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DISAGREEABLE PATTY FOLLOWS THE  
TWIN.

Page 180.

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*FLAXIE FRIZZLE STORIES*

# THE TWIN COUSINS

BY

SOPHIE MAY

AUTHOR OF LITTLE PRUDY STORIES, DOTTY DIMPLE  
STORIES  
LITTLE PRUDY'S FLYAWAY STORIES ETC.

*ILLUSTRATED*

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## THE TWIN COUSINS.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### FLAXIE FRIZZLE'S PARTY.

"O Auntie Prim, *may* I have a party? I'll give you a *thou*-sand kisses if you'll lemme have a party!"

Auntie Prim looked as if one kiss would be more than she could bear. She was standing by the pantry window that opened upon the garden, rolling out pie-crust, and didn't like to be disturbed. She was a very good woman, but she *never* liked to be disturbed.

"Party?" said she, gazing sternly at Flaxie Frizzle and her little cousin Milly. "Saturday morning, and your mother gone, too! I should think this was a queer time for a party!"

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Flaxie rolled her apron over at the corners and chewed it.

"Well, 'cause it's my birthday, and my mamma said—"

"Yes, and her grammy said—" Little Milly got as far as this and then stopped. Flaxie was her darling "twin cousin," and she wanted to help her; but that tall lady with the rolling-pin was just dreadful.

"Oh, now I remember," said Mrs. Prim, paring off the dough around the edge of a pie. "Your mother did say, if you were a good girl all the week, you might have a few children here to tea. But *have* you been a good girl, Mary Gray?" added she, with a look through her spectacles that pierced her little niece to the soul.

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"Yes um," replied Flaxie, gazing down at her boots. "Only once, you know, you had to set me on the shelf behind the stove."

"Very true. So you see you *were* naughty. What did you do?"

"Meddled," said Flaxie in a low voice, with another nibble at her apron.

Mrs. Prim smiled a very small smile, but it was behind her lips, where the children could not see it.

"Well, Mary, perhaps you have been as good as could reasonably be expected under the circumstances."

Poor little Milly couldn't help feeling as if *she* were the "circumstances," or why did those spectacles shine straight upon her?

"And I suppose you must have the party."

Flaxie gave a scream of delight, and caught Mrs. Prim round the waist.

"O you darling, darling auntie!"

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"There, there; don't smother me, or I can't cook your supper. What do you want?"

"Oh, *may* I have what I want? *Pinnuts* and peaches, and candy and preserves, and jelly and choclids, and oranges and *everything*?"

"No, you absurd child, not everything; but whatever is most suitable and proper,—if you will only run away out of my sight, you and Milly. But go first and tell your grandmother to send Dora to me."

"Grammy's quilting a quilt, and Dodo's quilting a quilt; but I'll tell 'em to come."

"No, no; I only want Dora."

"That child can't be trusted to do the smallest errand correctly," thought Auntie Prim, taking down the cook-book, with a sigh, and looking at the recipes for cake. Her husband was in Canada, and she had kindly offered to spend a month or so at Dr. Gray's while his wife went away for her health. This would have been very pleasant, only Julia went with her mother, and little Flaxie was always troublesome without Julia. 13

Mrs. Prim had said that morning to Dora that she would go into the pantry and make three apple-pies, for she knew how to make them better than Dora; and then she must finish writing her lecture on Ancient History. And now Flaxie Frizzle had come and asked for a party! Mrs. Prim was called a "superior woman," and knew more than almost anybody else in town except the minister; but she did think children very trying, and their parties "perfectly absurd." Besides, Flaxie wasn't her own niece.

"O auntie, auntie!" cried the little tease, coming back again, with Milly at her heels, "we've got to go and invite 'em!"

"Certainly; and why don't you go, then?" 14

"Don' know how; please tell us how," said Flaxie, clutching Mrs. Prim by the skirt, and wishing there was a hinge in that lady somewhere, so she could bend.

"Don't know how? Just go to the houses, child, and ask the little girls' mothers."

"O auntie, we don't want the little girls' mothers!"

"No, no; ask the mothers to let their little daughters come here to tea; that's what I mean."

Then Auntie Prim made out a list of ten little girls, for the table would seat twelve, and she wanted the party large enough to please Flaxie. She thought she would make some of her own delicious tarts and a nice sponge roll, and Dora might mix White Mountain cake and boil a tongue. Mrs. Prim meant to be very kind, though she was sure, if she had had any little girls of her own, they would never have had any parties! 15

"Now, be sure to say I want the children to come early—at half-past two."

"Yes um!" And the little messengers danced out of the house.

"Flaxie," said Mrs. Prim, rapping on the pantry window with the egg-beater, "are you sure you heard what I said?"

"Yes um."

"What time did I set?"

"Ha' pas' two."

"Very well.—And I shall be thankful when it is over," sighed the poor lady, taking down the spice-box.

But wasn't it gay times for the twin cousins, who had all the fun and none of the worry! I wish I were a little girl, just going to have a party, don't you? They didn't stop to look at the beautiful trees, with their bright October leaves, or at the sky, with its soft white clouds; they hopped along, their arms around each other's waist, keeping time to the happy thoughts in their hearts. 16

"Oh, Milly, aren't you glad you came to my house visiting?"

Milly was very glad to-day; she had not been glad yesterday, when they had the trouble about their dolls.

The first house was General Townsend's; and when Mrs. Townsend came to the door, Milly hid behind a lilac-bush; but Flaxie, who was never afraid of anybody, looked up with her laughing blue eyes, and said, without stopping for 'How d'ye do?'—

"Oh, Mrs. Townsend, I'm goin' to have a party six years old, and mayn't Fanny come? Auntie Prim says for the children to come early,—at ha' pas' two,—and she'll be *thankful* when it's over." 17

Mrs. Townsend could not possibly help smiling at this remarkable speech, but she replied that Fanny might go.

"Now, Flaxie Frizzle," said Mabel, as the door closed, "you oughtn't to say your auntie'll be 'thankful'; it isn't polite."

"Yes it is. I guess Auntie Prim knows; she knows everything. But 'fore I'd run and hide!" retorted Flaxie.

There wasn't any lilac-bush at the next house, and Milly had to stand on the door-stone and hide under her hat.

It was surprising how fast Flaxie said it over: "I'm goin' to have a party six years old," &c., without skipping a word; and though Milly had her doubts about the politeness of Mrs. Prim's being so "thankful," she did think Flaxie Frizzle was a wonderful girl; and indeed Flaxie thought so too.

"What, back so soon?" said Auntie Prim, who had scarcely missed the children before they appeared again at the pantry-door, rosy with running.

"Yes um; I've invited 'em all up."

Flaxie said "I" with quite an air.

"Possible? I wonder if you did it correctly. What did you say?"

"I said," replied Miss Frizzle, proud to have made no mistakes this time, "I said, 'I'm goin' to have a party six years old, and Auntie Prim says for the children to come early,—at ha' pas' two,—and she'll be *thankful* when it's over."

"You didn't!" cried auntie, the color flying into her pale face, and her spectacles shining like diamonds.

"Well, I never!" said Dora, and sat right down by the oven-door to laugh. "But they do say, children and fools always speak the truth!"

Mrs. Prim resolved to keep calm, but this was very trying.

"Mary Gray," said she, pressing her hands together quite sticky with dough, "I didn't mean you to repeat the last part of that speech; I didn't even know you had heard it. It does seem to me you are old enough to have a *little* sense of propriety. What can those ladies think of me? What can they think of *you*? I shouldn't blame them if they didn't let their children come, after such an invitation as that!"

Flaxie hung her head. What had *she* done so very wrong? She could never bear to be blamed; and I must relate that she was rude enough to slip out of the house while her aunt was still speaking, followed by Milly.

"She thinks children are goosies, and hates to hear 'em talk," said she, the tears dripping over her apron.

"I'm drefful 'shamed; aren't you?" said little Milly.

"Yes, I 'spect we've done something *orful*," returned Flaxie.

You will observe that she said "we" this time, quite willing Milly should have a full share of the blame.

"I can't stan' it, Milly Allen, folks laughing at us so! Did you see Dodo laughing and laughing and laughing?"

"Yes, I did. She shook all over, and said children were fools."

"My mamma wouldn't 'low her to say that," sobbed Flaxie. "And nobody comin' to our party, either. Auntie Prim thinks they won't any of 'em come."

"Oh, yes, they will! their mammas said they might."

"Hope they won't!" said Flaxie, stamping her foot so hard that a "hop-toad" thought there was an earthquake, and hurried out of the way. "Hope they won't, any of 'em! I'm not agoin' to go to it myself,—so there!"

Milly peeped up in surprise.

"I hate it, Milly Allen; let's run away!"

"Why, Flaxie Frizzle!" was all Mabel could say, for the idea of a little girl's running away from her own party was truly amazing.

"You think I don't dare," said Flaxie; "but I do dare! I'm agoin' right off in the woods, and stay there! And I *thought* you's agoin' with me. You're my twin cousin, and it's your party as much as 'tis mine."

Milly knew this was very wrong, and ought to have said so to Flaxie. If they had already done one foolish thing, it would make it no better to do another foolish thing, as *you* can see in a moment. But Milly wanted to please Flaxie, so she said stoutly:

"Oh, yes, I'm going!"

Silly children! Flaxie pretended she was running away from her party, but she didn't mean to *stay* away. Oh, no! She wouldn't have missed the party for anything. Even now she was beginning to wonder what Dora was baking.

The woods were deep and high and dark. Before they had gone quarter of a mile Flaxie wanted to turn back, but waited for Milly to speak first.

"Oh dear!" cried Milly, trembling, for she had never been in such a place before. "You s'pose it's night, Flaxie? Has the sun set?"

"No, it hasn't. But we ought to brought a imbreller; it's goin' to rain," replied Flaxie, holding out her hand to catch a drop. "I didn't spect you'd be so 'fraid, Milly Allen; but if you *are* afraid, we'll go right home this minute."

They turned, but the wrong way, and instead of going home, only struck deeper into the woods.

They didn't see the sky at all, and all the light seemed to come from the gay leaves and the gold of Flaxie's hair; for I am sorry to say she had lost her hat.

"Ha' pas' two; ha' pas' two," said she dreamily. "Let's go home to the party."

"Thought you hated the old party," said Milly, falling over a dead tree, and crying.

"Well, I was only in fun. Don't you know when I'm in fun, you goosie?"

You see they were both getting cross as well as hungry, for dinner-time was past long ago. In another hour they were half-starved.

"I spect we're lost," said Flaxie, calmly. "Going to rain, too; sun setting. Pretty near midnight—"

Upon this Milly began to scream.

"Well, then, what made you hide behind the lilac-bush, and not invite the folks, Milly Allen?" exclaimed Flaxie, feeling obliged to scold *somebody*; and then she too began to scream, though nobody heard, for they were three or four miles from the village.

They wound in and out, in and out, among the trees; but it was like a little bird putting his head through the bars of his cage. It did no good at all; they couldn't get out.

Thoroughly tired at last and discouraged, the poor babes in the wood lay down and fell asleep in each other's arms. I know it was a pretty sight,—the black head and the golden head so close together, and the beautiful bright trees bending over to say, "Good night."

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## CHAPTER II.

### STAYING OUT TO TEA.

But before the robins had had time to cover them with leaves, or even to think of it, there was a shout from Preston Gray.

"Hurrah, boys, I've found 'em!"

He and half a dozen other lads had been out all the afternoon in search of the little wanderers, and here it was five o'clock. They carried them home on their backs, taking turns, and Flaxie looked up only once to ask sleepily:

"Is it ha' pas' two?"

"Won't she catch it, though?" said Bert Abbott, who was in great awe of Mrs. Prim.

But Mrs. Prim was a just woman, and she thought poor little Flaxie's punishment had been hard enough. Her party was over long ago; the guests hadn't stayed to supper, and had gone home saying they "didn't think Flaxie was very polite," and they "wouldn't go to her parties any more." And here she was, tired and wretched, and scratched all over by blackberry bushes. No, Auntie Prim didn't even scold. She merely looked through her spectacles at grandma, and said, "Children are so absurd!"

And grandma replied sorrowfully:

"Well, they have to suffer for their own naughtiness, and that does grieve me!"

"They ought to suffer," said Mrs. Prim; "it is the only way they can learn not to behave so again."

Dear little Milly heard this, and remembered it, and repeated it to her mother the next week when she went home to Hilltop. She thought *she* had suffered so much that she should never be "absurd" again, even to please her beloved Flaxie Frizzle.

After she had gone away, Flaxie wandered drearily about the house, saying, "Oh dear! what shall I do without my twin cousin?"

You would have thought she had enough left to make her happy. Dr. Gray's house stood on a hill facing the river, with a green yard in front, and a stable and two gardens behind it. It was all beautiful, and Flaxie enjoyed the stable as well as the fruit and flower gardens, for she was very fond of the horses, Whiz and Hiawatha, and the cows and the hens. You needn't tell anybody, but I do pity children who never hunted for hens' nests: it is such capital fun! And then there was the handsome dog, Tantra-Bogus, one of Flaxie's best friends.

In the house she had her "splendid Dr. Papa;" her dear brother Preston, who could whittle all sorts of things with a penknife; her darling Grandma Gray, an old lady with white hair, white cap, and white ribbons; and last, but not least, she had the "beautifullest baby" Philip, who could stand on his head "just as cunning," and "hug grizzly"—that is, like a grizzly bear. Flaxie

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loved him with her whole heart, but there were moments when she felt half ashamed of him, for he was eighteen months old, and hadn't a sign of a tooth; wasn't it awful?

"Perhaps he'll cut one before your mother and Julia come home; I keep hoping so," said grandma, feeling in baby's mouth with her finger, which baby bit hard, like an old rogue as he was.

"Will they give him some gold teeth, if his don't ever cut?" asked Flaxie anxiously. "Preston says they will."

"No," replied Mrs. Prim, who sat by the window, with her little ebony work-box on a stand beside her. "Your brother Preston says very absurd things merely in sport; but you must not be so foolish as to believe them."

Down dropped Flaxie's head in grandma's lap, her hair falling over grandma's black silk apron in a golden shower.

Mrs. Prim looked surprised. She did not know that Flaxie really *had* believed in those gold teeth, and had been comforted by thinking how Phil would outshine everybody by-and-by! And now the poor little girl was crying because it was all a mistake, and because Mrs. Prim had said she was "foolish."

"Run and let in the cat," said grandma; "don't you hear her mewling?"

When Kitty Gray was let in, she came bringing a mouse, and Flaxie laughed to see her run right up to grandma and rub against her dress.

"Good pussy, pretty pussy," said grandma, stroking the cat, who almost purred her heart out for joy. Not a mouse did she ever catch but she brought it to grandma or mamma to show it; but she never brought one to Mrs. Prim. I wonder why not.

"Now let her out, Mary," said grandma to Flaxie. "And go ask Dora if it isn't almost time to make the gravy for dinner."

When Flaxie skipped away, grandma said to Mrs. Prim, "The poor child is lonesome, with nothing to do."

