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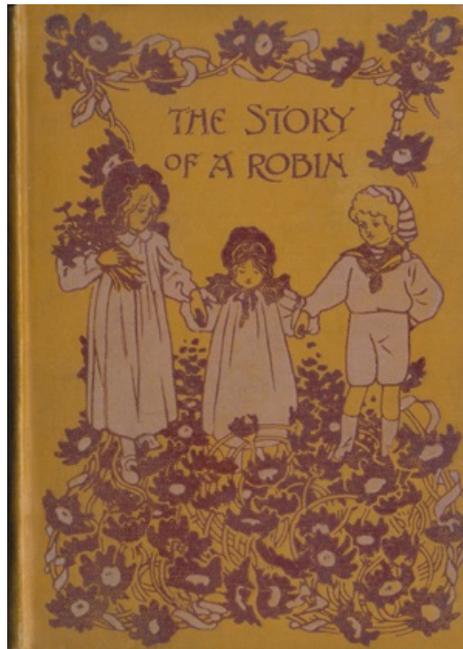
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"Two old robins were consulting."
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T. NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, and New York

[4]

**THE
STORY OF A ROBIN**

[5]

BY
AGNES S. UNDERWOOD



T. NELSON AND SONS

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THE STORY OF A ROBIN.

One fine summer morning two old robins were consulting about breaking up their household. In other words, they thought the time had come when their young ones should turn out of the nest and find food for themselves. There were five little birds in that nice, warm nest, but it was much too small for them now that they were so well feathered; and as they quarrelled terribly about getting the best place, the weakest one was in danger of being tumbled over the side with the pushing and struggling that went on. Then they were such hungry birds that their parents could not find enough of food to satisfy them, and the poor old birds were getting quite thin, and were tired flying from their nest to the plot where the gardener was raising some early potatoes, which was the best place to find food, and back with their mouths full.

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Cock Robin said to his wife,—

“This is going to be a very warm day, and I am not going to work all through the sunshiny hours feeding birds old enough to look after themselves. We shall say we are going away for a holiday, as we require change of air, and they must go and find their own food. Don’t look so sad, my dear; it is the way of the world. The same thing happened to us. I wonder what my father would have said had I screamed to him for food when I was the age my sons are?”

Mrs. Robin listened dutifully to this long speech, and, like a good wife, acquiesced in what her husband said. But as she flew with him to tell the youngsters of the change awaiting them, her heart was a little sore on account of her latest hatched birdie. He was not so big or so strong as the others, and she feared he might be caught by a cat or die of cold. However, it was no use dwelling on these dismal ideas; he must just take his chance, as all birds before him had done. She would give him some good advice as to avoiding cats, and the proper drying of his feathers when they got wet, so that he should not get rheumatism in his bones.

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On reaching the nest, they found there had been a fierce fight among their children. All the five were out of the nest, and four of them were on the ground fluttering and screaming, each trying to tell its own story and throw the blame on its neighbour.

“What is the meaning of this noise?” said Cock Robin.

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“Where is Robinette?” cried Mrs. Robin. “Has a cat or a weasel been here?”

Chip, chip, chip was heard among the leaves close to the deserted home, and the mother flew up to see if her darling was all right, leaving the father of the family to settle matters with the others. Robinette was safe, and as he took the breakfast his mother had brought him, he told her what a fight there had been, and how he in the struggle had been pushed over the side. He also told her he could use his wings so well that he had been able to steady himself and keep from falling, until he found a branch that he could rest on comfortably. And there he had waited for his mother’s return, knowing that she would bring him something good to eat.

The poor mother was wondering how she was to tell her wee birdie that this was the last breakfast she would bring him, when he introduced the subject himself by saying he wished he had not to get back into that nest. Indeed he did not think he could do it, for his wings were so stretched with using them that he was sure they would never crumple up into so small a space as they used to occupy.

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“Seeing that your wings are grown, my son, your father has decided we must all fly away. Let us join him now, and hear what he is saying to your brothers and sisters. He is very angry about this quarrelling, which is out of all order, and quite contrary to the doctrine taught by Dr. Watts that ‘Birds in their little nests agree;’ and he does not like to think that his children are naughty beyond all others.”

Robinette obediently accompanied his mother to the ground, and Mrs. Robin was glad to see how cleverly he managed both legs and wings. They found Cock Robin still haranguing his unruly family; but on seeing his wife, he concluded his remarks thus,—

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“You are old enough and strong enough to do for yourselves, so off you go. Your mother and I will look after Robinette, and keep an eye on you for a day or two to see how you get on. I hope the gardener will be considerate enough to leave those worm-enticing carrots in the ground, for then there will be plenty of food for us all. Now good-bye.”

Cock Robin, having dismissed the four, turned to his wife and Robinette.

“I hope, my dear, he was not hurt by his rough brothers and sisters?”

“No,” she replied, “he was not hurt; and I am now satisfied that his legs and wings are all they should be. As for his brains, he has more in his little head than all the others put together. I feel sure Robinette will have a history.”

