Augustus rose in alarm; but Horace laughed, believing the little witch could be trusted to keep out of fire and water.

After dinner, as they were returning to the parlor, Uncle Augustus said to his wife,—

"Between us, Margery, I don't believe you'd dare invite that little will-o'-the-wisp here again without her mother."

"Never," returned auntie, laughing,—

"'Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun."

They all sat chatting around the parlor fire,—Uncle Augustus always would have an open fire,—when Dotty slipped out unobserved, and went round the house hunting for the lost rings. She went first to auntie's chamber, and looked in the blue pocket; but it was empty. The wardrobe and closet had been restored to perfect order, and the jewel cabinet was not to be seen. Then she went slowly along to the housekeeper's room, and knocked, with her heart in her mouth.

"How do you do, Mrs. Fixfax? Isn't it nice to get that old stove out? I thought you'd let me come in and look to see if I've—I've left anything."

"Certainly, dear. What have you lost?" Mrs. Fixfax went on with her reading, and did not seem to hear Dotty's muttered answer about "running round so when Fly was sick. Didn't know but she'd put—wasn't sure.—Guessed not."

"Why, you see," said Dotty, to herself, as she left the room with downcast eyes, "it's no use to hunt there. Cupboard's gone, stove's gone. Nothing in the bathroom but soap and towels. I believe auntie's cat has swallowed those rings."

She went back to Mrs. Allen's room, turned the gas higher, and looked mournfully at herself in the glass.

"Shall I tell her the truth, that they're gone, and I lost them? Would my dear Aunt Madge go and take all father's money away? Mother says we must do what is right, and God will take care of the rest."

Just then Fly entered, followed by Mrs. Allen.

"You here, Dotty? I see my chamber is in excellent order. Let me look at the drawers. What? My jewel cabinet? Didn't I lock that in the safe? All right, no doubt, but I'll examine it."

She wheeled up a little easy-chair, sat down, and poured the jewels into her lap. What were Dotty's feelings as she stood there looking on? The gas-light seemed to turn the glittering diamonds into points of flame; but Dotty could not help gazing.

Why, what was that? Did her eyes deceive her? That ring with glass raspberry seeds! And, O, was it possible? The one like a drop of blood with ice frozen over it! Both there.

She learned afterwards that Mrs. Fixfax had found the rings in the bottom of the ivory bathing-tub, where Fly had had her "turkey wash."

Hark! Auntie was counting: "One, two, three, four. All safe. Not that I supposed any one would meddle with my cabinet, of course."

"Auntie," burst forth Dotty, her face tingling with shame, "I did. I wore two of those rings, and lost 'em off my thumbs. I don't see how they ever came back in that cabinet, for the only thing I know certain true is, I never put 'em there. O, auntie, if I had't found 'em, I was 'most afraid to tell you about it, because my father's so poor."

"Child, child, you wouldn't have deceived me? I could bear anything better than that. And, Dotty, I don't believe it of you. You would have told the truth."

"Yes, auntie, I do guess I should. It's better to eat fried pork than to act out a lie." What the truth had to do with eating fried pork, Aunt Madge could not imagine; but she assured Dotty she fully believed her when she promised not to meddle in future; and the child bounded down stairs with a heart like a bubble.

Fly had come up to go to bed.

"I've found sumpin," cried she, peeping into a basket behind the door. "It's got eyes, and I know it's a doggie."

"You little rogue! I didn't mean you should see that dog to-night."

"O, it's no matter 'bout me. If *Dotty'd* seen it, she'd been '*spectin'* it!"

The quick-witted child knew just as well then as she did next morning, that the dog—a King Charles spaniel—was intended for her. Mrs. Allen was so amused that she could scarcely sing Fly's by-low hymn:—

"Sleep, little one, like a lamb in the fold.  
Shut from the tempest, safe from the cold;  
Sleep, little one, like a star in the sky,  
Wrapped in a cloud, while the storm-wind sweeps by."

It was quite as hard to keep a grave face when Fly added to her evening prayer the petition,—

"God f'give me speakin' a naughty word '*fore Miss Perdigoff.*'"

"What naughty word, darling?"

"Hunkydory," replied Fly, with a deep sense of guilt. Not that she thought it wrong to use a coarse word, only wrong to use it "'fore Miss Perdigoff."