"She ought to do something," replied Mrs. Prim, making a knot in her silk. "If she were my little girl, I should send her to school, to occupy her mind."

"Should you?" said Grandma Gray, hesitating, and patting her white curls. "Her mother said there were some naughty children about here, and she might be led into mischief at school, while Julia is away."

"I'm sure she is led into mischief at home," said Mrs. Prim.

"Very true. Perhaps she would be quite as safe at school. I will talk to her father about it," said Grandma Gray.

And of course Dr. Papa said, "Just as you please;" and Flaxie was sent to school with her satchel and books.

She came home the first day very dirty, after the dinner was cold, and Auntie Prim wondered if such a child ought to have any pudding.

"Oh, auntie," said Flaxie, shaking her flying hair, "I saw a little girl down under the hill, and says I, 'What's your name?' and says she, 'Patty C. Proudfit.' And I thought you'd want me to go down and play with her, and I did."

This was the first Mrs. Prim had ever heard of "Patty C. Proudfit," and grandma knew nothing about her either; but Preston said the Proudfit family had just moved into town, "a whole army of 'em, and lived in that black house under the hill."

Next day, as Mrs. Prim was looking out of the window, she saw Flaxie and Miss Patty playing dolls under the trees. Patty was two years older than Flaxie, but her red hair had not been combed lately, her dress was torn, and her shoes were out at the toes.

"She is not a nice child; I am sorry to see this," sighed Mrs. Prim, turning away from the window. "But as Mrs. Gray is coming home next week, I shall do nothing about it."

Flaxie's mind was "occupied" now, and she gave very little trouble in the house. Patty was "a dear, sweet, good little girl," she said, "and she loved her next as much as her twin cousin."

But you can't be quite happy in this world; and Patty's baby brother, only nine months old, had cut four whole teeth, and I won't say this wasn't a trial to Flaxie.

"Poh, but they're eeny-teeny things," said she to grandma. "Phil's will be lots and lots bigger—when he gets 'em."

Patty came up to the fence one day, where Flaxie stood smelling a geranium leaf.

"How do you do?" said she.

"I do as I please, 'cause Auntie Prim is gone," replied little Flaxie, with a saucy smile. She was really very bold and naughty sometimes, as you have already found out, I suppose.

"Gone home?"

"No, she's coming back to-night, I s'pect, and bring grammy a cap. No, I don't s'pect she'll *ever* go home," said Flaxie, shaking her little head sadly.

"Well, she's gone now, ain't she, this whole afternoon? And why can't you come up to my house and see me?"

Flaxie knew why. It was because she ought to help amuse the baby. Dora had been making peach preserves all day, and it was too hard for Grandma Gray to take care of Phil alone. But Flaxie asked all the same, "May I go?" and grandma never could say "no" when little folks teased, so she answered, "Yes, and stay till half-past four; no longer."

Nothing was said about supper; but the children thought there would be time enough for that, and breakfast too, almost—it seemed so very long till half-past four.

"Very well," said Patty's mother, when they went into the smoky kitchen, where she was holding the baby that had four teeth. "Very well, you may both run out to play, and when it is time to call you in, I'll ring the bell."

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There wasn't much to play with, except sand right in the middle of the road; but Flaxie had never been allowed as much dirt as she wanted, and this seemed very pleasant for a change. It would have been pleasanter still if her conscience had felt easy. She was only six years old, but she knew perfectly well when her actions were right and when they were wrong.

"I never saw such a splendid visit," said she, when Mr. Proudfit kindly allowed her and Patty to feed the pigs. "But *don't* they have the awfulest-looking smell?" added she, gazing thoughtfully into the pen, which was dirty, like everything else about the place. Her own nice frock was already soiled, but she tried not to see it, and not to think how Auntie Prim would stare at it through her spectacles.

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"Why, what's that?" said she.

It was, oh dear! it was the bell; and there was Mrs. Proudfit at the back door ringing it. Grown people are always thinking what time it is; they never forget.

"I'm sorry you can't stay to tea, Miss Flaxie," said Mrs. Proudfit, politely.

"Oh, I guess I can; I'll go ask grammy," replied the little girl, dashing off up the hill, followed by Patty.

"Oh, grammy, they want me to stay *orf'ly*," she cried, out of breath, before they got to the house.

"Well, stay another hour, then," said the dear grandma, though baby was very cross and her arms ached, and Flaxie could have been *such* a help.

So Flaxie went back and stayed another hour, and *then* it wasn't tea-time. She could see some blue and white dishes spread on a round table covered with an oil-cloth, and she could smell gingerbread baking in the oven, which made her very hungry; and just as Mrs. Proudfit was opening a can of preserves, with at least six children clinging to her skirts, who should come but Preston, to say it was half-past five and Flaxie was wanted at home.

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"So you can't stay to tea, after all," said Mrs. Proudfit, putting a small covered dish on the table. What in the world could be in it?

Flaxie dropped her head and blushed. "Oh, yes'm, I can stay. I've sent Preston home, and locked the door!"

Mrs. Proudfit smiled into the oven as she looked at her gingerbread, and thought—of course she did—that Flaxie Frizzle was a very queer child.

It did seem as if that gingerbread never would bake! A cloud came up, the wind blew, the baby cried so Patty couldn't play, the children quarrelled, and the kitten ran round in a fit.

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Nothing seemed half as nice as it had seemed an hour ago; and when supper was ready, that gingerbread was burnt, and, as true as you live, the preserves were sour! There was nothing in the little covered dish but cheese, which Flaxie "despised," and she wished she hadn't stayed to tea, for it was a very poor tea indeed.

It began to rain just as hard as it could pour, and Dr. Papa came for her in the carriage, without a single smile on his face.

When she got home there was mamma, looking grieved and surprised,—the dear mamma she hadn't seen for three weeks. And there was "Ninny," her sweet sister Julia, who had come and found out about her actions, and brought her a new doll.

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"Baby has cut a tooth, too," said Auntie Prim; "but he's asleep now, and you can't see it to-night."

This was the last drop.

"I feel as if my heart was breaking," sobbed Flaxie, tottering up-stairs behind her mother. "I don't care if Baby Proudfit *has* got fo—ur teeth; they're *very* small!"

"I'm afraid you didn't have a good time, dear?"

"No'm, for Baby Proudfit's *so* squirmy and wigglesome! But they wanted me to stay *orf'ly*!"

"And oh, mamma," burst forth Flaxie, at last, "if you'll forgive me, I'll never stay *anywhere* to tea any more, as long as I live!"

"We'll talk about it to-morrow," said Mrs. Gray.

And then she put poor little Flaxie to bed.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE LONESOME VISIT.

Flaxie came down to breakfast next morning feeling rather humble, but nobody noticed her, for they were all talking about the cat. The cellar-door had been left unfastened, and Kitty Gray had come up about midnight bringing a nice fat mouse. She mewed a long time, hoping her mistress would get out of bed and stroke her, and say, "Good pussy, pretty pussy!" But as Mrs. Gray would not rise, what do you think Kitty Gray did, for this is a true story?

She just walked into the dining-room where the table was always set overnight, jumped up to Mrs. Gray's place by the waiter, and dropped the mouse beside her plate!

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"There," thought pussy, "she'll see it now first thing in the morning, before she turns the coffee; and if she doesn't say 'Good pussy, pretty pussy,' why—I'll eat it!"

Of course when Mrs. Gray saw such a droll morsel lying on her napkin she laughed, sent for Kitty Gray, stroked her, and called her "Good pussy, pretty pussy; and the brightest pussy too that I ever saw!"

Even Mrs. Prim was laughing, and Flaxie began to hope her own behavior of yesterday was forgotten. But no, her mother called her into the nursery after breakfast, and said, as she took her in her lap:

"I am sorry to hear that my little girl has done so many wrong things since I have been gone."

42

Flaxie dropped her head for shame, but raised it again indignantly.

"How'd you know that, mamma? Auntie Prim must have gone and told."

"Yes, darling, I asked her to tell. Isn't it right for mamma to know all her child has been doing?"

"Yes'm," replied Flaxie, watching a fly walk on the ceiling.

"And I thought perhaps you would like to talk with me about it, dear."

"One, two, three, four, five," said Flaxie to herself, counting the rosebuds in the carpet. Strange her mamma should suppose she wanted to talk about it! Why, there wasn't a subject in the world so disagreeable as her own naughtiness!

Mrs. Gray waited patiently till the rosebuds were counted, and then Flaxie spoke.

"O mamma, you think I was bad yesterday, but do you *s'pose* I'd have gone off if I'd known my little brother's tooth was a-cutting?"

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Mrs. Gray smiled down at the innocent, upturned face.

"Well, darling, whether he cut a tooth or not, had you any excuse for staying to tea?"

"No'm. They didn't have a bit good supper at Patty's house, and I oughtn't to have stayed."

"Mary," said Mrs. Gray,—she thought her little daughter was old enough now to be called by her true name, so she never used the baby name of Flaxie Frizzle,—"Mary, I do not wish you to play any more with this little girl till I have seen her."

"No'm."

"Have you anything else to tell me?"

"I don' know. Well, yes. Well, I—I—I am so sorry I ran away from my party, mamma. Ever so long ago. I s'pect Auntie Prim told of that too?" said Flaxie, twisting herself into odd shapes, for the thought of that unfortunate affair filled her with shame.

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"Yes, Mary, she did."

"Well, I felt so sorry, mamma. And Milly 'n' I, we didn't get but one tart and one piece o' cake; for auntie had a party with 'em her own self. Do you think 'twas right when she made 'em for Milly and me?"

Here Flaxie's eyes flashed.

"My child, we are talking of you now, not Auntie Prim."

"Yes'm, I know it, and I'm real sorry I'm so naughty; but Auntie Prim *makes* me naughty."

"Mary, Mary, you must not talk so about that good woman!"

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"Oh, I know she's good, mamma. Why, she is the best woman in this town; she's the best woman in the world! And she *knows* she's good, and it makes her just as proud!"

Now Mrs. Prim really was a person who *seemed* to be proud of her goodness, and Flaxie had

described her very well; but Mrs. Gray said again:

"Mary, we are talking of you now, not of Auntie Prim."

"Oh dear, I don't like to! I s'pect you think I don't try to be good; but, mamma, I do! I try real hard. But," said the little girl, patting her chest and her side, "there's something in me that's naughty clear through."

The tears had come now and were dropping over the little fat hands, for in spite of her queer way of talking, Flaxie felt really unhappy about her bad conduct; though perhaps nobody but her mother would have believed it.

These two good friends had a long talk,—the kind mamma and her little daughter who meant to do better,—and when Ninny came to call them to dinner, Flaxie said, joyfully,

"O Ninny, I'm going to begin new, and you mustn't 'member I ever was naughty."

That was the way Mrs. Gray forgave her children; she put their naughtiness far off and never talked of it any more. Is that the way God forgives *his* children?

After this, Flaxie was one of the most charming little girls you ever saw for two whole months. She said it was because Mrs. Prim was gone; but of course it was simply because she tried harder to be good; that was all. Toward the last of the winter, Uncle Ben Allen, Milly's father, passed through Laurel Grove on business, and spent the night at Dr. Gray's.

"When I go home to-morrow," said he, "I'd like to take one of these little girls. Have you one to spare?"

Now he knew very well which he wanted, but it wouldn't have been polite to say so; he wanted Julia. He had always admired her gentle ways, and her sweet patience with her trying sister Flaxie, and had often told his wife that he loved Julia because she was "like a little candle." Perhaps you will know what he meant, for I dare say you have learned these lines at Sabbath school:

"Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light,  
Like a little candle burning in the night;  
In this world of darkness so we must shine,  
You in your small corner, and I in mine."

But just because Julia *was* such a beautiful little candle, her mother couldn't spare her from home just now; it was much easier to spare Flaxie.

Uncle Ben tried to look delighted when he heard Flaxie was going; but it was not till her valise had been packed and she stood by the window prepared for the journey, that he happened to remember it wasn't a good time to take her to Hilltop, for Milly was gone!

This was a blow! Flaxie winked hard, trying not to cry.

"That is," said Uncle Ben, "perhaps she is gone. When I left home, a week ago, her mother was talking of sending her to Troy, to her Aunt Sarah's: but I declare I had forgotten all about it till this minute."

Mr. Allen was a man of business, and very forgetful, or he could not have made such a blunder as this. And there was Flaxie's new and elegant doll, Christie Gretchen, all packed in cotton, in a box by itself, on purpose to show Cousin Milly.

"Well, my daughter, you can wait and go another time, that's all," said Dr. Papa, oh, so cheerfully, as if it didn't make a bit of difference.

"Another time!" That was a little too dreadful. Flaxie felt as if it was more than she could bear, when her bonnet was on and everything ready.

"Oh no, papa, I don't want to wait till another time. I want to go now."

"Yes, let her go," said Uncle Ben.

There wasn't much time to discuss the matter, and Flaxie was so eager that it seemed a pity to disappoint her; so she went.

"Homesick?" Why, *she* shouldn't be homesick! The truth was, she didn't know what the word meant.

When they reached Hilltop, Milly *was* gone. Aunt Charlotte was looking for Uncle Ben, but when he alighted from the carriage there was a glimmer of blue and gold, and Flaxie Frizzle appeared, borne aloft in his arms. Aunt Charlotte ran to the door very much surprised.

"Why, you darling," said she, greeting her with kisses, "we didn't expect you just now."

"I know it," returned the little guest triumphantly; "we wanted to surprise you. I knew Milly wasn't here, but I thought I'd come to see the rest of the folks."

Johnny and Freddy smiled at this very pleasantly; and little Ken, the very small baby, cooed and sucked his thumb.

"I don't care a speck if Milly *is* gone. I've brought a new dolly to show you," cried Flaxie, whirling Aunt Charlotte's head around as if it had been a revolving globe, and kissing her under the left ear.

"And oh, Uncle Ben and I had such a nice time on the cars! We had bread with egg between, and bread with chicken between, and candy and pinnuts. 'Twas splendid!"

"Well, we'll have nice times here," returned Aunt Charlotte; but her tone was doubtful. She knew how suddenly Flaxie sometimes changed from one mood to another; and what could she do with such a wayward little guest, when Milly was gone?

"I like Hilltop so much," went on Flaxie, pouring out compliments. "Uncle Ben's so nice, you know; and Johnny, and Freddy, and the baby."

Freddy threw back his shoulders. He liked to be called "nice;" but Johnny was older, and only laughed.

"And I can go to the stores if it does rain and go up in the *alleviator*, for I brought my little umbrella."

"You don't need an umbrella in an elevator. And we don't *have* elevators," said Johnny.

Everybody was smiling, for it was plain that Flaxie's head was a little turned. She was thinking of New York city, and had forgotten that Hilltop was only a small village.

She had been here two or three times before, and knew her way all over the house: it was a double-house, with another family in the other part. She remembered Aunt Charlotte's pictures, and vases, and ship-thermometer, and the tidy with a donkey on it drinking from a trough. She had spoiled two of the albums when she was a *little* girl, and broken ever so much china; so you see she had reason to feel quite at home at Aunt Charlotte's. Ah, but she had never been there before without her mother!