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Cock Robin put his head first to one side, then to the other, and gave a funny, chirrupy laugh.

“Ah! you mother birds are all alike; you think your special nursling is sure to turn out the flower of the flock.”

“Let us fly away. There is an uncomfortable feeling about my feathers, plainly telling me there is a cat near us.”

At this moment there was a rustle among some leaves, and a beautiful tabby cat came into view close to where the birds were. Robinette got such a fright that he rose suddenly from the ground, and he seemed to go on rising, rising, until he was far away from his home in the rhododendron bush.

In his pleasure at finding himself going along so easily up in the air he quite forgot the cat, and, alas! he forgot his parents too. He forgot everything but himself.

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“What a big place the world is!” thought he, as he sat on a branch of a large walnut-tree and looked round about him.

He was rather tired, so he rested there a while. Then he remembered that he had no one to bring him his food now; he must look for it himself. So he spread his wings and let himself gently down to the ground, where he soon found some earth newly turned over, and there was a feast for a king. Oh, those thoughtless wire-worms playing in the sunshine, they little knew who was just going to pounce upon them!

Robinette was now quite “on his own hook,” as people who speak slang say. There was no one to consult as to what he should do; and though this freedom was enjoyable in the full daylight, he began to feel lonesome as evening drew on. He found a good supper where he had found his dinner, then crept into a nice, thick rose-bush, dropped a silent tear as he thought of his mother, and tucking his head under his wing, fell fast asleep.

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For some time Robinette’s life was much the same day by day. He met with

no accidents, and had no adventures. However, one morning he saw something new and strange. He was on his usual point of observation—the branch of the walnut-tree—when he saw the gardeners bringing a long seat and putting it against the trunk of his tree. Then a neat maid from the house brought cushions and rugs. Next came a lady, and seated herself comfortably among those cushions and rugs.

“This must be ‘the mistress’ I hear the men speak about. She is evidently at home here, and looks as though she were some one of importance; but, poor thing, she seems lonely. I am lonely too. I don’t care for the other birds in the garden; they are a common lot with no manners. I’ll get acquainted with ‘the mistress.’ From what the men say, it is a wise thing to be on friendly terms with those in authority. I’ll go down and speak to her.”

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With this he flew down near to the lady’s feet. She was reading *The Standard* with close attention, and did not see the wee bird.

“Chip, chip, chip,” said Robinette—his way of saying “good-morning,” you know.

Down went the newspaper with a crackling noise that somewhat alarmed him, so he withdrew to what he thought a safe distance. He flew to a dahlia stake, and from there again addressed the lady.

“Chip, chip, chip. Ah! she sees me now,” he said to himself.

The lady looked and saw him. He came near her, almost to her feet again. Robinette was very brave—whether from real courage or from ignorance is a disputed point.

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“What a very friendly bird! You seem quite tame.”

“I wonder what she means,” thought the birdie. “Chip, chip, chip,” he said.

“Come near, robin; I shall not hurt you. Sing me a song.” And the lady made that curious, kissing sound with her lips that people always make when speaking to birds.

Robinette thought she was very polite to sing to him on such a slight acquaintance; and not to be behind in his manners, he sang to her with his strange, twittering note. The two conversed and sang to each other for some little time, when another lady came under the tree.

“Do look at that funny, little bird, Polly; it has been hopping about close to me, and seems very tame. We must bring some crumbs next time we come out.—Good-bye, Robin; but really you are so small that we shall call you Robinette.”

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The ladies moved away, and the bird was left wondering what “crumbs” were like.

For some days after this the rain came down so fast that poor Robinette had much ado to keep himself dry. He cowered under his rose-bush or kept close to the thick hedge; but all the places got so very wet that the poor wee birdie thought life was not worth living. However, just as he was in the depths of despair, out came the sun from behind the clouds, and soon all nature was rejoicing again. The two ladies came out from the house to breathe the perfume-laden air and to enjoy the sounds of reviving nature. Robinette was so glad to see them that he flew quite close to them, saying in his own way, “Good-day to you—chip, chip, chip.”

“There is Robinette, I declare,” said Polly; “how wet and draggled he looks, poor birdie! He needs the sun to dry his wings.”

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The next day was all that could be wished in the way of heat and bright sunshine, so the ladies came to the garden seat. Robinette was looking out for them, and could scarcely wait for the older lady to be settled among the cushions and wrapped up in the rugs by her daughter. There are treacherous draughts under trees, and Polly was very careful of her mother. At last all arrangements were complete, and Mrs. Lewis opened her book to

read. Suddenly Robinette flew on to it, quite startling her by such an approach. But she was charmed with his trusting familiarity, and at once asked Polly for the crumbs she had brought out. Polly produced them from her useful apron pocket, and threw some gently on the grass at her feet, and Robinette was soon eating the finest feast he had ever had.