Aunt Madge entered into a short explanation of the true nature of right and wrong; but her words were thrown away, for that "curly dog" filled every nook and corner of Fly's little mind.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### "FOLDED EYES."

"Folded eyes see brighter colors  
Than the open ever do."

It stormed next day; but as "brooks don't mind the weather," Maria and her mother appeared again. When Aunt Madge went down to see them, Maria was sitting near the dining-room door, the scarlet spots of excitement coming and going in her cheeks. She could think of nothing but the wonderful, unknown doctor, who would know in one moment whether she could ever see or not.

"We hadn't ought to have come in this snow-storm, ma'am," said Mrs. Brooks; "but poor Maria, she couldn't be denied. She said she must come, whether or no. But of course we don't hold you to your promise, ma'am, and I hope you don't think we're that sort of folks."

While Mrs. Brooks was talking, with her nose moving up and down, Maria's face was turned towards Mrs. Allen, her quick ears eager to catch the first sound of her voice. What if the word should be No? But Aunt Madge was never known to break a child's heart.

"Who minds a snow-storm?" said she, gayly. "I love it as well as any snow-bird. I am very sorry you were disappointed the other day. I'll have my wraps on in two minutes."

The children watched from the bay-window as John came round with the carriage, and the three ladies got in.

"She's a rare one," remarked Horace, with a sweep of his thumb.

"Who? Maria?"

"No, Dot; the one in front; the handsomest woman in the city of New York. Tell you what, 'tisn't everybody would go round and look up the poor the way she does; and she rich as mud, too."

"Why, Horace, that's the very reason she ought to do it. What would be the use of her being rich if she didn't?"

"Poh!" said Horace, with a look of unspeakable wisdom. "Much as you know, Prue. Rich people are the stingiest in the world. The fact is, the more you have, the more you don't give away."

"O, what a story!" said Dotty. "The more I have, the more I do—I mean I *shall*, if I ever get my meeting-house full."

Horace laughed heartily.

"What'd I say now, Horace Clifford?"

"I was only thinking, Dot, that's what's the matter with everybody; they're waiting to get their meeting-houses full."

Dotty did not understand the remark, but thought it safe to pout.

"I can't help thinking about that poor Maria," said Prudy. "Do you suppose, Horace, the doctor can help her?"

"Yes, I presume he can. It will probably take him about five minutes," replied Master Horace, as decidedly as if he had studied medicine all his days. "But do you suppose he'll do it for nothing? Not if he knows it. He'll see the carriage, and find out auntie has money; and then won't he make her pay over? Just the way with 'em, Prue. He's one of these doctors that's rolling in gold."

"Rollin' in gold," repeated Fly, thinking how hard that must be for him, and how it would hurt.

But Horace was quite mistaken. The doctor did not say one word about money. He asked Mrs. Brooks to tell him just how and when Maria had begun to grow blind. And though she made a tedious story of it, he listened patiently till she said,—

"Now, doctor, I am poor, and we've been unfortunate, and I don't know as I shall be able to pay you, and I—"

"No matter for that, my good woman. I shan't charge you one penny. Don't take up my time talking about money. It's my business to talk about eyes. Lead the child to the window."

The scarlet spots in Maria's cheeks faded, leaving her very pale. She held her breath. Would the doctor ever stop pulling open her eyelids? It was not half a minute, though. Then he spoke:—

"Madam, are you willing to do exactly as I say? Can you both be patient? If so, I have hope of this child."

Maria swayed forward at these words, and Mrs. Allen caught her in her arms. Mrs. Brooks ran around in a maze, crying, "We've killed her! we've killed her!" and wildly took up a case of instruments, to do, she knew not what; but the doctor stopped her, and dashed a little water in Maria's face.

When the dear little girl came out of her swoon, she was murmuring to herself,—

"I thought God would be willing! I thought God would be willing!"

She did not know any one heard her. Mrs. Brooks rushed up to her.

"You are the best man alive, Maria," said she.

Then she turned to the doctor, calling him "my dear little girl," and might have kissed him if he had not laughed.

"Why, I beg your pardon, sir," cried she, blushing. "I don't believe I know what I am about."