The afternoon did seem rather long, but Aunt Charlotte told funny stories, and after a great while the boys came home from school, and there was a jolly game of romps. Flaxie thought she was very happy.

"We are doing better with her than I expected," said Aunt Charlotte to her husband next morning, when the bright face beamed on them at breakfast. "I'm so glad you brought her, for I do miss my little Milly."

Flaxie, too, missed Milly, but was resolved to be a little woman, and said to Christie Gretchen privately, "*We* won't cry." After breakfast she spent two hours in the kitchen with patient Nancy, spitting out little ginger cakes, and picking dirt from the cracks of the floor with a pin. Then she danced off to the sitting-room to play with the baby, telling him "if he'd be goody, he'd grow up a doctor, like my papa." She had promised the same thing to every boy baby at Laurel Grove, for doctors were the best people in the world, she thought, and best of all was Dr. Papa.

She was as happy as ever, and singing merrily in the front yard, when the boys came home at noon. The moment she saw them she felt perfectly forlorn, and it suddenly seemed to her as if she couldn't live any longer without Milly. That wasn't the worst of it; she *knew* she couldn't live any longer without her mother.

It was a terrible feeling that swept all at once over little Flaxie. I wonder if *you* ever had it? If not, you can't understand it: it was *homesickness*. There is no ache or pain like it in the whole world, and it seemed to tingle all through Flaxie, from her head to her feet. She ran into the sitting-room, ready to scream. "Oh, auntie, I feel so bad; I feel bad all over!"

Mrs. Allen did not know what she meant.

"Not *all* over," said she, looking up pleasantly. "Isn't there a good spot somewhere, dear? Perhaps there's a wee spot on your little finger that's almost good."

But Flaxie could not smile.

"It's right in here, in my heart, that I feel the worst," moaned she; "'cause I can't see my mamma, and haven't anything to kiss but her picture!"

Then Aunt Charlotte was full of sympathy, for she knew the dreadful suffering Flaxie spoke of was homesickness. It seemed strange that it should have seized her so suddenly,—but Flaxie was sudden about everything.

"Why, my precious one," said Mrs. Allen, taking the unhappy child in her lap, "you know Milly is coming home next week, and in one week more Dr. Papa will send for you to go home. Two weeks won't be long."

"Oh, yes'm, oh, very long! And they oughtn't to have lemme come; I'm too yo-u-ng!"

"Hullo! Is she sick?" cried Freddy, bursting into the room with a great clatter.

His mother shook her head at him.

"I think Flaxie and I will take a ride in the cars to-morrow," said she. "I think we'll go to Chicopee to see Mrs. Adams, who has some gold-fishes, and a parrot, and a canary. How would you like that, Flaxie?"

"Wouldn't like it a tall, 'cause *she* isn't my mamma," sobbed the poor little girl. "And we couldn't go to-morrow, 'cause to-morrow is Sunday."

"Sunday? First I ever heard of it," said Freddy. "To-day is Friday, I suppose you know?"

"Oh, Freddy, Freddy, I can't bear that. It's Saturday," said Flaxie.

As she spoke, the tears poured down her cheeks in little streams, and she squeezed her eyelids together so tight that Freddy laughed, for he thought the day of the week was a funny thing to cry about.

"To-day isn't Saturday," said he. "If 'tis, what did I go to school for? Tell me that."

"Oh, it *is* Saturday, Freddy Allen! Don't I know what day I came here? I came Friday. Didn't I hear Ninny and mamma talk about it, and don't I *know*?" screamed the wretched child, hopping up and down, then falling, face downward, on the rug. "Oh, I can't bear it; I *can't* bear it! There, don't anybody in this town know what day it is! Nobody knows it but me!"

This was funny enough to Freddy, but very painful to his mother, who knew the deep trouble at the little girl's heart. Of course Flaxie didn't care a bit what day of the week it was; she only felt so very unhappy that she could not endure the slightest contradiction.

Before another word had been spoken, she sprang up and flew out of the room. About two minutes afterward the front door slammed, and Freddy saw her dashing down street with her hat and cloak on, swinging her valise in one hand and her umbrella in the other.



FLAXIE LOOKED BEWILDERED. Page 60.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LUCY'S MITTENS.

Aunt Charlotte ran to the door with the baby, calling out:

"Flaxie, come back! come back!"

But the little runaway would not even turn her head.

"Crazy," said Freddy, still laughing.

"I do believe," exclaimed his mother, "that child is going to the depot! Run after her! You and Johnny both run!"

The boys did their best, but Flaxie was already far ahead, and never once paused till she reached the station, where she nearly ran the baggage-master through the body with her little umbrella.

"Now look here, my little lady," said he, catching her in his arms, "I ain't used to being punched in this style, like a passenger-ticket; and you'd better stop to explain."

"Oh, don't hold me, don't hold me! I'm going on the cars to my mamma. *Let* me go to my mamma!"

"Why, certainly," said the man, winking to Johnny and Freddy, who had reached the platform and stood there panting. "*To* be sure! We let little girls go to their mothers. But you didn't think of starting on ahead of the cars, did you?"

Flaxie looked bewildered.

"You see the cars haven't come," said Johnny, coaxingly. "You'd better go back with Freddy and me, and wait awhile."

"No, no, no," said Flaxie, brandishing her umbrella. The boys were too anxious to get her away, and she wouldn't trust them.

"The cars won't be here till two o'clock," said the baggage-man. "Now I'd advise a nice little lady like you to eat your dinner before starting on a journey. Or would you like it any better to have me lock you up in the ladies'-room till two o'clock? But I should think you'd get rather hungry."

He held up a big key as he spoke, and Flaxie gazed at it in dismay. Was this the way they treated little girls that wanted to go to see their mothers?

"Come, Freddy," said Johnny, "let's hurry home, or there won't be any apple-dumpling left. If Flaxie doesn't want to come she needn't, you know."

Johnny spoke with such a show of indifference that Flaxie was struck by it. He was ten years old, just the age of her brother Preston, and had had some experience in managing children younger than himself. As he was walking off with Freddy, she trudged after, exclaiming:

"Well, will you lemme leave my umberella? Will you lemme come back again? Will you, Johnny?"

"We'll see what mother says. What makes you come home with us? Why don't you stay with the man and be locked up?" replied Master Johnny. But he had her fast by the hand, and led her home in triumph.

"What did make you try to run away?" asked Freddy, when they were safely in the house.

Flaxie felt rather ashamed by that time, for Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Ben were both looking at her.

"I read about a little girl that did it," said she, dropping her eyes.

"Well, I'll read to you about a little girl that didn't do it."

"Hush, Freddy," said mamma, for Flaxie's lips were quivering, "we'll have our dinner now, and then I am going to Chicopee to see Mrs. Adams, who has the gold-fishes and parrot and canary. Flaxie may go with me if she likes."

Flaxie brightened a little at this, and thought she wouldn't go home to see her mother to-day; she would wait till to-morrow. Still her heart ached now and then just as hard as ever, and when she was riding in the cars that afternoon to Chicopee with her aunt beside her and her second-best dolly in her arms, she did look the picture of woe.

"Toothache, perhaps," thought a woman who entered the car with a baby and two little girls. One of the girls limped along, scowling as if every step hurt her.

"How do you do, Mrs. Chase?" said Aunt Charlotte, making room for the mother and baby by taking Flaxie in her lap; then turning over the seat just in front of them for the two little girls. "I think it will be a good thing for my niece, Flaxie Frizzle, to see your children, Mrs. Chase."

Flaxie wondered why it should be a good thing; still she was glad the little girls had come, for she liked to look at them.

Hattie was a bright child of six, just her own age; but the lame girl of ten, what a white face she had! What very light, straw-colored hair! Her manners were odd, Flaxie thought, for as soon as she saw the doll Peppermint Drop, she snatched at her and would have pulled off her blue satin sash if Flaxie had not drawn it away.

"Lucy, Lucy," said Mrs. Chase, "don't touch the little girl's doll!"

Then Lucy leaned forward again, and fingered the buttons on Aunt Charlotte's dress, and stroked her fur cloak, with a smile. That was a queer thing for such a large girl to do, but Aunt Charlotte did not seem to mind it, and only said, "I fancy Lucy wants a lozenge," and popped one into her mouth as if she had been a baby. Flaxie stared, and the mother said, with a sad smile:

"Poor Lucy knows but very little. Aren't you sorry for her?"

"Oh dear, why doesn't she?" said Flaxie, forgetting her own trouble in gazing at the strange little girl, who was now stroking Aunt Charlotte's cloak again, as if she did not hear a word that was said. "Why doesn't she know but little?"

"Because she was very sick a great many years ago, and it hurt her mind."

"Can she talk?"

"She only says 'Papa,' 'Mamma,' 'Hattie.' She talks just about as well as the baby does, and they play together half the time."

"Does she go to school?" asked Flaxie, growing very much interested indeed.

"To school? Oh no! *she* couldn't learn anything," said Mrs. Chase, sighing.

But Hattie seemed rather proud of having such a strange sister.

"See that?" said she, holding up Lucy's right hand.

"Why, it's littler than mine, and all dried up," exclaimed Flaxie Frizzle.

"Poor dear, she has lost her mittens again," said Mrs. Chase, wiping Lucy's mouth. "I can't

afford to keep buying mittens for her, she loses them so."

"Wouldn't it be well to fasten them to her cloak-sleeve by a string?" asked Mrs. Allen.

Flaxie gazed bewildered at this singular little girl, who could not wipe her own mouth, or talk, or go to school. She had never known of such a little girl before.

"Too bad about Lucy!" said she, thoughtfully, to her aunt as they got out at Chicopee, and left the whole Chase family looking after them from the car-window. "Is Lucy poor?"

"Very."

"Where does she live?"

"In Hilltop."

"Oh! I didn't s'pose she lived in Hilltop."

"There," said Aunt Charlotte, "now this next house is Mrs. Adams's, where you will see the gold-fishes."

But Flaxie did not care just then for the gold-fishes.

"Auntie, don't you think Lucy ought to have some mittens?"

She spoke cheerily, as if mittens were the very thing, and the only thing Lucy needed.

"And, auntie, I can crochet!"

"Is it possible?" said Aunt Charlotte, thinking how many things Flaxie had learned that little Milly knew nothing about. "How much can you crochet?"

"Well, I made a scarf once for my dolly. I *wish* I could make some mittens for Lucy!"

"That's the very thing! I'll buy you some worsteds this afternoon," said Aunt Charlotte, as she rang Mrs. Adams's door-bell; and Flaxie "smiled" up her face in a minute, exclaiming:

"Red, auntie, please get 'em red!"

They had a lovely time with Mrs. Adams's gold-fish, and parrot, and canary; but after all it was the vision of those red mittens that eased the ache at Flaxie's poor little heart.

Auntie was all patience next morning, and her young niece all smiles; and between them the ivory hook and the red worsteds kept moving.

"Lucy can't say 'thank you,' but her mamma'll be *so* pleased," said Flaxie, her face beaming. She really thought she was making the mittens herself, because she took a stitch now and then.

"What, working on Sunday?" said teasing Johnny.

"Oh, it isn't Sunday, and I *didn't* come Friday, and I *can* wait two weeks to see my mamma. You see I didn't know there was a little girl I could make mittens for, or I shouldn't have cried," said Flaxie, stopping a moment to kiss the baby.

The mittens were lovely. Aunt Charlotte finished them off at the wrists with a tufted border. Lucy couldn't say "thank you," but her poor mother was delighted, and fastened them to the child's cloak by a string, so they wouldn't be lost.

The moment Milly got home from Troy and had been kissed all around, Flaxie said:

"Oh, you don't know how I did feel, staying here all alone, Milly. But I made those mittens, and then I felt better."

"What mittens?" asked Milly, who hadn't untied her bonnet yet, and couldn't know in a minute everything that had happened.

"Why, Lucy's red mittens; don't you know? I tell you, Milly, what you must do when you don't feel happy: you must make somebody some mittens."

This was Flaxie's way of saying "You must help other people." But Milly knew what she meant. Children understand one another when the talking is ever so crooked.

Flaxie had now been at Hilltop more than three weeks, and had become so contented and happy that she was really sorry when Aunt Jane Abbott appeared one morning to take her home.

"Thank you ever so much," said Miss Frizzle, politely; "but I don't care 'bout going home."

"Indeed!" said Aunt Jane, smiling. "And why not?"

"'Cause she wants to stay here and go to school with me," spoke up Milly, with her cheek close to Flaxie's.

"But we thought she'd like to see her little brother Phil; he has eight teeth," said Aunt Jane.

"Oh yes'm, I do, I do!"

"Now, Flaxie," pleaded Milly, looking grieved, "when you haven't been to my school, and haven't seen my elegant teacher!"

"Well, but isn't Philip my brother? And so are Preston and Ninny. I forgot about them."

"And don't you want to see your mother too?" asked Aunt Jane, with another smile. She had been smiling ever since she came.

"Oh, yes, my mamma; I want to see her most of anybody in this world—'cept my papa!"

Milly's head drooped.

"Oh, but I'm coming back again," said Flaxie, kissing her. "And then I'll go to school. Where's my valise?"

She was such a restless, impatient little girl that it wasn't best to let her know till the last minute what a beautiful thing had happened at home. But the next morning, when her hat and cloak were on, Aunt Jane told her she had a dear, new little baby sister, three days old!

Flaxie did just what you might expect she would do: clapped her hands and cried for joy.

"What's her name? Has she any teeth? Has she any curls? Where does she sleep?"

73

"Why, what's the matter now?" said Uncle Ben, coming in as Flaxie and Milly were whirling around the room in each other's arms.

"Oh, good-bye, Uncle Ben, good-bye! I don't know what her name is, but there's a little sister at home, and I must go right off in the cars. I *wish* I had some *seven-legged* boots! Good-bye, Uncle Ben."

She meant *seven-league* boots, for the cars did seem very slow. And when she got home the baby was so small that she laughed and cried again.

"Oh, it's the little *bit-of-est* baby ever I saw!"

Phil had a grieved lip. He hardly liked the little pink morsel in the nurse's lap; but he was glad to see Flaxie, and stood on his head with delight.

74

Mamma looked very happy, and so did Dr. Papa. Ninny went singing about the house, and Preston whistled more than ever.

It was all beautiful, only Flaxie wanted to have a "talk" with mamma, but nurse said, "You'd better go down-stairs to play;" and then, not long after supper, she said again, "And now you'd better go to bed!"

"A queer woman, scolding so to other people's little girls," thought Flaxie.

75

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## CHAPTER V.

### THAT HOMELY MISS PIKE.

The nurse did leave the room next day for a minute, and Flaxie ran up to the bed and nestled close to her mother.

"Now I'll tell you all about it. I wanted to see you so, my heart ached and ached, and once I ran away home."

"You did, darling? I'm glad I didn't know it," said mamma, kissing her.

"I didn't tell anybody—much," returned Flaxie. "I thought 'twasn't polite. And then auntie bought me some red worsteds, and I made some mittens for a sick girl named Lucy, that can't wipe her mouth, or go to school, or talk; and it made me just as happy!"