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You may be sure, after having eaten these good things, Robinette was always watching for the ladies, and he hopped beside them and sang to them as they walked or worked in the garden. He was soon tame enough to eat from their hands, and Polly, looking upon him as a great curiosity, wished to show him off to some gentlemen friends. But Robinette obstinately refused to be made a spectacle of. Not the most enticing crumbs would bring him to her hands if strangers were near, particularly of the male sex. He had no faith in men.

As the summer days passed away, and autumn came and went, the days became shorter and colder, and Robinette found his way into the house, and soon was as much at home there as in the garden. He made friends with the cook in the kitchen, and had many a rich meal when she was preparing the family dinner. He knew all the meal-times. He came in by the morning-room window in time for breakfast. But there he ran some risks. He sometimes encountered the table-maid, who was very cross with him; and perhaps not without reason, for he was not particular to wipe his feet before flying on to the clean white table-cloth, and often left the marks of his claws all over it; so she feared her mistress would insist on her changing the cloth. As this young woman especially disliked extra work, she used to frighten Robinette nearly out of his senses by shaking her duster at him and pretending to catch him.

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Whenever the ladies came downstairs he was quite safe. They let him do what he liked. He tasted the bacon, he feasted on butter, he burned his toes on the tea-pot—in fact, he did whatever came into his little head. At lunch he again presented himself, and he came to the drawing-room for afternoon tea.

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With all this high living he became a big, fat bird, and I am sorry to say he was very selfish and very jealous. He could not endure the thought of any other bird sharing his privileges, as the following incident proves.

One morning after breakfast he heard a noise in the hall.

“Whoever is Polly speaking to? It must be another bird,” said he to himself. “That is the way she speaks to me. I must see to this. If it is another robin, I shall be the death of him.”

He ruffled up his feathers and flew into the hall, prepared to do battle with any intruder. He was very angry to hear Polly speak in such petting tones to any bird but himself, and he was tempted to give her ear a bite as he sat on her shoulder. He found he had put himself in a rage very needlessly. It was not another robin, but a little wren.

[25]

“Oh!” he thought, “I wonder what she wants.—Good-day, Miss Wren; are you coming to live here?”

“I was thinking of it,” she replied, tossing her head; “but I don’t think the society is very select.”

As she made this speech, she gave it point by looking straight at Robinette.

“Indeed,” he said, “you are rather a small person to have formed such a large opinion; but as you are so small, you are welcome to stay as long as you do not interfere with me.”

“Thank you for nothing, Cock Robin. I shall stay or I shall go without asking your leave.”

“You are a very rude bird, Jenny Wren.”

“Am I, Cock Robin? There are various opinions about that. What a great, fat, clumsy bird you are, to be sure! I would not have you for a husband

[26]

though there were not another bird in the garden.”

“You will perhaps wait until you are asked, Miss Wren,” replied Robinette, feeling he had better retire from the argument after this retort, for Jenny, like all females, would try to have the last word.

Polly had been watching the birds fluttering towards each other, and was a little fearful Robinette might be rough with Jenny, so she was glad to see them part company after simply speaking, as she thought.

This is the only incident worth mentioning that occurred during the winter months. Robinette’s life was happy and comfortable. Free to come and go as he pleased, he always felt himself a guest—never a prisoner.

At last winter was over, and the garden was beginning to have more attractions. There were some rather pretty Miss Robins flying about, and our bird thought he must go a-courting. He could not easily make up his mind whether he should bring a wife into the house, or whether he should go and live in the garden with her. Finally he decided on the latter plan. [27]

One very fine morning he dressed his feathers most carefully, saw that each one was lying exactly over the other, that his brown coat was perfect and his red waist-coat faultless. He practised his singing until his love-song was all he could wish it. He was wonderfully well satisfied with himself; but Jenny Wren’s impertinent speeches would recur to his mind. The words fat and clumsy had especially annoyed him, and he never could altogether rid himself of their effect.

As he flew past the greenhouse he saw a bucket with pure, clear water in it. He thought he would rest on the edge and take a drink. Imagine his delight when he saw reflected in the water a perfectly beautiful cock robin, as charming a bird as any one could desire to see. After such a vision, what cared he for Jenny Wren and her impudence? Away he went, flying up and down the garden, quite sure that no Miss Robin in her senses would say “no” to him. [28]

He rested a while on the branch of an apple-tree, while he meditated on the various Miss Robins, and considered to which he should pay his addresses. He was startled by a slight movement of some leaves just beneath him, and on looking down to find the cause, he saw his too candid friend Jenny.

“So you are come out a-courting?” said she. “You are not a bit thinner. Which of the Miss Robins do you think will have you—a fat, over-fed house-bird?” [29]

“You are quite mistaken, Miss Wren, if you think I am out for any such purpose. I am only taking an airing this fine day. A-courting, indeed! A bird like you would frighten any bachelor. I am sorry for your husband, if you ever get one.”

Away he flew, for he did not like Miss Wren’s remarks. You see, he had not mixed much with other birds, so he had not, as it were, found his level. He was in danger of thinking too much or too little of himself; and then, you perceive, he was thin-skinned.