"I don't believe you do, either, so I'll give my message to this other lady. I want the little girl to come again to-morrow without fail. It is well I saw her so soon. A few weeks longer, and she could not have been helped."

"You don't say so, doctor! And I never thought of coming. I shouldn't have stirred a step if it hadn't been for this good, kind Mrs. Allen. O, what an amazing world this is!"

"And you know, Mrs. Brooks," returned Aunt Madge, "I should never have heard of you if my baby niece hadn't run away. As you say, it is an amazing world!"

"And there's One above who rules it," said the doctor, as he bowed them out.

"Yes, there's One above who rules it," thought happy Maria, riding home in the carriage. "If I've asked Him once, I've asked Him five thousand times, and somehow I knew He'd attend to it after a while."

"O, what did the doctor say to her? What did he do?" cried the children, the moment their aunt appeared in the parlor.

"He says he can cure her if she will only be patient."

Prudy screamed for joy.

"O, dear! why didn't he cure her right off?" cried Dotty. "We s'posed she was seeing like everything."

"Why, child, do you expect things are going to be done by steam?" said Horace, forgetting he had calculated it would take about five minutes.

"Well, if he didn't had no steam, he could 'a' tookened the sidders, and picked 'em open," sniffed Fly, who had great contempt for slow people.

"Ah, little Hopelover," laughed auntie, "you're like us grown folks all the world over, scolding about what you don't understand."

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A few more days were spent in uninterrupted happiness. Fly declared "Santa Claus *is* a darlin'," when she received the King Charles spaniel, which, by the way, had not been purchased without the full consent of Horace, who was even willing, for his little sister's sake, to take him home in the cars.

The youth, in his turn, was made happy by the gift of a silver-mounted rifle; while Prudy rejoiced in a rosewood writing desk, and Dotty in a gold pen.

"All's well that ends well." Uncle Augustus was at home, and that in itself was as good as most fairy stories. Fly had the kindness to "stay found" for the rest of the visit, and did not even take another cold. Dotty was unmixed sweetness. Maria came every day with such a beaming face that it was delightful to see her.

Mrs. Pragoff asked for all their photographs, and gave the Parlins some Polish mittens to carry home to their mother.

"I s'pose you know," said Dotty, privately to Prudy, "there's not another girl at my school been to New York, and treated with such attention; but O, I tell you, I shan't be proud. I shall always love Tate Penny just the same."

When the day came to separate, it went hard with them all.

"Just as we got to having a good time," said Dotty, her face in a hard knot.

"But we shall all meet next summer," said Prudy, hopefully.

"I don't want to wait," moaned Fly, going into her pocket-hangfiss—all but her back hair and the rest of her body.

I have a great mind to let her stay there till we come to the next book, which is, AUNT MADGE'S STORY, TOLD BY HERSELF.

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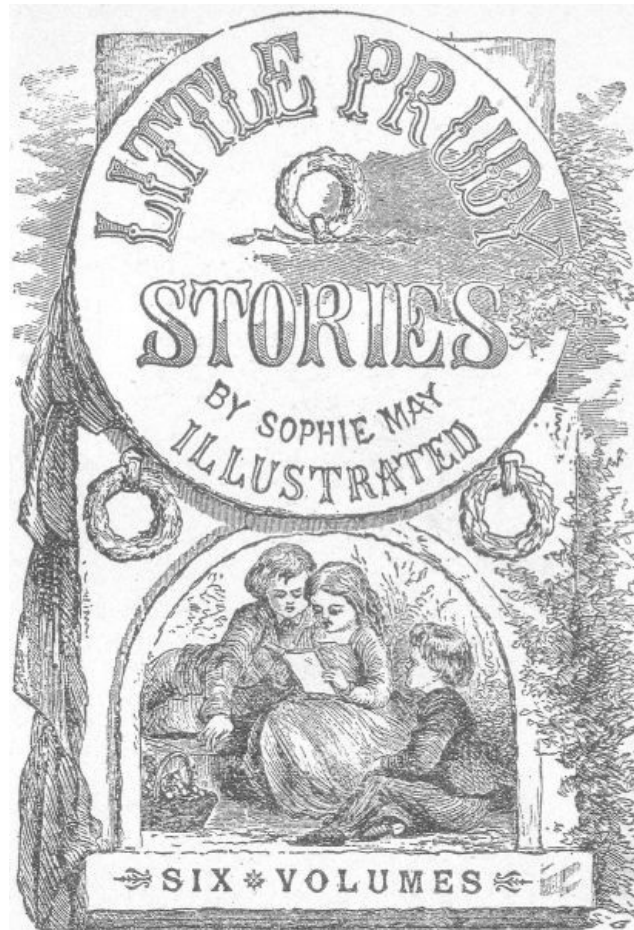
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"There were a few articles to be ironed for the bride; and Prudy had a mind to try the Jewish flatirons; so, with Barbara's leave, she smoothed out some handkerchiefs on a chair."