76

"That was right. Of course it made you happy to forget yourself and help somebody else."

"Yes'm, I know *all about* that!" replied Flaxie, with a wise look. She had learned a deep lesson from those mittens.

"But I don't ever want to go away again," said she, dropping a tear on the pillow, "for there isn't any *you* and Dr. Papa anywhere else."

"Oh, some time you'll want to."

"No, mamma. When I said I'd go there to school with Milly I didn't know about my baby sister. I ought to stay and take care of her, and never go away any more as long as I live,—not till I die, and go to heaven."

But three months passed, and Flaxie had forgotten all this. She was always fond of the baby, whose name was Ethel Gray; but sometimes she thought Ethel needn't cry quite so much, and ought to cut a tooth, and ought to have more hair.

77

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The world looked dark to Flaxie, for she was sick that spring, and a long while getting well. It was a queer sort of illness too. First it made her look yellow and then pea-green, and Julia had to sing and smile a great deal in order to keep her at all comfortable.

"After dandelions, buttercups,  
After buttercups, clover;

One blossom follows another one,  
Over and over and over!"

sang Julia one evening, when Flaxie was making ready to take her medicine.

"Now, Flaxie dear, swallow it like a lady."

"Yes. Dr. Papa knows a great deal, and I shall do just as he says," replied the little girl, grasping her cup of rhubarb tightly in one hand, and a glass of cold water in the other. 78

It was a comfort to see her take her medicine for once without crying, and Preston shouted "Hurrah!"

She was pea-green at this time, and oh, so cross! For supper she had had three slices of bread and butter, and cried because she couldn't have the fourth.

"If the poor little thing wasn't so cross we'd send her to Aunt Charlotte's for a change," said Dr. Papa in a low voice to his wife; but Flaxie heard it.

"Oh, mamma, do lemme go to Aunt Charlotte's, and go to school with Milly; she has such a dear teacher! And Milly's my twin cousin, born just the same month. And I won't be cross if they *don't* give me enough to eat; and I'll take a whole bushel o' pills!" 79

"Let her go," laughed papa; "the bushel of pills settles it."

Flaxie was six and a half years old, and could have gone to Hilltop alone—almost; but as Captain Jones happened to be travelling that way, Dr. Papa thought he would pretend to put her in his charge.

"Did you ever go in the cars alone, Ninny, with your own valise, and a check in your pocket?" asked Flaxie in glee, as she rode up to the station; "and oh, a umbrella, too!"

"No, I never did—at your age," replied Ninny, who was now a young lady of twelve.

"You see Uncle Ben will be there to meet me when we get to Hilltop," said Miss Frizzle, fluttering her darling umbrella against the captain's spectacles; "and won't he laugh when he sees me coming all alone, with a check in my pocket?"

"Good-bye, curly-head; take care of that umbrella," said her father, kissing her pea-green cheek, and hurrying out of the car as the bell rang. 80

"Let's see, where is Hilltop, and how will you know when you get there?" asked the captain, before Flaxie had time to cry.

"Oh, it's where Uncle Ben lives and Aunt Charlotte," replied the little traveller, who had a vague idea that the house was in the middle of a snow-drift, with roses in the front yard and strawberries behind it. "Their name is Allen."

"Well, I'm glad you've told me all the particulars," said the captain gravely. "And I shall be easy, for we can't miss it."

Flaxie smiled and looked at her check. She felt the whole care of the journey, but it didn't trouble her at all, for the captain would tell her when to stop. She "membered" all about Hilltop just as well as could be, but she didn't *xactly* know where it was! 81

It was a pleasant ride on that beautiful spring day, and the captain would have been very agreeable, only he seemed to have a perfect horror of "pinnuts," the very things Flaxie had dreamed about and expected to eat all the way. He shook his head at the peanut boys, and told her he "wished they would keep away with their trash!" If he had only gone into a smoking-car and left her, she might have bought some, for she had her red portemonnaie with her; but then he never thought of leaving her, for he really had no idea she was travelling alone.

She had said Uncle Ben would laugh at meeting her; and so he did. He threw up both hands and cried, "Bless me! what's all this?" for it is not every day one sees a little girl of just that color; but he looked sober the next minute.

"Poor little thing, you've had a hard time." 82

"Oh no, sir, not very," said Flaxie, thinking he meant the journey. "I like to travel alone."

Captain Jones, who was putting the little umbrella into the carriage, laughed, and said he wished he had known that before.

"Good-bye," said he, kissing his hand to her. "I shall miss you very much, for *I don't* like to travel alone!"

Then Flaxie drove off with her uncle in the nice easy carriage, and found Aunt Charlotte and all her cousins delighted to see her, as she had known they would be. She had told the captain they were "elegant cousins;" but when Johnny exclaimed, "Hullo! Miss Frizzle, you look like a pickled lime," she blushed a sort of pinkish-green blush, and thought he had grown very disagreeable.

"Well, I didn't mean anything. I've seen folks look worse'n you do—a good deal," added the little fellow, and thought it a handsome apology. 83

"I'll tell you who looks worse," he broke in again, as they were all seated at supper; "it's our teacher, Miss Pike. She isn't the same color by a long shot, but she's awful homely."

"Is she? Well, I guess I shan't go to school."

"Johnny ought not to speak in that way of his dear teacher," said Aunt Charlotte gravely; "it is not her fault that she is not pretty; and everybody loves her, for she has a beautiful soul."



"Oh, yes, everybody loves her," said Master Freddy; "but didn't Jemmy Glover send her a mean valentine last winter?"

'Old Miss Pike, she's ninety-nine,  
Her hair's the color of a ball of twine.'"

"If she looks so bad, why don't she let the doctor take care of her?" asked Flaxie, thoughtfully. "Dr. Papa gives me medicine three times a day, and I'm going to be real white."

"Oh, Miss Pike isn't sick; she was born so, and medicine wouldn't help her any," said Johnny, trying hard not to laugh at his simple little cousin. "I'll take you to see her to-morrow."

Flaxie set her teeth firmly into a cookie, resolving that she would not see such a monster of ugliness, much less go to school to her, not if Johnny should drag her to the schoolhouse by a rope.

After tea she sat on the front doorsteps awhile in Milly's lap. The little friends had a way of sitting in each other's lap, and it was a droll sight, as they were just of a size.

"Where's Lucy, that I made the mittens for?" asked Flaxie.

"Oh, she's at home, but her sister Hatty goes to school."

"Well, I shan't have to make mittens or anything this time, 'cause you're at home, Milly. I like to be with my twin cousin in a twin house," said Flaxie, twisting her neck to look at Mrs. Hunter's door-stone. It was just like Aunt Charlotte's, only there were flower-pots on it.

"Guess what I dreamed last night," returned Milly. "I dreamed you were my sister; and then I woke up and thought how queer it is that God always sends brothers to this house, and not any sisters."

"Why so he does; for Johnny and Freddy are *both* boys, and so is Ken," said Flaxie, struck with a new idea. "It's real-too-bad!"

"But now you've come, and we'll go to school together, and it's just as well," said Milly, kissing her pea-green friend in rapture.

"Oh, I didn't say I'd go to school, Milly Allen.—Why, who's that coming?"

"Hush! that's my teacher and her sister."

"Which is the sister?"

"The big one."

"Well, she's got the dropsies."

"Oh, no, she hasn't; she teaches the singing in our school."

"But she *has* got the dropsies, Milly Allen, for a fat woman has 'em where I live, and my papa takes care of her; so don't I know?"

Milly said no more, for *her* papa was not a doctor; so what right had she to give an opinion concerning diseases?

The two ladies nodded and smiled in passing. "Oh, how homely!" whispered Flaxie, in amazement; "I mean the other one, not the sister."

There was no doubt about it. I really suppose Miss Pike was one of the ugliest women in the whole state. Her eyes were small and half shut; her mouth was large and half open; her nose was enormous, and turned up at the end,—and, to crown the whole, it was red!

Milly, who had always known her, did not mind her looks. Indeed, so little can children judge of the beauty of those they love, that I dare say she might have thought her dear teacher quite handsome if she had not heard everybody speak of her as "that homely Miss Pike."

"We don't have such looking folks keep school where I live," said Flaxie, in scorn.

"I can't help it if you don't," returned Milly, slipping her cousin off her lap with much indignation. "God made her so, and my mamma says you mustn't notice how anybody looks when they have a beautiful soul."

"Well, you won't get *me* to go to school, not if you give me five million thousand dollars, Milly Allen!" said Flaxie; and their loving chat on the doorstep was over for the evening.

Flaxie kept her word, and Milly went off next morning half crying; but little Freddy confided to his mother that *he* was "glad Flaxie wouldn't go to school, for the scholars would laugh at her, true as you live."

It was rather dull, all alone with Aunt Charlotte and little Ken, who was cutting his teeth and cried a great deal; but Flaxie held out for a whole week. This was fortunate, as it gave time for the greenish color to fade out of her face, and her own natural pink and white to come back again as beautiful as ever.

"I guess I *will* go to school with you, Milly, if you want me to so much," said she at last one morning, when her cousins had all stopped teasing her. "I just despise Miss Pike, but I like the one that has the dropsies, and I want to hear her sing."

Such a hugging and kissing followed this remark that Flaxie felt as if she had said a very fine thing, and started off with Milly, carrying her head very high.

The schoolhouse was white, with green blinds, and stood on the bank of the river, shaded by

trees. Burdocks, milkweed, rushes, dandelions, and buttercups, were sprinkled around, while close down by the river was a narrow strip of clay bank, very nice to cut into with penknives,—as you would think if you had seen the pretty images some of the children made and spread out on boards in the sun.

Inside the schoolhouse it was nice and cool, with a large entry and recitation-room, and flowers on the desks and tables. The teacher, “that homely Miss Pike,” moved about softly, and spoke in low, sweet tones, smiling, and showing even white teeth.

“I s’pose her soul will fly right out of her when she dies,—and *that* won’t have a red nose,” thought Flaxie, gazing at her with curiosity mingled with awe.

Somehow there was a happy feeling all over the schoolroom because Miss Pike was in it, and Flaxie’s thoughts grew pleasant, she could not have told why. But one thing she did know, she wanted to be a good girl,—not pretty good, but the very best in the world,—that that sweet woman might love her.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT.

“Well, darling,” said Aunt Charlotte at noon, “you said you went to hear the singing, and you look as if you had enjoyed it.”

“Oh, the singing isn’t as good as Miss Pike; she’s just the best woman. Only,” added Flaxie regretfully, “I *wish* I could see her soul, auntie!”

Mrs. Allen smiled.

“Wait till you know her better, and then you’ll see it shine through her face. There’s a good look about her that is better than beauty.”

After she had once begun, Flaxie would not have missed a day at school for anything. She had never learned so fast before, for she had never had a teacher she loved so well.

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“Oh, auntie,” said she one day, “I’ve seen her soul shine! It shines when she smiles.”

Milly and Flaxie were the best scholars, so Miss Pike told Aunt Charlotte. But they did not study all the time. Oh, no. Miss Pike understood children, and didn’t *expect* them to study all the time. She often drew pictures on the blackboard for them to copy on the slate, and if they wanted to bring their dinners and play at noon she was perfectly willing; only they were not to scream too loud, or go near the desks, for fear of spilling the ink. She noticed that the little girls were more noisy after Flaxie Frizzle came; but this was not strange, for Flaxie knew a great many games that the Hilltop children had never heard of before.

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“Lesson? Oh, yes. I’ve got that ole thing,” she would say sometimes, as she rushed for her hat long before school-time.

“Spell *ocean*, then,” said studious Milly, following her with the spelling-book in her hand.

“*O-s-h-u-n*. There! I’m in a hurry. I want to get to school to play ‘Bloody Murder.’”

That sounded dreadful, but I dare say was not as bad as it seemed. And one day after Flaxie had taught the little folks all the games she could possibly remember, she thought of a new thing to do.

“See there, Milly,” said she, pointing to a high pile of boards behind the schoolhouse, under one of the windows. “A man has gone and put those down there, and now let’s make a house of ’em, and live in it!”

Milly hugged Flaxie, it was such a bright idea. Make a house? Of course they would! They had made cupboards out of shingles and stones, and put clay dishes on the shelves; they had dug ovens all along the bank like swallows’ nests; but a real live house, what could be so charming as that?

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But when you came to think of it, it wasn’t what you might call easy work, for the boards were very heavy; and with all their tugging the little girls could only drag them a little way across the ground.

“Well, Johnny will help,” said Milly, puffing for breath. “And perhaps Freddy will too.”

She knew they couldn’t coax Freddy quite as well as they could Johnny. The little girls never once thought of asking who owned the boards, but I will tell you; it was Esquire Blake, and he was intending to use them to repair his office, which stood not far from the schoolhouse.

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"'Twill be our ownty-doanty house, and nobody must come into it but us," said Flaxie, gazing with satisfaction at the clean boards.

"The boys must come," suggested Milly.

"Well, yes, I s'pose they'll have to, if they help make it."

"And Ada Blake."

"You always want Ada Blake to go everywhere," pouted Flaxie. "We can invite her for company, if you want to, but 'twill be *our* house."

Johnny thought it all nonsense, but consented to undertake the business. He drove four stakes into the ground, near a beautiful maple-tree, and then nailed boards on the stakes all around, making a pen about three feet high. Everybody looked on deeply interested. After that he and Freddy went fishing. The little girls felt very impatient.

"Oh dear," said Milly, "it doesn't look much like a house. You'd think it was for pigs to live in."

Next day it rained; but the day after, as Johnny could get no peace of his life, he nailed on more boards, till the pen was so high you couldn't see over it, unless you stood on tiptoe. That was high enough; but where was the roof?

"Oh, bother, what do you want of a roof? Hold up your umbrella."

"Next house I make I'll make it myself!" cried Flaxie, stamping her foot.

That amused good-natured Johnny, and he called together some of the boys, to help him put on a sloping roof. Then he sawed a door in the side next the river; and when all was done the building looked so much like a "truly house" that the little girls screamed for joy, and Johnny felt rather proud of his work.

"Tell you what," said he, looking around at the boys, "this is the house that Jack built. Now let's saw a hole in the roof and put in a stove-pipe."

Ah, Johnny! Johnny! it was thoughtless enough to use those boards without leave; but to put in a stove-pipe was downright madness!

The girls were charmed, and wanted a fireplace immediately. Why not? That wasn't much to make, and they made it themselves with the loose pieces of brick they picked out of the old hearth in the recitation-room.

Squire Blake knew nothing of this; neither did the teacher. The new and elegant building was located on the bank behind the schoolhouse, and as the windows that way let in the sun, the blinds were kept closed, and Miss Pike did not look out. If she had only looked out! But then perhaps she wouldn't have thought much about it; for who would dream of little daughters of respectable parents bringing matches to school?

It might be very funny to light a fire on one's own little hearth, and bake one's own little biscuits for tea; but then it was certainly wrong. If it hadn't been wrong, why didn't the little girls tell of it at home? What made Flaxie seize a bunch of matches from the kitchen-shelf and hide them in her pocket? What made Milly snatch that piece of dough when Nancy's back was turned, and run away with it so fast? Children are never sly, you know, when they are doing right.