Poor birdie! That pert young Jenny had put his spirits down to his very toes. Had it not been for the glimpse he got in the bucket, he would have returned to the house discouraged for that day. However, like many other creatures, he did not know what the near future had in store for him. [30]

The time of day was noon, and he bethought him the kitchen dinner would be ready; so he prepared to fly towards the house, as he was very hungry. Just at this moment he caught sight of the gardener turning over some stuff for a hot-bed, and he also saw some fine, fat worms thrown to the surface by the fork. He concluded to dine there that day, and proceeded to make a very satisfactory meal. He had with some difficulty swallowed a very large worm, when he heard the gardener say, “Hush! gently; now we shall see some fun.” Robinette looked up. He saw, and he loved. The daintiest Miss Robin in all the garden was hopping towards him. Alas! beside her was a

fine cock robin, and they seemed on the pleasantest terms with each other, and hopped along, quite unaware of Robinette's presence. To be ignored was what he could not stand. So he came near to them, made a deep bow to the lady, and ruffled his feathers and scowled at his rival. A fierce rage and jealousy took possession of him. He would kill this bird or die in the fight. The other cock robin was as eager for the fray as he was; so these two little birds were soon fighting savagely for the lady of their choice. She watched the duel from a twig close by. She had made up her mind to marry the winner, and it did not seem to matter much which that was. Both were handsome; and the victor would prove himself the stronger. The birds were very equally matched, and fought for some time with varying fortune. At last, however, Robinette was conqueror, and he flew at once to the lady and claimed her as his bride. He knew he now had a right to her; but just in case her mind should waver towards another, he placed before her the advantages of an alliance with him, the chief one being that he could get as much food as ever they could eat, with very little trouble, and the food was of the most rare and nourishing kind.

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"I can get some for you now, for I see my friends in the garden, and Polly is sure to have crumbs in her pocket. Wait here until I come back."

[32]

The ladies had come out for a stroll in the garden. What a garden that was! At almost any season it was beautiful, but in the summer it was a paradise alike for birds and human beings. It was surrounded by grand old trees of many kinds and flowering shrubs as large as trees. Then the wealth of roses and sweet-scented, old-fashioned flowers of all sorts, mixed here and there with their more modern sisters, made it a perfect dream of delight. How the town-wearied friends rejoiced when they were bidden to visit that garden! There their eyes were refreshed by the softly-blended colouring and exquisite beauty of the whole scene. They breathed in the delicious air, and thought it better than wine as a restorer of strength. No words can describe the feeling to the feet of those soft, green avenues—the grass so short that the most delicate could walk there without harm, and so smooth that a child's bare foot could run there scathless. That garden is now to those dear friends a place in their memory only. The ladies have passed away from it, and strangers are in possession.

[33]

Excuse this digression.

Robinette flew to Polly's hand.

"So here you are, Bobbie. We wondered what had become of you, as you did not come in at lunch-time. Don't fill your mouth so full; you will choke yourself. Oh! he is off."

Polly had held the crumbs for him as usual, and he just stuffed his mouth full and flew in the direction of the greenhouse.

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"Mother, Robinette must have a lady-love. He has taken the crumbs away; he did not swallow them."

Mrs. Robinette was charmed with the crumbs—that kind of food suited her taste exactly; and she hoped her husband would keep her well supplied with them when she was too much occupied with other matters to seek food for herself. Robinette gallantly promised to do his best for her.

Now it was time to seek a place for their nest, and begin building. Like most young people under similar circumstances, they were difficult to please. Robinette, having been so much accustomed to a house, thought the greenhouse the best place; Mrs. Robinette, knowing nothing about houses, thought a nice, thick bush much superior. She, like a good wife, gave in to her husband, and allowed him to choose the site for their nest. He selected a nice, quiet corner of the greenhouse, beside some large flower-pots that looked as if they had not been disturbed for a century. Here they would be safe from storms and cats and all creatures which terrify small birds. As evening was drawing on, our little lovers parted, having appointed a place to meet next morning at sunrise to begin to build their nest.

[35]

The following day the sun rose bright and beautiful, making all things and creatures rejoice, and none more than our two little birds, who were soon as busy as possible, finding and bringing the materials necessary for their purpose.

They had such a happy time building that nest; he was so gallant and she was so sweet. How he sang to her when she was tired, and what delicious crumbs he brought her! Some shortbread had been sent to Polly as a present, and it is such a crumbling cake that the birds feasted royally while it lasted. [36]

At last the nest was finished. The little builders looked it all over and could find no fault with it. As they were rather exhausted with their hard work, they agreed to rest themselves a while near the hot-bed where the memorable fight had taken place. There they could find plenty of worms without fatigue, and they would sleep or chat as they felt disposed. When they were sufficiently rested, they went back to look at their pretty, new house. Alas! alas! what desolation they found! The gardener, who had been cleaning his greenhouse, had moved the big, dirty flower-pots, and had thrown out the robins' nest. Poor, tired birds, they had to begin all over again. Mrs. Robinette burst into tears, saying,—

"I told you not to choose a house to build in; I was sure a bush would have been safer. Do, dear husband, come away now to some other place; I do not like the men." [37]

Robinette was very angry at his work being spoiled, and he answered a little sharply,—

"Nonsense, my dear; I am not going to be driven out of my way by a stupid old gardener. We shall build here again. Let us set to work at once; and if that man interferes I shall tell the mistress. Hallo! here is a piece of good-luck for us; he has only thrown it down here. To be sure, it is torn to pieces. But never mind; we shall soon have it up again."