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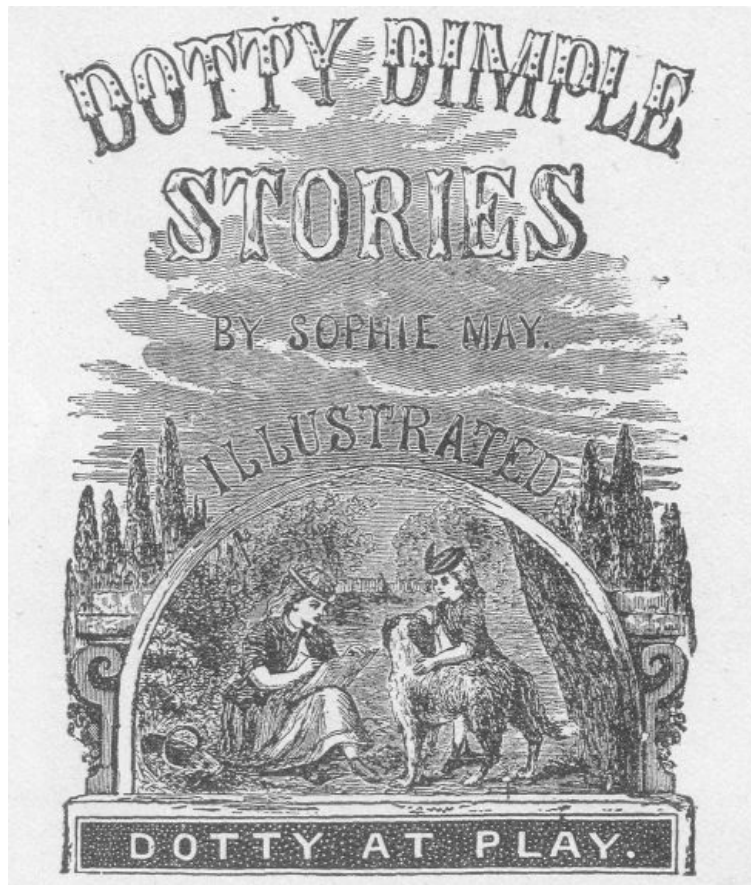
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"'Please stop,' said Dotty faintly, and the boy came to her, elbowing. 'I want some of that pop-corn so much! I could buy it if you'd hold this baby till I put my hand in my pocket.' The youth laughed, but for the sake of 'making a trade' set down his basket and took the '*enfant terrible*.' There was an instant attack upon his hair, which was so long and straggling as to prove an easy prey to the enemy."

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"Dotty's trip was jolly. In the cars where she saw so many people that she thought there'd be nobody left in any of the houses, she offers to hold somebody's baby, and when it begins to cry she stuffs pop-corn into its month, nearly choking it to death. Afterwards, in pulling a man's hair, she is horrified at seeing his wig come off, and gasps out 'O dear, dear, dear, I didn't know your hair was so tender.' Altogether, she is the cunningest chick that ever lived."—*Oxford Press*.

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"As Dotty seized two locks of the Major's hair, one in each hand, and pulled them both as if she meant to draw them out by the roots, out they came! Yes, entirely out; and more than that, all the rest of his hair came too. His head was left as smooth as an apple. You see how it was. He wore a wig, and just for play had slyly unfastened it, and allowed Miss Dotty to pull it off. The perfect despair of her little face amused him vastly, but he did not smile; he looked very severe. 'See what you have done,' said he. Major Laydie's entire head of hair lay at her feet, as brown and wavy as ever it was. Dotty looked at it with horror. The idea of scalping a man."

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