If these biscuits turned out well, they were to bake some more to-morrow, and have what Johnny called a "house-warming," and Freddy had partly promised some fish. But this was only the very first day of housekeeping, and they had invited nobody but Ada Blake to tea,—Ada and her dolls.

It seemed as if recess would never come that afternoon, and when it came it wasn't "any longer than your little finger." The fire was kindled the very first minute, the thimble-biscuits rolled out, and then the three children sat on the grass around their hearth to watch the baking. Seven dolls sat there too, with their party-dresses on, waiting very politely. There was a dictionary in the middle of the room for a table, with a pocket-handkerchief spread on it for a table-cloth, and Milly had set out all her best dishes there at noon, with a dot of butter, a pinch of sugar, and some bits of cake.

"I guess our oven is slow; they don't bake much," said Milly, peeping at the biscuits, which were placed in a row on a cabbage-leaf at a respectful distance from the fire.

"Let's wish something while we're waiting," said hungry Flaxie, who had only snatched a very hurried dinner. "I wish this world was one big doughnut, with only us to eat it!"

"Pshaw!" sniffed Milly, "why didn't you wish something good,—sponge-cake, with jelly between?"

"Wish yourself, Milly Allen, if you can do it so much better'n I can," retorted Flaxie, putting another stick on the fire.

"Well, lemme see; I wish you and I were sisters, Flaxie Frizzle, and Ada was our aunt come from Boston."

"Well there, Milly Allen, that isn't half as nice as my doughnut! What's the use to wish we were sisters, when we are twins now, and that's almost as good?"

"Oh, I never!" laughed Ada. "Such a *nidea* as *you* being twins! You weren't born the same day, either of you! Twins have to be born the same day, now truly, or they can't *be* twins!"

There was wisdom in Ada's voice, and wisdom in her superior smile. Flaxie raised her eyes, but

that smile was too much for her, and she dropped them again. If there was one thing Flaxie could not bear, it was to be laughed at by a girl of her own age, who knew more than she did.

At that moment the school-bell rang, and, oh dear, those biscuits were not half done! So very queer, too, for the stove-pipe was red-hot, and roaring away beautifully!

The three little cooks were the last to enter the schoolhouse, and Miss Pike wondered what they were whispering about in the entry.

"Dear little creatures," thought she, petting their heads, "I'm glad they've had a good time, for they deserve it!"

She called a class, and everything went on as usual, till suddenly she thought she smelt smoke, and went to the window to look out.

Miss Pike was a most sensible young lady, and knew better than to scream; but I assure you she never felt more like screaming in her life. The "house that Jack built" was all ablaze from top to bottom, and had already set fire to the schoolhouse!

She had to think fast. There were sixty children to be got out, and no time to lose. If they should know the house was on fire they would be crazed with fright and run hither and thither like wild creatures; it would never do to let them know it.

Miss Sarah was at the farther end of the room setting copies slowly, very slowly. She did not look up, and Miss Pike had no time to go and speak to her; the only thing she could do was to walk quietly up to the desk and ring the bell. That meant, "Put up your books." A strange order while a class was reciting; but it was obeyed instantly.

"Star-spangled Banner," said Miss Pike, calmly. She could see the little tongues of flame running along the ceiling now, but she looked as if she was thinking of nothing but music and waiting for Miss Sarah to pitch the tune. Miss Sarah dropped her pen and did it of course, wondering why; and all the sixty voices joined in it, clear and loud, as they had often done before; while in time to the music the whole sixty children marched in orderly file out of the room.

"Now, run!" cried Miss Pike, the moment the last child was in the entry, "run and tell everybody the schoolhouse is on fire!"

She had a pail of water in her hand. The children rushed through the streets screaming; the bells began to ring; the Hilltop fire-engine came out; and all the people and horses and dogs in the village. But Miss Pike was the first to pour water on the flames, and everybody said it was she who saved the schoolhouse.

There was a black hole in the wall, and another in the roof; the books were, many of them, soaked and ruined; the floor an inch deep with water, and it would take a whole week to set things to rights. But the schoolhouse was saved.

"Why, how did it take fire?" asked Uncle Ben, who had been out of town and did not come back till all was over.

The boys looked another way, the twin cousins hung their heads. Aunt Charlotte did not answer. She was wondering which child would speak first.

It was Flaxie Frizzle. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were fixed on the carpet.

"We've got something *orful* to tell you," said she, her voice trembling; "we baked our biscuits, and Johnny built a house out there with a stove-pipe in, and we oughtn't to taken any matches. You better believe we cried!"

"Well, well, you young rogues; so *you* set the schoolhouse afire? And who saved it?"

"Miss Pike!" broke forth all the children in chorus.

"Yes," said Johnny; "but she marched us all out first, so the little ones wouldn't get burnt. Never said a word about the fire till we got out!"

"She always does things just right. She's one of God's girls," cried Freddy.

"Yes," broke in Flaxie, strongly excited; "I don't care if I can't see her soul. I've seen it shine! Oh, it's beautiful to be homely!"

Nobody smiled—they all thought Flaxie was right.

"Yes, it is beautiful to be homely in just Miss Pike's way," said Aunt Charlotte.

And then they went out to supper, and, as the twin cousins looked broken-hearted, nothing more was said about the house that Jack built.

"Oh, Flaxie, *do* you s'pose we've suffered enough?" asked little Milly that night after they had said their prayers and were lying in bed looking at the pure soft moonlight which shone on the far-away hills.

"I don' know. I feel as if I had a pain, don't you? Oh dear!"

"Yes, that's just the way I feel; a pain way in deep," replied Milly, heaving a sorrowful sigh. "And I ought to, I'm glad of it."

"Glad, Milly Allen? How queer! Why, *I* don't like to feel bad!"

"I don't either," said Milly, sitting up in bed and speaking very earnestly. "But don't you 'member what Auntie Prim said that time we ran away from the party? She said children ought

to suffer for their naughtiness; it's the only way they can learn to behave better."

"Well, any way," said Flaxie, rolling her eyes uneasily, "'twas Johnny that put in the stove-pipe, and he ought to feel the worst. I'm going to ask Preston about that, see 'f I don't."

Two days after this Flaxie went home, and her little frizzled head was not seen at Hilltop any more till the next December. Then her dear Grandma Gray had rheumatic fever, and though Flaxie pitied her all she could, she made too much noise in the house, and had to be sent away. But I will tell you about that in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### HILLTOP AGAIN.

"Little red riding hood, where are you going?"

"Going to see my grandmother," replied Flaxie Frizzle, peeping out from under her scarlet hood. "And here's a pat of butter for her in this wee, wee basket."

"My dear Red Riding Hood, your grandmother is too sick to eat butter. Shut the door, walk very softly, and bring me my writing-desk. I'm going to write Aunt Charlotte, and ask her if she wants you at Hilltop."

"Oh, mamma, how elegant! Is it 'cause grandma's sick?" cried Flaxie, dropping her wee, wee basket, butter and all. She ought to have been ashamed to find she was so noisy that she had to be sent away from home; but she never thought about that. She did try to keep still, but as she had said to Julia that very morning, "there wasn't any still in her!"

110

"Oh, let me write it myself to Milly; please let me write it myself."

Flaxie was seven years old now, and had actually learned how to scribble pretty fast. She was very proud of this, for Milly could do nothing but print.

She seized a postal card, ruled it downhill with a pencil, and wrote on it a few cramped-up words, huddled close together like dried apples on a string:

"DEAR TWIN LITTLE COUSIN: My Mamma is going to let me go to your House and go to school to your Dear teacher, becaus I make too much noise, and Grammy is sick with Something in her back and Ime glad but not unless your Mamma is willing. Wont you please to write and say so. My lines are unstraight, and its real too bad Good by FLAXIE FRIZZLE."

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Mrs. Gray smiled when her little daughter asked how to spell *unstraight*, and smiled again when she saw the card and read, "Dear twin little cousin."

"Oh, I know better than that," explained Flaxie, blushing: "we're not twins a bit, and couldn't be if we should try, and we've known it for quite a long time; but you see, mamma, we're *make-believing*, just for fun."

"I never saw such a child for 'make-believing,'" said Mrs. Gray, kissing Flaxie, who skipped gayly out of the room to pack her valise.

She always packed it, if there was the least thing said about going away. She didn't mind the trouble, it was such a pretty valise,—made of brown canvas, with leather straps like a trunk. And she knew Aunt Charlotte would want her at Hilltop,—people always do want little girls, and can't have too many of them,—and it was best to be ready in season.

112

So she looked up her little umbrella, with F. F. painted on it in white letters, her school-books that she had been playing school with all over the house, and a half bushel or so of her best dolls. But as she did not go for a week, she had time to lose these things over and over, and some of them were never found any more.

"Now, darling," said mamma, when Flaxie had bidden good-bye to papa and Preston, and Ninny and the baby, and was just entering the car behind her friend Mrs. Prim. "Now, darling, don't be troublesome to dear Aunt Charlotte, and if you'll learn to be good and orderly and sweet like your Cousin Milly, I shall be so glad."

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Flaxie pondered upon this speech as she sat rattling along in the cars, munching peanuts, while Mrs. Prim took care of the shells.

"Troublesome. Oh, my! 's if I ever troubled anybody! 'Cept Grandma Gray; and that's 'cause she's got something in her back. But mamma *always* thinks Milly is nicer than me! Queer what makes mammas *never* like their own little girls!—I mean, not much. Now Aunt Charlotte thinks I'm the nicest. She scolds to Milly sometimes, but she don't scold to ME!"

Hilltop had been green when Flaxie left it, but now it was white, and seemed lovelier than ever, for Johnny had a new sled, and was "*such* a kind-hearted boy!" That is, he was always ready to draw the twin cousins on the ice till they were half frozen and begged him to stop, and I hardly see how he *could* have been kinder than that!

114

Then the school was "perfectly elegant," taught by that same dear teacher, Miss Pike. What if her nose *was* red, and her mouth so large that little Betty Chase called her "the lady that can't shut her face"? She was just lovely for all that, and Flaxie and Milly couldn't forget that she had saved the schoolhouse when it was set on fire by mistake. After that she hadn't looked homely a minute,—only "a beautiful homely," that is ever and ever so much better than handsome;—and the little girls fairly adored her.

Now Flaxie was quick to learn, but as a general thing she didn't study very hard, I am obliged to confess. When she couldn't spell her lessons she said to Milly, "It's 'cause you don't have the same kind of books we have where I live. The words look so queer in your books!"

115

If Flaxie was noisy at Laurel Grove, what was she at Hilltop? Sometimes in the evening, when she played the piano and sang, Aunt Charlotte was really afraid she would disturb Mrs. Hunter, who lived in the other half of the house.

"Oh, I like it," said Mrs. Hunter, pleasantly; "but don't you think, Mrs. Allen, there is danger of her pounding your piano in pieces?"

But by and by there wasn't so much time for music and play. The busy season had begun, when everybody was making ready for Christmas; and the twin cousins had as much as they could do in talking over what they were *going* to do, as they sat in each other's lap and looked at their work-baskets.

Flaxie wanted to make a marvellous silk bedquilt for her dear mamma out of pieces as big as a dollar; but, finding there wouldn't be time for that, concluded to buy her a paper of needles, "if it didn't cost too much."

116

Probably there wouldn't have been anything done but talking if Aunt Charlotte hadn't brought out some worsteds and canvas and set the helpless little ones at work upon a holder called the "Country Cousin." They had a hard time over this young lady, and almost wished sometimes that she had never been born; but she turned out very brilliant at last, in a yellow skirt, red waist, and blue bonnet, with a green parasol over her head. After this they had courage to make some worsted balls for the babies, some cologne mats for their brothers who never used cologne, and some court-plaster cases for somebody else, with the motto, "I stick to you when others cut you."

Both the children were tired with all this labor, and Flaxie discovered, after her presents were packed and ready to send off by express, that she didn't feel very well.

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"My throat is so sore I can't *swoler*,"—so she wrote on a postal to her mother; for when she was sick she wanted everybody to know it.

Before Aunt Charlotte heard of the sad condition of her throat, she had said she might go with Milly and Johnny and some of the older children in the village, to see the ladies trim the church. But when Flaxie came into the parlor with her teeth chattering, Aunt Charlotte began to fear she ought not to go out.

"Are you so very chilly, my dear?"

"Yes 'm, I am," replied Flaxie, with a doleful look around the corners of her mouth. "This house isn't heated by steam like my house where I live, and I'm drefful easy to freeze!" And her teeth chattered again.

118

Aunt Charlotte looked anxious, as she drew on her gloves.

"My child, you'd better not go to the church, for it's rather cold there."

"Cold as a barn," put in Johnny.

"Oh, auntie, do please, lemme go! I'm cold, but it's a *warm* cold though," said Flaxie, eagerly; and her teeth stopped chattering.

"I'm sorry, Flaxie, but there's a chill in the air like snow, and if your throat is sore it is much wiser for you to stay at home," said Aunt Charlotte, gently but firmly, like a good mother who is accustomed to be obeyed by her children.

And poor Flaxie was obliged to submit, though it cut her to the heart when Milly gave her a light kiss and skipped away; and she did think it was cruel in Aunt Charlotte to advise her to go into the nursery and stay with Nancy and the baby. She wished she had never said a word about her throat.

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"It don't feel any worse'n a mosquito-bite," thought she, watching the gay party from the window,—half a dozen ladies and as many children; "it don't hurt me to swallow either,"—swallowing her tears.

"Hilltop's such a queer place! Not the least speck of steam in the houses! If they had steam, you could go anywhere, if your throat *was* sore! And I never saw anybody trim a church; and oh, Milly says they'll have *beau*-tiful flowers, and crosses, and things! *I* never saw anybody trim *anything*—'cept a loaf of cake and flowers on a bonnet."

Foolish Flaxie, to stand there winking tears into her eyes! *You* would have known better; you would have gone into the nursery to play with that lovely baby; but there were times, I am sorry

to say, when Flaxie really enjoyed being unhappy. So now she stood still, rolling her little trouble over and over, as boys roll a snowball, making it larger and larger, till presently it was as big as a mountain.

"Auntie *said* I might go, and then she wouldn't lemme! Made me stay at home to play with that ole baby! He's squirmy and wigglesome; what do I want to play with *him* for, when she *said* I might go? I like good aunties; I don't like the kind that tell lies.

"Oh, my throat *is* growing sore, and I'm going off up-stairs to stay in the cold, and get sick, 'cause they ought to keep steam; and *then* I guess auntie'll be sorry!"

I grieve to tell you this about Flaxie, for I fear you will not like a little girl who could be so very naughty.

When the happy party of church-trimmers came home at tea-time, there she was up-stairs in the "doleful dumps;" and it was a long while before Milly could coax her down.

When she came at last, her face was a sight to behold—all purple, and spotted, and striped; for a fit of crying always gave her the appearance of measles. She consented to take a seat at table, but ate little, said nothing, and gazed mournfully at her plate.