You see Robinette had a temper; but he was a cheery wee bird, inclined to make the best of things. When his anger had cooled, he chirped to his down-hearted little wife so brightly that she was obliged to pluck up spirit, and they were soon as merry as before the terrible misfortune. [38]

A few days after these events Mrs. Lewis came into her greenhouse, and seeing it look so much brighter and lighter than usual, she said to the gardener,—

"You must acknowledge that the house looks better for being clean. Try to keep it so."

"I'll try, ma'am; but it is not much use when these mischievous birds come in, bringing their stuff to build with. Just look there. I threw away a nest from that very spot three days ago, and there is another. And there is a robin in it."

"It is Robinette," cried Polly. "I am sure it is.—Bobbie, come for crumbs."

Robinette, sly bird, had been watching and listening; and when he saw that attention was drawn to the nest, he sat down in it as though he were the lady on her eggs, knowing well "the mistress" would give orders that he was not to be disturbed. And when she saw it was her own pet robin, of course she was more decided, and told the gardener he was on no account to take down the nest, and every possible arrangement was to be made for the comfort and happiness of Robinette and his wife. [39]

It is customary to close all stories when the hero marries. So, having come to the end of Robinette's bachelor days, we shall take leave of him and his bride, hoping that, now they are married, they will "live happy ever after."

What a bright, sunshiny forenoon! and how green the meadow looked before Simon Copland's farm! The thrush in the great thorn was singing loudly, and the old clock, which stood in its dark oak case in the corner of the kitchen, struck twelve as little Phœbe came into the porch.

This little girl, though, whose face was so sad, and whose straw-hat hung so droopingly from her arm, was not like the Phœbe of most days, who, on her return from school about this hour, came popping her happy little face in at the door, and if dinner were ready, would eat hers quickly, and be off again. [41]

The kitchen at Simon Copland's was a long, large room, and had great beams across the ceiling, from which hung hams and other good things. Mrs. Copland was busy at the table, and near one of the windows sat her brother, Phœbe's uncle, Roger, who lived some miles away at pretty Lady's Mead, and who was very dear to his little niece. To him, however, she had no mind to go at present, and would have slipped upstairs; but he quickly spied out the little figure in the doorway, and opened his arms to her, saying, "Here's the little lass; give thy Uncle Rogie a kiss, Phœbe." There was no escape for Phœbe, and in a minute more she was on her uncle's knee, while his large forefinger was placed on the marks of tears on her cheeks, and his kind inquiring eyes asked as well as his words, "Phœbe, my lass, what ails thee?" [42]

Her mother turned round from the table. "What is it, Phœbe?" she said.

And then came a burst of tears from the little girl, and a confession, poured into Uncle Roger's ear, of misfortunes that day, and many days before, at Mrs. Nott's school in the village; how diligently Phœbe had always prepared her lessons overnight, but how first one book was lost, and then another; and how to-day, because the pencil had been carelessly fastened to the slate, it too had disappeared, and was not there when wanted, and in consequence Margaret Prettyman had got above her—sly Margaret Prettyman, who often did not learn her lessons at all, but kept her place at the head of the class by writing down her task on a slip of paper, and keeping it in her hand while she repeated it; and how Mrs. Nott had said that Margaret was so tidy and Phœbe so careless; and how she reproved the latter when the class was over, and told her that, unless girls were tidy and careful, all their learning was of no use. "Every girl ought to keep herself and her things in apple-pie order," Mrs. Nott said. "And, O uncle," sobbed Phœbe, "I know I'm careless, but I never can remember to be tidy; and I can't keep apple-pie order, for I don't know what it is." And so, with many more tears, Phœbe's confession ended. [43]

"Well, child," said her mother, "it's as I've often told you. Your drawer is a shame to be seen; and I'm glad Mrs. Nott spoke to you as she did."

Uncle Roger stroked his chin, and sat looking out through the window for a little, saying nothing, till Phœbe's sobs grew less frequent, and at last almost ceased. He then reached his hand through the open lattice, and pulling a little flower from among the creepers, gently raised Phœbe's face, saying,— [44]

"Look thee here, little niece; mark this small, pretty flower, with its white blossoms so perfect and tidy; look at the stalk below, and each little leaf upon it, regular, one after the other. There isn't one part of this pretty flower out of its place, Phœbe; and who made it?"