This distressed Aunt Charlotte, but she asked no questions, and tried to keep Johnny talking, so he would not notice his afflicted little cousin.

"Now what *does* make you act so?" asked Milly, as soon as tea was over.

"Got a *cricket* in my neck;  
Can't move it a single speck,"

replied Flaxie, not knowing she had made poetry, till Johnny, who was supposed to be ever so far off, began to laugh; and then she moved her neck fast enough, and shook her head, and stamped her foot.

"Let's go in the nursery, so Johnny can't plague you," said the peace-loving Milly. "I'm so sorry you're sick."

Flaxie had not meant to speak, but she could not help talking to Milly.

"Wish I'se at home," said she, reproachfully, "'cause my mamma keeps pepmint."

"Why, Flaxie, my mamma keeps it too. We've got lots and lots of it in the cupboard."

"Don't care if you have," snapped Flaxie. "I just despise pepmint. It's something else I want, and can't think of the name of; but I know you don't keep it, for your papa isn't a doctor!"

It was not the first time Flaxie had wounded her sweet cousin's feelings by this same cutting remark.

"Dr. Papa keeps *tittlish* powders in blue and white papers, and one of the papers *buzzes*. I guess he'd give me that, but I don't know," added Flaxie, crying again harder than ever, though the tears fell like fire on her poor, sore cheeks.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A CRAZY CHRISTMAS.

"You dear little thing," said Aunt Charlotte, coming into the room with Ken in her arms, but putting him down and taking up her naughty niece. "You've been getting homesick all by yourself this long afternoon. Where did you stay?"

"Stayed up-sta—irs," sobbed Flaxie.

"In the cold? Why, darling, what made you?"

"You all went off and left me," replied Flaxie, with a little tempest of tears.

Then auntie understood it all,—how this child, who was old enough to know better, had been rolling a little bit of a trouble over and over, till it had grown into a mountain and almost crushed her. And the mother-heart in Aunt Charlotte's bosom ached for poor foolish Flaxie.

"She has added to her cold, and is feverish," thought the good lady, sending for Nancy to bring some hot water in the tin bath-tub that was used for washing the children.

"I shall have you sleep with me to-night, in the down-stairs room," said Aunt Charlotte; "and I'll put a flannel round your neck, dear, and some poultices on your feet."

Flaxie smiled faintly as she saw the dried burdock-leaves soaking in vinegar, for she liked to

have a suitable parade made over her when she was sick. Besides, she had often thought she should enjoy sleeping in the “down-stairs room,” and was glad now that Uncle Ben happened to be gone; that is, as glad as she could be of anything. It was a miserable, forlorn world all of a sudden to Flaxie, and she had never known such “a mean old night,” even if it was “the night before Christmas.”

126

The lamp burning dimly in the corner of the room, on the floor, cast shadows that frightened her; her head ached; she woke the baby in the crib by crying, and then he woke everybody else.

It was a “mean old night” to the whole house; and when I say the *whole* house, I mean both halves of it. About midnight, as Mrs. Hunter was sleeping sweetly, her door-bell rang a furious peal. Nobody likes to hear such a sound at dead of night, and Mrs. Hunter trembled a little, for she was all alone with her children; but she rose and dressed as fast as possible, and went down-stairs with a lamp.

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“Who is it?” she asked, through the keyhole.

“It’s ME!” said a childish voice that she thought sounded like one of the Allen children.

She ventured to open the door, and there on the steps in the darkness stood Flaxie Frizzle, bareheaded, shivering, and looking terribly frightened.

“Oh, Mrs. Hunter, something *orful* has happened at our house. Oh, come quick, Mrs. Hunter!”

“Yes, yes, dear, I’ll go this minute; but what is it?” said the lady, hurrying to the entry closet for her shawl.

“Auntie is crazy! She is running round and round with the tea-kettle.”

Mrs. Hunter stood still with amazement.

“Who sent *you* here?” said she. “Why don’t they call the doctor?”

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“I don’t know. She’s going to scald me to death, and I s’pose you know I’m sick,” whined Flaxie, sinking down on the doormat, where the light of the lamp shone full upon her, and Mrs. Hunter saw—what she might have seen before, if she had not been so nervous—that the little girl wore a checked flannel nightie, and her feet were done up in poultices.

Of course she must have come away without any one’s knowing it, that cold night, with the snow falling too! It was she that was crazy, instead of Aunt Charlotte.

“How could the child have got out of the house?” thought Mrs. Hunter.

But the question was now, how to get her back again?

“Come, Flaxie,” said she, in a soothing tone, “let me wrap you up in a shawl and take you home pickaback,—there’s a good girl!”

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“But I don’t want auntie to scald me.”

“She shan’t, dear. If she has got the tea-kettle, I’ll take it away from her.”

“Honest?” asked Flaxie, piteously.

But she forgot her terror as soon as she was mounted pickaback, and thought herself the “country cousin” taking a ride on a holder.

All this while everybody in the Allen half of the house was up and hunting for the lost child. Milly was crying bitterly; Johnny had come in from the barn, where he had pulled the hay all over; and Uncle Ben, who had just returned from his journey, was starting out on the street with a lantern.

Just then Mrs. Hunter walked in, and dropped Flaxie into Aunt Charlotte’s arms, saying:

“Here, I’ve brought you a poor sick child.”

Then there was such a commotion that Flaxie was more bewildered than ever, and at sight of Uncle Ben she screamed wildly. It was his coming home about ten minutes before that had frightened her, in the first place, by waking her from a bad dream; and she had slipped out of bed, and out of the open front door, before any one missed her.

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“There! there! darling, don’t cry,” said Aunt Charlotte, hushing her in her arms, while Mrs. Hunter heated a blanket.

“I’ve done something *orful*,” said Flaxie in her auntie’s ear. “I’m so sorry; but I stole a horse and sleigh! *Don’t* tell, auntie! I put ‘em behind that door.”

“Well, never mind it, dear; you didn’t mean to,” said Aunt Charlotte, smiling in spite of her heavy heart. Then she turned to Uncle Ben, who stood by, looking puzzled, and asked him in a whisper if he “didn’t think he ought to go for the doctor”?

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“Oh, by all means,” said Mrs. Hunter, beginning to help him on with his overcoat.

He had hurried home in the night train, on purpose to spend Christmas day with his family, and was really too tired to take a ride of two miles in a snow-storm. But he was not thinking of that; he was thinking how dreadful it was to have his dear little niece sick away from home; and how her papa didn’t like the Hilltop doctor,—and perhaps it was best to go three miles farther to the next town after Dr. Pulsifer.

“Yes, go for Dr. Pulsifer,” said Aunt Charlotte, when he asked her about it; “and be as quick as you can.”



Flaxie knew nothing of all this. Her cheeks burned, her eyes shone, and she kept saying there were a million lions and tigers in the bed; and where was the rat-trap?

"Do bring the rat-trap!" said she, plunging about in a fright. "Oh, you don't hear, do you? There's a woman out in the other room eating peas,—eating, and eating, and eating. Why don't you stop her? Oh, you don't hear! Johnny Allen, run for a sponge and vinegar, and put it in auntie's ears, so she can hear!"

Milly laughed at these strange speeches till she heard Nancy say to Mrs. Hunter, "Crazy as a loon, ain't she? I'm afraid it's water on the brain."

Then Milly, who did not understand Nancy's meaning, but was appalled by the tone, ran into the pantry, and cried behind the flour-barrel.

"If Flaxie Frizzle dies, I want to die too! She's the only twin cousin I've got in the world."

In a short time, considering how far he had ridden, Uncle Ben came home, but without Dr. Pulsifer, who had gone away, and could not be there before to-morrow noon.

"I'm so disappointed," said Aunt Charlotte, looking pale and ill enough herself to be in bed. "But the poor little thing is asleep now, and perhaps she isn't so very sick after all. Do tell me if you think there's any danger of brain-fever?"

"Well, I think this," replied Uncle Ben, leaning over the bed and taking a long look at the little patient; "I don't know what ails her! It may be diphtheria, and then again it may be common sore throat; but if she isn't better in the morning, we'll telegraph to her father, for a child that can turn yellow and pea-green, as she did last spring, is capable of almost anything."

"That is true," said Aunt Charlotte; "one never knows what she is going to do next." And then she looked at Flaxie, and sighed. It was wonderful what a power she had of keeping her friends in a worry, this little pink and white slip of a girl! Once she had fallen into a brook, and once into a well, beside falling sick times without number. Uncle Ben and Aunt Charlotte knew all this, but they did not happen to know that it was a very common thing for Flaxie to be crazy! It was just so with her brother Preston and her sister Ninny; they seldom had any little ailment like a bad cold without "going out of their heads," and nobody in the family minded it at all.

If Flaxie's mother had been at Hilltop, she would have sent Uncle Ben and Aunt Charlotte to bed; but as she was not there, and they didn't know any better, they sat up all night watching their queer little niece.

Rather a sorry "Christmas eve" all around the house,—but a beautiful Christmas morning, and not a cloud in the sky. Flaxie woke as gay as a bird, without the least recollection of the horrors she had suffered in the night from tigers and tea-kettles.

"Wish you merry Christmas!" cried she to pale Aunt Charlotte, and sprang out of bed with poultices on her feet to go after her Christmas stocking.

"Well, is this the little girl they thought was so sick," said Dr. Pulsifer, when he arrived at noon, and found her and Milly lying on the rug, with a pair of twin dolls between them dressed just alike, and each with a fur cap on its head.

He felt Flaxie's pulse and looked at her tongue, and said he "shouldn't waste any of his nice medicine on *her*."

"But my cold isn't good at all, now honest; and my throat's a little sore—I guess," said Flaxie, drawing a long face, and feeling rather ashamed not to be sick now, when the doctor had been sent for on purpose!

"Never mind! If you don't need me, your aunt does. What do you think of yourself, you little piece of mischief, running away in the night, and frightening people so that they are sick abed Christmas day?"

All Flaxie's good time was over in a minute. *Was* auntie sick abed up-stairs? Was that why Flaxie hadn't seen her since morning?

"Oh, mayn't I go look at her?" said she, after the doctor had left. And Uncle Ben consented, thinking she wouldn't stay a minute.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I do love you dearly," cried penitent Flaxie, climbing upon the bed and cuddling close to the white auntie. "Did I make you sick? I didn't mean to; and I don't 'member anything about the tea-kettle."

"There, there, dear, don't cry."

"I oughtn't to stayed up-stairs yesterday in the cold," went on Flaxie, determined to free her mind. "That was the wickedest thing! But you were just as good as you could be, if you *did* trim the church; and I'll never do so again!"

"Oh, hush, dear; you shake the bed."

"I'm real bad in here, in my s-o-ul!" wailed Flaxie, squeezing her eyelids together tight, and laying her hand on her stomach. "Why don't God make me beautiful inside o' my soul?"

"Ask Him, dear child!"

"Will He?" said Flaxie, earnestly. "Oh, yes, I know;" and her eager face fell. "But He'll have to make me homely to do it, just like Miss Pike."

"Oh, no, my darling."

"Won't He? See what a orful cole-sore I've got on my mouth. If it would stay there, and stick on always, do you s'pose I'd grow good?" asked Flaxie, thoughtfully.

Aunt Charlotte almost smiled.

"'Cause I'm willing to be a little homely,—now truly—if I can have a nice so-o-ul," added the child, with a true and deep feeling of her own naughtiness that I am sure the angels must have been glad to see.

But she was shaking the bed again, and Uncle Ben drew her gently away, and took her down stairs in his arms to finish the rest of her "crazy Christmas."

## CHAPTER IX.

### MILLY VISITING.

Winter passed, spring came, and April was half over before the twin cousins met again. Then it was Milly's turn to go to Laurel Grove to see Flaxie. She had written a postal-card slowly, and with great pains, to say "she should be there to-morrow if it was pleasant."

But how it did rain! It had rained for two days as if the sky meant to pour itself away in tears; but on Wednesday the sun came rushing through the clouds, his face all aglow with smiles, and put an end to such dismal business. The rain ceased, the clouds scampered away and hid themselves, and the sky cleared up as bright as if nothing had ever been the matter.

Sweet little Milly looked out of the window, heard the birds sing, and whispered in her heart:

"Oh, how kind God is to give me a good day to go to Laurel Grove!"

She didn't own a pretty valise of brown canvas with leather straps like Flaxie's. All in the world she had was an old bandbox trunk that belonged to her mother, and she took no care of that, for Milly never "travelled alone."

"Well, little sobersides," said her father, putting the check in his pocket, the ticket in his hat, and opening a car-window before he sat down beside Milly. "Well, little sobersides, are you glad you're going visiting?"

"Yes, sir," said she, her eyes shining. She didn't laugh and clap her hands quite as much as Flaxie did, but you always knew when she was happy by the glad look in her eyes.

"I hope you two little folks won't get into too much mischief at Laurel Grove. Are you going to school?"

"Yes, sir; and oh, it's such an elegant schoolhouse!"

"Well, don't set it on fire."

Milly blushed.

"But the teacher isn't half so nice as Miss Pike."

The dear little girl had not been at Laurel Grove for a long while, but all the people in town seemed to remember her,—Mr. Lane the minister, Mr. Snow the postmaster, and everybody they met in the street. Her father noticed how they smiled upon her, as if they loved her, and it made his heart glad.

Preston drove his uncle and cousin home from the depot, but he almost ran into a lumber-wagon, and Mr. Allen thought he was too young a boy to be trusted with such a fiery horse as Whiz. Flaxie sat with him on the front seat of the carriage, dancing up and down, and turning around to say to Milly:

"Oh, I'm so happy I can't keep still." She looked like a bluebird, in her blue dress and sash, with a white chip bonnet, blue ribbon and blue feather, and Milly thought there was not another such girl in the world.

It was a charming place at Dr. Gray's, and the house was full of beautiful things, such as Milly did not see at her own home; but that never made her discontented or unhappy. If God gave Flaxie prettier things than He gave her, it was because He thought best to do so, and that was enough for Milly.

"O Aunt Emily, *are* you glad to see me?" said she, as Mrs. Gray kissed her over and over again.

"Yes, I'm just as glad as I can be, and I wish you were my own little girl," said Mrs. Gray, who had five children already.

The "little bit-of-est" one was a year old now, and didn't know Milly at all, but Phil know her and

prattled away to her so fast that nobody else could be heard.

That afternoon she and Flaxie were in the stable, feeding Whiz with lumps of sugar, while the dog, Tantra Bogus, capered about them, giving their cheeks a "thou-sand" kisses with his long, loving tongue.

"Stop, Tantra Bogus; now we'll have to go and wash our faces," said Flaxie.

As they entered the kitchen by the outside door they met Mrs. Gray standing there talking to Preston.

"Here is a cup of jelly," said she, "and I'd like to have you take it to Sammy Proudfit."

This was Wednesday afternoon, and Preston was starting to go about half a mile up town to recite an extra lesson to his teacher, Mr. Garland.

"Oh, you're coming too, are you?" said he, looking around at Flaxie and Milly, who were skipping along behind him, drawing a handsome doll's carriage.

"Yes, we are going up on the bank to play with Blanche Jones and Fanny Townsend: mamma said we might," replied Flaxie, dancing.

Preston was very glad of the company of two such happy little girls, only he forgot to say so.

"And we've built a house of birch bark under the trees. But it hasn't any stove-pipe!" said Flaxie, who had never forgotten that unfortunate house that Jack built.

"And we're going to have a doll's party in it," remarked Milly.

"Oh, no, not a party, it's a *reception*," corrected Flaxie; "that's what Fanny Townsend says they call 'em in Washington. My biggest dolly, Christie Gretchen, is going to receive. Oh, you don't know how beautifully she's dressed! And all the other dollies are coming to call on her, with the cunningest little cards in their pockets."

"Oh, do your dollies play cards?"

"No, indeed; it's *visiting* cards,—don't you know?—with their names printed on them, just like ladies. Ninny did that."

As they chattered in this way they were drawing near the Proudfit house, which stood at the foot of the hill, and little Milly sang,

"There was an old woman lived under the hill;"

Preston sang to the same tune:

"And she had a little boy who was not very ill,  
And he went to bed, and he lies there still."

"Why, Preston Gray, did you make that all up yourself?" cried Flaxie, amazed at his genius.

But there was no time for more poetry, even if Preston had been able to make it, for they were standing now at the door. It was an old, tumble-down house. The children called it black, and in fact it was a sort of slate-color, though it had never been painted at all, except by the sun, wind, and rain. In the road before it three dirty children were poking sand, and they looked so shabby that Milly whispered:

"I shouldn't think they'd be called *Proudfits*: they don't look very proud!"

"No," replied Preston, trying to be witty, "the name doesn't *fit*."

Mrs. Proudfit was changing Sammy's pillow-cases when she heard the children knock, and came to the door with a pillow between her teeth. She was "proper glad of the jelly," as Preston thought she ought to be.

There was a smell of hot gingerbread in the air, which reminded Flaxie of the time ever so long ago, when she had taken supper in that house without leave; and there was Patty at the window this minute making faces. It is strange how things change to you as you grow older! Flaxie never cared to visit at that house now, for Patty wasn't a nice little girl at all; she not only teased away your playthings, but told wrong stories.

"Our baby's two months old, and he's got two teeth!" cried she, as Flaxie turned away; but nobody believed her.

The twin cousins and their little friends had a gay time that afternoon on the bank, and Christie Gretchen "received" with great dignity; but I have no time to talk of that now, I want to tell you something about Preston.

When they reached Mr. Garland's house, the little girls left him, and he walked up the gravel path to Mr. Garland's front door and rang the bell with a sober face.

"I don't believe I can say my lesson, and Mr. Garland will think I'm a dunce," said he to himself, with a quivering lip.

Now Preston Gray was remarkably handsome, and one of the dearest boys that ever lived, but not a great scholar. He could whittle chairs and sofas and churns for Flaxie with a jackknife, and I don't know how many ships and steam-engines he had made; but he did not learn his lessons very well.

To-day, after the recitation was over, Mr. Garland walked with him along the bank of the river.

"Preston, my fine little fellow," said he, kindly, "I can't bear to scold a boy I love so dearly; but

I've been afraid for some time that you don't study this term as hard as usual; what's the matter?"

Tears sprang to Preston's eyes, but he brushed them off and pretended to be looking the other way.

"Now, seriously, what *do* you suppose boys were made for?" went on Mr. Garland, without the least idea Preston was crying; "you don't suppose they were made on purpose to play and have a good time?"

"I don' know, sir," replied Preston, clearing his throat, and trying to laugh; "perhaps they were made to play a good deal, you know, because they can't play when they grow to be men."

"Ah, Preston, Preston, I am not joking with you at all. If you were a small child like your sister Flaxie it would not matter so much whether you studied or not, but your father expects a great deal of his oldest son, and it grieves me to have to say to him—"

"Oh, don't, don't," wailed poor little Preston, "I'll do anything in the world if you won't talk to my father; I'll take my books home, I'll—I'll—"

"There, there, never mind it," said soft-hearted Mr. Garland, moved by the boy's distress, "if you really mean to do better—Why, look out, child, you'd have fallen over that stump if I hadn't pulled you back. Where in the world were your eyes?"

"I was looking at that big woman across the street," stammered Preston; "how funny she walks!"

"Woman? What woman? Why, that's a boy with a wheelbarrow," exclaimed Mr. Garland, in great surprise.

Preston blushed with all his might and dropped his chin.

"Please, don't tell anybody I took a wheelbarrow for a woman! They'd laugh at me. Of course I knew better as soon as I came to think."

Mr. Garland stopped suddenly and stared at Preston.

"Look up here into my face, my boy."

Preston raised his beautiful brown eyes,—those *good* eyes, which won everybody's love and trust; and his teacher gazed at them earnestly.

But Mr. Garland was not admiring their beauty or their gentle expression. He saw something else in Preston's eyes which startled him and gave him a pang. Not tears, for those had been dashed away, but a sort of thin mist lay over them, like that which veils the sun in cloudy weather.

"Can it be possible? Why, Preston, why, Preston, my boy," said Mr. Garland, taking the young face gently between his hands, "when did things begin to blur so and look dim to you?"

Preston did not answer.

"Tell me; don't be afraid."

"It's been," replied Preston, choking, "it's been a long while. The sun isn't so bright somehow as it was; and oh, Mr. Garland, the print in my books isn't so black as it used to be! But I didn't want to make a fuss about it, and have father know it."

"Why not?"

"Oh, he'd give me medicine, I suppose."

"My boy, my poor boy, you ought to have told him."

"Do you think so? Well, I hoped I'd get better, you know."

"Preston, is this the reason you don't learn your lessons any better?"

"I don't know. Yes, sir, I think so. I can't read the words in my books very well."

"You poor, blessed child! Growing blind," thought Mr. Garland; but did not say the words aloud.

"And I have to sit in the sun to see."

"I wish I had known this before, and I wouldn't have complained when you had bad lessons. Why didn't you tell me, you patient soul!"

"Oh, I don't know, sir; you didn't ask me."

"Good night," said Mr. Garland, in an unsteady voice. "And don't you study to-morrow one word. You may sit and draw pictures all day long if you like."

Preston smiled. He did not know what made his dear teacher say this, and place his hand on his shoulder so tenderly; but he was glad of it, very glad; for now it was certain that Mr. Garland would not blame him any more; and he ran home with a light heart.

## CHAPTER X.

### BLACKDROP.

"Oh, we had such an elegant time up there on the bank! only the boys came and plagued us," cried Flaxie, bursting into the house, followed by Milly.

She said it to her papa, but he did not appear to listen. He sat holding Preston on his knee, and looking at him sadly.

Then Flaxie turned to her mother.

"Why, mamma, Willy Patten threw kisses to me when he was a boy, and wasn't my cousin!"

But Mrs. Gray did not listen either. She too was looking at Preston. Mr. Garland had just been at the house talking with them about the dear child's eyes, and she and Dr. Papa were heavy at heart. Flaxie did not know of this, but she felt vaguely that something was wrong.

Milly felt it too, and almost wished she had gone home with her father in the afternoon train.

"What has mamma been crying about?" thought Julia. "I'm afraid Preston has been a naughty boy, for she and papa have looked very sober ever since Mr. Garland was here."

Preston himself understood the case a little better, and was saying to himself: "I guess there's something awful the matter with my eyes, or father wouldn't have told Mr. Garland he should take me to New York."

There were cold turkey, and pop-overs, and honey for supper, but it wasn't a pleasant meal; there was no chatting and laughing; and Dr. Papa hurried away from the table as soon as possible to go to see a sick lady up town.

It was some time before the children were told the dreadful news that Preston was losing his sight. They wondered the next week why he should be allowed to stay out of school and play, and why his father, who was always kind to him, should be so very gentle now, almost as gentle as he was to little Phil.

One day Dr. Gray took Preston to New York to see an oculist. An oculist is a physician who treats diseases of the eye.

When Dr. A. called Preston up to him, and looked at the beautiful eyes over which a veil was slowly stealing, he shook his head.

Poor little Preston! Not twelve years old, yet growing blind like an old man of ninety!

"But after he is blind, we can help him," said Dr. A., stroking the boy's white forehead. "When that dreadful veil, which is stealing over his eyes, has grown thick enough, then we can take it off, and he can see. But it is not thick enough yet. He must go home and wait."

Dr. Gray was not at all surprised by this. He had known all the while that Preston's eyes must grow worse before they could be made better. But how long the boy must wait, the oculist could not say; some months, at any rate, and perhaps a year.

It was a sorrowful time for the whole family when Dr. Gray took Preston home with him that night and told the story. Julia put her arms around her dear brother as if she wanted to hold him safe from this trial. Loving Julia! if darkness was coming upon him, *she* would surely be, as Uncle Ben had said:

"Like a little candle burning in the night."

And what would Flaxie be? I am afraid Preston did not expect much of Flaxie, she was such a flyaway child.

She cried bitterly now, and said:

"Oh, I wish 'twas *my* eyes, 'cause I'm a naughty little girl; but Preston is splendid!"

Milly didn't say a word, she only laid her soft cheek against Preston's hand to let him know she pitied him.

"There, there, don't feel so bad, all of you," said he, holding up his head grandly. "I can bear it, you see if I can't."

How they all loved him for that! And he did bear it nobly and patiently, and the whole family helped him. That is one comfort of having a father and mother, and brothers and sisters; they always do help you bear your troubles.

"Let's read to him," said Milly to Flaxie. So they read,—first one of them, and then the other,—whenever he wished. This would have been very pleasant if he had liked "nice books" such as little girls enjoy; but no, he chose stories of lion-tamers, and sea-serpents, and wild, dreadful Indians.

"Isn't it just awful?" said Flaxie to Milly; but they read away like young martyrs.

On the whole, as the family was so large, and every member of it so kind, Preston had a very good time, and seldom thought of his eyes.

One day the twin cousins were in the shade of the apple-blossoms, in what was called the "orchard garden," driving a carriage full of dolls to a "wedding picnic." Flaxie's dolls led a very gay life, and perhaps that was one reason they all faded so young.

Just as "Christie Gretchen" was alighting from the carriage, assisted by her young husband, "Dr. Preston Smith," and just as Milly had sweetened the lemonade exactly to the bride's taste, and was cutting the cake, there was a quick call from Preston.

"Girls, girls, come here?"

"Oh, dear," said Flaxie to Milly, "when the picnic is beginning so beautifully!"

But then they both remembered that Preston was growing blind and they must be kind to him; therefore Flaxie dropped Dr. Smith, and Milly dropped the cake, and they ran along to the stable.

Before they reached it, however, they had forgotten all about the picnic, for right in the stable-door stood a shaggy mustang pony, harnessed to a basket-phaeton; and in the phaeton sat Preston holding the reins, while Dr. Papa, mamma, and Julia stood looking on and smiling.

"Oh, I never did see anything so cunning," cried Flaxie, forgetting she had seen several just such ponies when she went to the seaside with Mrs. Prim.

"Whoa! Jump in, both of you," said Preston, turning the phaeton half round. His face was all aglow with delight.

"Yes, jump in," said Dr. Papa and mamma.

"It's Preston's pony," cried Julia, who had kept the secret for a whole day and night, till it "seemed as if she should fly."

The way that gentle little beast walked out of the yard, the way he trotted after he turned into the road! I really cannot give a proper account of it myself; it needs a little girl about Flaxie's age to describe a pony.

"Oh, he's a darling, a beauty, the sweetest little thing, not half as big as Whiz! Why, Preston, aren't you just as happy? Is it your carriage? Where's the whip? Oh, the silver reins! Didn't they cost a *thou*-sand dollars? What do you call the pony? May I drive?"



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"Yes, by and by, when my eyes grow so bad that I can't see," replied Preston, a little sadly in spite of his joy; "but father says I may drive now."

Flaxie had reached out for the reins, but Milly pinched her,—one of those sly pinches that both the cousins understood,—and she folded her little hands to keep them still. She did want to drive this very minute, but she wouldn't plague Preston.

"Who is going to take care of your pony?" she asked.

They had a boy, Henry Mann, who took care of Whiz and Hiawatha.

"I shall attend to my pony myself," replied Preston, driving off at high speed.

"Well, you must give him a quart of *granary* as quick as we get home," said Miss Frizzle, looking wondrous wise; "Johnny Townsend feeds his pony with granary—a whole quart."

Preston laughed and chirruped. He was "just as happy," there was no doubt about that.

"I guess I'll call him Blackdrop, wouldn't you, though?"

The little girls thought it was a queer name, but they said:

"Oh, yes, if you want to call him Blackdrop, I would."

"It won't do any hurt," added Flaxie encouragingly.

I wish Blackdrop could have known how happy he made the whole family. Milly didn't say much, but her eyes shone as she patted his neck, Julia sang every time she saw him, Phil "hugged him grizzly," and Grandma Gray who was very timid about horses, said she wasn't any more afraid of him than if he had been a Newfoundland dog.

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It was the funniest thing, but really and truly, before many days that dear old lady used to step into the pony carriage and let little Flaxie drive her all around the town! Everybody nodded and smiled as the couple passed by, and said it was "the cunningest sight," for grandma wasn't so very much bigger than Flaxie, and they looked like two little girls riding out, only grandma's hair was silver-white, and Flaxie's spun gold.

Through the whole summer Preston's eyes grew worse and worse. It was all twilight to him now, or, as somebody calls it, "the edge of the dark." He still took care of Blackdrop, by the help of Henry, but he could not ride out unless somebody else held the reins.

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"But then this sort of thing won't last always," said he to his particular friend, Bert Abbott. "Just wait a year or two, sir, and I shall be as good as anybody."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### FLAXIE A COMFORT.

The days went on, and still Preston's eyes were not "ready." Winter came, then spring, and Milly paid another visit to Laurel Grove. She was one of those quiet, happy little girls, who make hardly any more noise than a sunbeam; but everybody likes to see a sunbeam, and everybody was glad to see Milly.

She was even more welcome than usual at Laurel Grove just now, for by this time Preston's eyes were "ready," and his father was about taking him to New York.

There were four grown people left in the house, and five children beside Milly; still it seemed lonesome, for everybody was thinking about Preston, and wondering if the doctor would hurt him very much.

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"He can't see *what* the doctor is doing to him," said Flaxie to Milly; "I shouldn't think God would let my brother be blind, my *good* brother Preston!"

"God knows what is best," replied Milly, meekly.

"Yes, but, oh dear, I feel so bad! Let's go out in the kitchen and see what Dodo is doing."

Grandma, mamma, and Julia looked sadder than ever to hear Flaxie talk in this way and run out of the parlor crying.

Dora stood by the kitchen-table ironing very cheerfully.

"Dodo," said Flaxie, "what shall we do to have a good time?"

"Such a funny child as you are, Miss Flaxie," said the girl, trying another flatiron; "haven't you everything to your mind, and haven't you always had ever since you were born?"