Phœbe's sobs ceased altogether as she replied, "God, uncle."

"And look there," Uncle Roger went on, drawing towards him as he spoke a large china dish, on which lay a beautiful honeycomb, which Mrs. Copland had set aside for a sick friend—"look at this too. See each cell, and each of these beautiful little arches; there is not one unlike its neighbour. What do you think of order like that, niece Phœbe? isn't it perfect?" [45]

"Yes, uncle," she whispered, quieted and wondering.

"Well, little lass, our God, who made the pretty flower, and caused the bees to make the sweet honeycomb, is a God of order, and He loves order. He

does not wish my little Phœbe to be the untidy little maid she is.”

Phœbe lay quiet for a few minutes, thinking to herself how kindly Uncle Roger always spoke to her, and how much easier it was to “feel good” with him than with Mrs. Nott or Margaret Prettyman. “But what did Mrs. Nott mean by ‘apple-pie order,’ uncle?” she said after a little, looking up in her uncle’s face.

Uncle Roger smiled and smoothed her hair, not saying anything for a moment or two; then, instead of answering her question, he asked, “When is your birthday, Phœbe?”

“The twenty-sixth of next month,” she replied quickly, and wondering very much. [46]

“Do you remember,” continued Uncle Roger, “the custard feast I gave you last birthday? I’ve been asking your mother here to bring you over this year too to Lady’s Mead, and I’ll give you another feast, and father, and mother, and Bob, and little Charlie; and we’ll have Uncle and Aunt Leyton, and little Mary-Anne to keep you company; and then, Niece Phœbe, I’m thinking of showing you by that time what apple-pie order is. Don’t you know how good Uncle Roger’s apple-pies are?”

“O uncle!” cried Phœbe, clasping him closely round the neck; “how good you are to me, Uncle Roger—custards and apple-pies, and Cousin Mary-Anne!”

“Fair and softly,” said her uncle, loosening her hold. “You haven’t heard it all yet, Phœbe. It is nearly a month till that, you know. Well, you must promise me that every day of that month you will please your mother by keeping your drawer, or whatever it is, as tidy as a nut; and I must have from Mrs. Nott a good account of your order and neatness. Mind, *every day*; no books lost, no pencils falling off, else no apple-pies for you, Niece Phœbe.” [47]

Phœbe’s face fell. “O uncle!” she said.

Her mother looked round again. “Roger, you spoil the child,” she exclaimed.

“Not if I teach her order, Sister Marjory,” was his reply.

“I’ll *try*, uncle,” whispered Phœbe; and Uncle Roger kissed her.

You all know the difference well, I don’t doubt, betwixt *trying* and *doing*—how easy it seems to perform a promise at first, when resolves are fresh and strong, but how each day takes, as it were, a little bit of strength out of the wish to do the disagreeable duty. Little Phœbe was truly anxious to overcome her bad habit; and I can also say that, though apple-pies and custards, and her dear little cousin Mary-Anne’s company, had at first given her an inducement to do so, yet after a little that part of it became very faint indeed in comparison with the wish to succeed in fulfilling her promise to Uncle Roger. [48]

Difficult enough the task was; and sometimes Phœbe felt as if the month would never pass. But the days went on somehow, and Mrs. Copland was much amused, and secretly much pleased, to see the important air with which her little daughter would retire daily to her small bedroom, next her father and mother’s, and after a great deal of knocking about and noise overhead, would run downstairs, and coming to Mrs. Copland, say, “Please, mother, come and look at my drawer. I’m sure it’s tidy.” [49]

After a little time had passed, Mrs. Copland explained to her daughter the secret of true order; which is, not to keep things untidy, and to have constantly to *put them to rights*, but to *keep them right*—to put everything in its own place *at once*. This was a new part to learn in Phœbe’s lesson, but she tried it, and heartily too; and things were going on in this way when, just two days before the month was over, there came a sad misfortune to her, which took away the hopes of apple-pies and other things which her birthday was to bring her.

All this time she had been going regularly to Mrs. Nott's school, and the schoolmistress was much surprised at the change in her careless little pupil. Her companions, too, could not tell what had come to Phœbe Copland; and as for sly Margaret Prettyman, she was filled with dislike and envy of her little rival; for Phœbe, having put aside her careless habits, took her place as first in the class, and Margaret had been first till now.

[50]

On this particular afternoon Mrs. Nott had given her girls an additional task to learn; and Phœbe, having a quarter of an hour to spare, sat down, as was her habit sometimes, to look over the lesson before leaving school. She was putting up her books, when one of the other girls, Esther Heywood, came to her with a message from her (Esther's) mother, asking Phœbe to step down to the Mill Farm, where the Heywoods lived. They had got a jar of fine citron-preserves, which the sailor son, Jem, had brought from across the seas to his mother; and she was going to send some over to Mrs. Copland to taste.

"You might leave your books here," said Esther, "and I'll walk back a bit with you. We'll get them when we come."

[51]

The citron-preserves were very, very good, and Phœbe was kept a little while at the Mill Farm to taste them, and to hear the wonderful things which Jem Heywood had to tell about the parrots and the beautiful birds in the countries where he had been; and then Phœbe started on her way home over the fields, and Esther with her. Sailor Jem said he'd "go a bit too with the girls," to see them "under way," as he called it; and it ended by Esther and Jem going the whole way with her, to carry her books, which they got as they passed the school-house.

All the evening Jem was telling them such funny stories that she could not attend to her lessons, but went to bed quite tired with laughing, and dreamed that she was a parrot, and that Jem Heywood was teaching her tasks off by heart.

Next morning, with the sunshine, up jumped Phœbe, to learn her lessons before going to school. She felt very happy. The next day but one was her birthday; and next day itself Uncle Roger would be over from Lady's Mead, she knew, and then she would tell him how faithfully she had kept her promise; and how pleased and kind he would look—she could fancy she saw his face so well. And singing a little song to herself, Phœbe sat down at her bedroom window, opening her books out before her on her knee. But there were only three books there, and she ought to have *four*.

[52]

How Phœbe sought for that book—through all her drawers and her little room, then through the house, and lastly, down all the lane, and by every step of the path through the fields which they had crossed the evening before! Oh, what a weary search that was, and what a sad story to tell her mother, when, *without* the book, Phœbe returned.

[53]

If Mrs. Copland looked so vexed, what would Uncle Roger be? And then all the happy birthday pleasures which she had lost! She would have to dine with little Charlie, she knew, and to feel as if in disgrace all day; and in disgrace even Lady's Mead itself could bring her no pleasure. Poor little Phœbe!

Her mother would not allow her to stay at home from school, but said she must tell Mrs. Nott the plain truth, and, if she had time before the class began, learn the lesson from some of the other girls' books. Fortunately, the missing task was that which Phœbe had learned before leaving the school the day before; but, owing to her haste and agitation, it was so incorrectly repeated that Margaret Prettyman again triumphantly took her place at the head of the class. It was hard enough to see Margaret's malicious face as she pushed past, and Phœbe had much trouble in choking down her temper and her tears at the same time.

[54]

The next day Esther Heywood came to meet her with a very sorrowful face, and told her that Jem had been "all up the fields" the evening before, searching the path they had gone by, and that he had looked into every

nook and corner he could think of, but he could not see the book anywhere. His opinion was, though, that Uncle Roger would never keep to his word; that he would never disappoint Phœbe on her birthday for such a trifle.

Phœbe shook her head. "Uncle Roger always keeps his word," she said. "I'll be in disgrace, I know, though perhaps I'll go to Lady's Mead all the same; but that will be quite as bad as not going at all."

Hardest of all it was when Uncle Roger came over that afternoon. Mrs. Copland had to tell him the story, for Phœbe was so drowned in tears that she could not speak a word. Uncle Roger looked grave when he heard how it was, but soothed his weeping little niece kindly, and gave her no reproof. He spoke little or nothing about the following day, only saying, while stroking her hair as usual, "Well, my little maid, we must stick to our bargain. Apple-pie order must wait till next year, I fancy; but come over all the same, and welcome, to Lady's Mead. You and Mary-Anne can have your romp together; and you must forget it's your own birthday, that's all. I'm just about as much pleased with you for your last month's doings as if all your books were safe in your bag, mind you that; and now wipe your tears, my little lass."

[55]

The next morning rose as bright and beautiful as you could well wish to see, and Phœbe, seated by her father behind the old grey horse Robin, with her mother and Charlie in the back seat, almost forgot her sorrows while driving down the sweet, shady lanes in all their beautiful autumn colours, and while looking forward to Lady's Mead, and the delight of seeing her dear little cousin Mary-Anne.

[56]

Lady's Mead was such a pretty place, with a very large orchard full of rosy-cheeked apples; and there was a dairy, large, and cool, and sweet, with great bowls of delicious milk, and such a beautifully white, clean floor. Out of doors there was a swing, and a pretty mossy summer-house down by the stream, and such delightful little paths through clipped yew hedges, and an old sun-dial on the grass, and in one corner a stone figure of a little boy kneeling, with his hands clasped and his face looking up to heaven. It was altogether such a place as children did not weary of; and had it not been for little Phœbe's late troubles, she would have been as joyous as the birds which were singing in the trees all round them.

[57]

There were many "rubs" to bear, though; first, the meeting with her uncle and aunt and Mary-Anne, and receiving from them no happy birthday wishes as usual; and then seeing her brother Bob's disappointed face when he came over from the county town where he was serving his apprenticeship, bringing with him a nice little parcel, which looked very like a doll, wrapped up in thin brown paper, and stowed away in one of his pockets for his little sister. The parcel was not taken out, however.