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"No, indeed, Dodo," said Flaxie, mournfully, breaking off a corner from a sheet of sponge-cake which stood cooling in the window; "I don't want my brother to be blind."

"Well, but you can't help it, though. So you'd better not go round the house, moping in this way and worrying your mother," returned Dora, making a quick plunge with her flatiron into the folds of a calico dress.

Worrying her mother! Flaxie had not thought of that. She supposed she was showing very kind and tender feelings when she cried about Preston.

"Let's go back to the parlor," said Milly; "perhaps Aunt Emily will feel better if we talk and laugh and play with the baby."

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"That's the nicest little thing I ever saw," thought Dora, gazing after Milly; "she don't fret about her own feelings, but tries to make other folks happy."

This was very true, but you mustn't suppose that Flaxie didn't also try to make other people happy. She did whenever she could think of it. She was really learning lessons in unselfishness every day; and how could she help it when everybody in the house set her such a good example?

She and Milly went back to the parlor now, and talked to grandma about their western cousins,

Pollio and Posy Pitcher; and then they made little Phil eat apples like a squirrel,—a very funny performance. After that they told him to go into the middle of the room, make a bow, and “speak his piece.” That was funny too, and Ethel joined in on a high key:

“Poor little fish, I know you wish  
To live as well as I;  
I will not hook you from the brook,  
Or even wish to try.

“And you, old frog, behind the log,  
I will not stop your song;  
Your great round eyes may watch the flies,  
I will not do you wrong.”

Mrs. Gray and grandma did not know this exhibition was called for on purpose to amuse them, but they laughed heartily, and felt the better for it; and so did Flaxie and Milly. Wasn't it much better than sitting in silence and thinking about Preston, when they couldn't help him at all?

You may know it was a very sad day for the poor boy. When he found himself in the “awful chair,” his heart failed him and he sprang out of it.

“No, no, he never could have his eyes cut with little daggers. Even if they did give him ether, he couldn't; Papa must take him right home again. It was of no use!”

It was pitiful to see Preston's struggles with himself, and the still greater struggles of the father, who tried to hide his feelings for his boy's sake.

“Wait till to-morrow,” said Preston; “just wait, and I *will!*”

So they waited.

All the afternoon Preston's heart kept sinking down, down, like a plummet let into the sea, and his father's heart sank with it, for a child cannot feel a sorrow that does not touch his parent too.

But it chanced in the night, as Preston lay awake, that he fell to thinking how his father loved him.

“He would do anything in this world for me. He'd take his eyes right out and give them to me if he could.”

And then Preston wondered if it were really true that God loved him better yet?

Oh, yes, loved him so that he would never, never let anything really bad happen to his little boy.

“So this isn't really bad,” thought he, clapping his hands softly under the coverlet; “it seems awful, but it isn't. God sent it, and I can bear it—yes, for his sake and father's sake!”

“Surely what He wills is best,  
Happy in His will I rest,”

repeated Preston, and went quietly to sleep “like closing flowers at night.”

Dr. Gray was joyfully surprised at his bright looks next morning.

“Smile up your face, Dr. Papa,” said he, playfully. This was what Flaxie used to say in her baby days, when they didn't call her Flaxie Frizzle, but Pinky Pearly. “Smile up your face, Dr. Papa, and see what Preston Gray can do.”

The horror was over then for Dr. Gray; his son was going to behave like a man.

He did not know when he saw Preston take his seat so calmly in that “awful chair,” that he was strong because he felt God's arms about him.

But when Preston left that chair, the trouble was not all over. He could not bear any light yet, so he had to go home a few days afterwards with a bandage over his eyes, and stay in a dark room for many weeks.

But didn't they make the room pleasant for him? Didn't they treat him like a prince? Didn't Bert Abbott and the other boys go up and down on that stair-carpet till they nearly wore it out?

Of course Julia was good to the young prisoner; you would have expected that. Flaxie was good too. She seemed at this time to have forgotten all her little fretful, troublesome ways, and was always willing to stay in Preston's chamber, and tell him everything that happened in the house or out of it; just how the pony looked and acted, and how he coughed a little dot of a mouse out of his nose, supposed to have run up his nostril when he was eating his “granary.” Flaxie could be very interesting when she chose, and Preston's face began to light up at the sound of her little feet on the stairs.

She had never loved her brother so well as she did now that she had become useful to him, and it made her very happy to hear Preston tell his mother that “Flaxie grew better and better; she was almost as good now as Julia.”

Milly had gone home, but she came back again in June. You see that the twin cousins were not very particular about taking turns in their visits, but went and came just as their two mothers found it most convenient.

By this time Preston could venture out of doors on a dark day or in the evening; but I am sorry to say he was obliged to wear spectacles. This amused the little ones, Phil and Ethel, but Flaxie



was very sorry.

"I do pity those spectacles," said she to Milly in a low voice, as they walked under the apple-trees with their arms around each other's waist.

"Oh, well," returned Milly brightly, "he won't have to wear them always."

"Yes, he will. He said he was afraid the boys would laugh when they saw him, but they didn't. Some of them cried though; I saw Bert Abbott wiping his eyes."

After a while, the little girls, and indeed all Preston's friends, became so accustomed to seeing him in glasses that they did not mind it all. He could see perfectly well, and was as happy as ever; so it didn't seem worth while to "pity his spectacles."

And now I must tell you one thing more about this dear boy, and then my story will be done.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### BRAVE PRESTON GRAY.

"Never saw such folks for jelly; they eat it by the quart. Wish I could be sick once in a while, and get some myself," muttered Preston, as he settled his school-book under his arm, and took the cup his mother had brought to the door.

It was Jimmy Proudfit who was sick now, and Mrs. Gray was in the habit of sending him little dainties by Preston, who often grumbled about it, and said he was "tired of the whole Proudfit family." Mrs. Gray never took any notice of these unfeeling remarks, knowing they meant nothing, for Preston was an extremely kind-hearted boy. He had a few faults, of course, and one of them was a strong dislike for doing errands. He was on his way now to recite a Latin lesson to his kind teacher, Mr. Garland; and, as usual, the twin cousins were close at his heels, skipping and dancing, for they never could walk when they felt truly gay.

"Where are you going?" asked Preston, looking back through his spectacles.

"Going up on the bank to play 'Uncle Tom.' Blanche Jones and Fanny Townsend and everybody else is going, and 'twill be just splendid," replied Flaxie, as Preston walked up to Mrs. Proudfit's door to deliver the jelly.

There were four children playing in the sand this time, and one of them was Patty. The twin cousins thought they would go by them without turning their heads, but Patty called out, "Where are you running to in such a hurry?"

"Oh, we're going up to play on the bank there somewhere," replied Flaxie, trying to shake off the baby, who had been eating candy and was pulling at her frock with his sticky fingers.

"Up on the bank? Well, I'm agoin' too," said that black-eyed, disagreeable Patty.

And without waiting to see whether she was wanted or not, she followed along with her two dirty sisters; and behind them toddled the baby!

Preston marched on in front, looking very much amused; but Flaxie's face was quite red. She pinched Milly's arm, and then Milly pinched hers. It was a strange way to go to a party—the party of the season; and Flaxie had a great mind to run home; only her mother had charged her again and again not to be rude; so she said in a very calm, polite manner:

"Patty, don't you think 'twould be a good plan for you to go in the house and see Jimmy? He's sick."

Patty only laughed, and the four children scuffled along just the same behind Flaxie and Milly, making the dirt fly with their bare toes.

Oh, it was all very well for Preston to whistle! It didn't trouble *him*, of course, for *he* wasn't going to the party! He stopped in a few minutes at Mr. Garland's beautiful brown house with the green vines around it, and made a low bow as he said "Good-bye."

Flaxie scowled. What would Fanny Townsend and Blanche Jones and all the other nice girls say to see her bringing along such a train of dirty gypsies? She and Milly kept close together, never turning their heads till they came to the place "on the bank up there somewhere," where they were to have the party.

Fanny and Blanche, and nearly everybody else, had arrived already, in clean frocks, with faces just washed; and, dear! dear! who wanted those Proudfits? But the little girls in Laurel Grove were for the most part very well-bred, so they said, "How do you do, Patty?" and "How do you do, Gretty?" and "How do you do, Baby?" just as if they had expected the whole family; though it

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was really a picnic party, and nobody had a right to come to it without an invitation. Patty kept close beside Flaxie; but Bubby, the fourteen months' old baby, made himself generally disagreeable by wiping the candy and sand off his hands upon the little girls' skirts.

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"Let's play something," said Flaxie nervously.

It was a beautiful place to play. There were trees for hide-and-see, flat spots for croquet, and little hills and hollows for everything else. The village children used this for a sort of park, and the river seemed to look on and laugh to see them so gay. It was a very sober, steady river above and below, but right here it went leaping and tumbling over some rocks, making a merry cascade,—just for fun, you would think. The children liked to skip stones and see them spin up and down in the foam; but they had been warned not to go too near the bank. Nobody had ever fallen in yet, but it wasn't a safe place for very little folks, certainly not for roly-poly babies like Bubby Proudfit. He was very clumsy, falling down, rolling over, and picking himself up again every five minutes. Patty meant to watch him, but he was not very interesting, and the little girls quite bewitched her with their kind smiles and pretty ways.

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Flaxie Frizzle was one of the youngest, but led off in most of the games. She was little Eva, and died on a bed of grass "elegantly," while everybody else groaned and howled, especially poor Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom was Milly, in a black mask of Preston's, which had been played with till it was cracked in fifty places, and made Uncle Tom look about two hundred years old.

Then they had the "Old Woman in the Shoe," and Flaxie was a fierce and cruel mother, whipping her children so "soundly" that you could hear them scream half a mile off.

Patty thought all this was beautiful, and a longing look came into her bold black eyes, as she gazed at the old woman.

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"Oh, if *I* could wear red stockings, with flowers on them, like Flaxie! If *I* could be a doctor's little girl, and live in a house with blinds and trees and flowers, and have a cousin come to see *me!*"

It wasn't strange that Patty should feel like this, and want to cover up her bare feet in the grass; but in admiring Flaxie she forgot entirely to watch Bubby, and that was a great mistake. *He* didn't care, he never liked to be watched; it was fine fun to see the whole world before him and go just where he chose. Didn't the trees and grass and flowers all belong to him! To be sure they did, and he meant to carry some of them home. But while he was trudging about, and making up his little mind where he would begin to pull, he espied the river sparkling in the sun, and that was finest of all. "Pitty, pitty!" cried he, and thought he would carry the river home too. How nice it would be to splash in! He fairly shouted at the idea, for having never seen a bathtub, he hadn't learned to be afraid of soap and water. "Pitty, pitty!" said he, toddling down with outstretched hands toward the dashing, dancing, merry, white cascade; while the children, running away from the terrible old woman, and trying to see which could scream loudest, never saw or heard him at all.

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Ah, baby, foolish baby, do you think you can seize that bright river and carry it home? No, it is the bright river that is going to seize *you*, unless somebody stops your little feet before they get to the brink!

About this time Preston Gray had finished reciting his lesson. It was not a very good one, though his teacher found no fault whatever; and now instead of going home, Preston strolled along toward the "Children's Park," thinking how strange it was that little girls should scream so much louder than boys at their games.

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"Flaxie is a gay one," said he, as he saw her chasing her children with a white birch switch; but at that moment he saw something else that made his heart stand still. The Proudfit baby was scrambling down the bank, just above the falls!

Preston called out, but it was of no use; there was not a man to be seen, and if there had been twenty men they could have heard nothing, while the little girls were making such a noise. He ran with all his might, but by the time he reached the bank, the baby had tumbled headlong into the river!

What was to be done? Preston was only a little boy himself, let me tell you, and though he had learned to swim, the current was strong right here, and there was great danger of his being carried over the falls.

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What would *you* have done, my little reader? Perhaps you would have stopped to think a good many times, saying to yourself:

"Oh, I don't dare, I don't dare!"

And then, ah, *then*, it might have been too late!

Preston was called a slow boy, but he didn't stop to think once; he did his thinking while he was pulling off his shoes.

"I must do it!" that was all he thought. And then he dashed in.

Bubby was in deep water already, and his struggles were carrying him down stream. Preston seized him by his calico frock, and tried to drag him toward the bank; but that dreadful baby had always had a habit of nipping at everything like a snapping-turtle, and now he caught Preston's throat between his thumb and forefinger, half strangling him. And, oh, the current was so swift!

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For a moment it was life or death with both of them; but Preston managed to unclasp the tiny hand, hold it down, and land the poor little fellow safe at last.

"God helped me—I knew he would!" thought brave Preston Gray, as he drew his first long breath on the bank.

Of course all the little girls had gathered around him, screaming in chorus, and it was a noisy procession that followed the weeping Patty down the street, with the dripping baby in her arms.

"'Twas my brother that saved him, 'twas my brother Preston!" cried Flaxie to everybody they met. "He jumped into the river and pulled out the baby!"

That wasn't the end of it. There was another procession in the evening, and this one stopped at Dr. Gray's gate. It was the Brass Band, out in uniform; but Preston hadn't the least idea what for, till the men paused at the end of a tune, swung their caps, and gave "Three cheers for Master Preston Gray!"

Even then he didn't understand. He hid behind his father and thought he *should* like to know what his mother was crying about.

"Hurrah!" said the leader again, Major Patten, swinging his tall fur cap, which was the pride of the whole company; "hurrah for the boy that risked his life to save a drowning baby!"

"Oh, is that it? Anybody'd have done that!" thought little Preston, hiding again. He was a modest boy; but his sister Flaxie, you know, was quite too bold.

"Why don't he come out?" whispered she, pulling at his sleeve.

"Hush, let him alone," said Dr. Gray, with tears in his eyes.

And then he raised the noble boy in his arms, so the men could see him, for that was what they wanted. But still Preston hid his face. His heart was full, and he *couldn't* look up when those people were praising him so.

By this time there were lamps lighted in every window of Dr. Gray's house, and even in the trees; and though the moon was shining her best, Major Patten, with the wonderful fur cap, asked Preston to stand beside him and hold a lamp, that he might see to read his music.

Preston stood there with the light shining on his pure, good face; and then the men played, "See the Conquering Hero comes," the "Marsellaise," and a dozen other tunes, while their uniforms made such a dazzle of red and gold that Flaxie could not help dancing about like a wild thing for joy.

It was not so with thoughtful Milly. She snuggled down on the piazza beside Julia, and looked on quietly.

"I'm glad Preston was so good," thought she; "perhaps he wouldn't have been so very good if he hadn't had those blind eyes and spectacles. How God must love him! Papa says Julia is like a little candle, and I'm sure Preston is like a candle too. Why, where *is* Flaxie going now?"

Flaxie was flying down the hill after Henry, the stable-boy. She had heard her papa tell him to go to Mr. Springer's for some ice-cream, and she wanted to say: "Get it pink, Henry; get the pinkest ice-cream you can find!"

Then when the men were seated all about the yard and on the piazza, eating their pink ice-cream, somebody threw up a rocket; and that was the end of the gayest, brightest evening our little friend Flaxie Frizzle had ever known in her life.

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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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"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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