Cousin Mary-Anne, who was a dear, good little girl, no sooner heard that Phœbe was to dine at a side-table with little Charlie, instead of the treat of sitting at the great long one with the older people, than she declared that she would do so too; and though Phœbe would not listen to this at first, yet Mary-Anne would have it so, and it was accordingly settled. She proved herself, too, such a good little comforter and companion, that Phœbe became quite cheerful again, though perhaps their play was not quite so merry as usual.

[58]

First they went to the poultry-yard, where there was a brood of very fine little ducklings, just hatched, to see. Then to the dairy, where they both were allowed to pat away at the butter and make it up for tea. Then Matty, the dairy-maid, said that she must leave the dairy, and that they must go too; so they sauntered away down by the stream to the pretty summer-house. They were glad to get there, because of the shade, for the sun was hot, and they were tired with butter-making. So for some little time they sat resting, and making boats of the large leaves, to float down the stream.

[59]

By-and-by they heard a step coming quickly down the path towards them, and directly afterwards Bob came hurrying into the summer-house, saying, "Phœbe, come along; Uncle Roger's seeking you.—And you, Mary-Anne, if

you like, you little duck;" and with that Bob gave a loud "hurrah," which made both the girls spring to their feet in astonishment.

"But why, Bob?" asked Phœbe excitedly, as he hurried them along, one in each hand, as fast as they could go up the path.

"Never you mind," said Bob—"you'll soon know;" and then he gave another "hurrah" and jumped like a madman.

On they rushed, through the orchard, round the yew hedge, and so past the old dial, and over the grass, on to the house. At the window, which was a very large one, Phœbe saw quite a crowd; for they were all collected there, and amongst them, to her astonishment, stood tall Jem Heywood. When she and Bob and Mary-Anne came in sight, he set up a cheer, in which little Charlie joined lustily; and Phœbe turned first red and then pale, and at last stopped altogether in fright and bewilderment, dragging the two others back with her. Then her father's face looked out and smiled to her, and then her mother's and Aunt Leyton's; and then out came Uncle Roger, and Phœbe was lifted on his shoulder, and carried through the midst of the smiling faces to where the dinner was laid out. [60]

There she saw a little bower of green branches over a chair at Uncle Roger's right hand, at the end of the table; and on this chair, under the boughs, Uncle Roger set her down, while before her rose the most enormous apple-pie you can imagine! Instead of crust, which it looked like, its cover was of china-ware; and Uncle Roger raised it in his hand when every one had sat down all round the table, and there—what do you think? Phœbe saw the wonderful pie filled, not with apples, but with beautiful birthday gifts—Bob's doll, dressed all in pink ribbons and lace; a little straw-hat, trimmed with bright blue ribbons, from Aunt Leyton; a pretty china cottage, covered with roses, from Mary-Anne; a beautiful little work-box, lined with red silk, and filled with every pretty, useful thing for sewing, and also a crown-piece in it, from her father and mother; and better than all these, a small Bible, beautifully bound in purple velvet, with gold clasps, from Uncle Roger; and beside this lay *another book*, and with a cry of surprise Phœbe saw before her, torn and stained, her own lost lesson-book! What a cheer rose up all round the table! And sailor Jem cheered louder than any one. But all this joy was too much for poor Phœbe, and she fell acrying on Uncle Roger's shoulder. [61]

If any of you wish to know how the lost book was found again, I must tell you what Jem Heywood said about it, though it won't be in his own words. [62]

He had been down the evening before at Mrs. Prettyman's (Margaret's mother), and one of the little ones having come toddling into the room, Jem had lifted it on his knee, taking as he did so a crushed, torn book out of its hand. On the fly-leaf, though almost torn away, Jem read, to his surprise, the first letters of Phœbe's name. The child said it had got the book "in Maggie's bag." Then Margaret came in herself, and Jem asked her what was the meaning of this. Her angry, guilty face and confused replies immediately roused his suspicions; and on going home he took care to let his sister Esther know all he had seen and heard. The truth was soon found out. It was Margaret who had done this spiteful thing, to bring disgrace upon Phœbe. [63]

Can you all picture to yourselves Phœbe's joy on this happy evening? How grateful she was to Jem Heywood, and how the hours flew away, supper-time coming before the games seemed half done! Phœbe found time, though, for a long, happy talk with Uncle Roger; and it was then she told him how she had made up her mind not to quarrel with Margaret because of all this, but to try, if possible, to be better friends than before; for she now saw, she said, that their quarrelling had brought all this about.

I may as well add here, as some of you may wish to know, that Phœbe's resolution had its own reward, for her change of conduct seemed to bring about a change in Margaret's too. Of course this took some time, for bad feelings cannot be rooted up all at once. But as the months passed on, every one could see a great improvement in Margaret. Little beginnings often [64]

bring much greater endings; and Margaret could look back afterwards to this time with feelings of gratitude for the lesson which had been taught her by means of one forgiving little heart.

On this birthday night Uncle Roger was much pleased to hear Phœbe speak as she did; and her happiness was quite full when, drawing her on his knee, he added, "And my little Phœbe has shown me that, with God's help, she has learned the meaning of 'APPLE-PIE ORDER.'"

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