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Judith Lynn

A Story of the Sea

By Annie Hamilton Donnell

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Chapter I.

In Tarpaulin and oilskins she did not look like a Judith. Easily she might have been a Joseph or a James. So it was not really to be wondered at that the little girl in the dainty clothes—the little girl from The Hotel—should say, “Why!”

“What is your name?” the Dainty One had asked.

“Judith Lynn,” had answered the boy-one in oilskins.

“Why!” Then, as if catching herself up at the impoliteness of such a little word in such a surprised tone—“I mean, please excuse me for thinking you were a boy,” the little Dainty One had added, in considerable embarrassment. And Judith had laughed—Judith’s laughs were rare, but the crisp, salty brightness of the sea was always in them. The sea was in everything about Judith.

“I don’t wonder!” laughed Judith. “Me, with these togs on! But I guess *you’d* be a boy when you went out to your traps—you can’t ‘tend traps in skirts. Blossom calls me Judas with these on!”

It was strange how suddenly the rather big voice—a voice has to be big to compete with the voice of the sea—grew soft and tender at the name of Blossom.

In Judith Lynn’s rough, hard, salt-savored life Blossom was the one thing sweet and beautiful. Blossom was the little frail wisp of a child that Judith loved. This other child, here on the sand,

watching her with friendly wonder, reminded her a little of Blossom. Anyway, they were both sweet and beautiful.

"Traps?" queried this other child. "I didn't know there were mice in the ocean!—you were going out on the ocean, weren't you?"

Again Judith's rare, bright laugh. Children were such funny things!—Blossom was, too.

"Lobster-traps," she explained, when the laugh had laughed itself out. "I'm going out to mine to get the lobsters. Out there where those little specks of white are bobbing 'round on the water—don't you see?"

"I see some little specks—yes, they're a-bobbing! Are those *traps*?"

"Mercy, no! The traps are sunk 'way down to the bottom o' the sea! Those are nothing but the little wooden floats that tell me where the traps are. I couldn't go hunting all over the bay, you know."

"No—oh, no, you couldn't go hunting all over the bay," repeated the small, puzzled voice. The Dainty One was distinctly interested. "I s'pose, prob'ly, every one of those little white specks has got a fish line to it. I hope they've all got *bites*. Oh, my suz! Here comes Elise. Elise is always a-coming!" with a long sigh.

Elise was slender and tall, in cap and apron. She walked with the stride of authority. A frown of displeasure was getting visibler and visibler on her face, the child noticed with another sigh. Elise was 'most always a-frowning.

"Good-by. I—I guess I'd better go and meet her," the Dainty One said hurriedly. "She isn't quite as cross when you go and meet her. It helps."

But the child came back again to Judith Lynn. She held out one little sun-browned, sea-browned hand.

"I'm happy to have seen you," she said, with soft graciousness, as if Judith were a duchess in laces instead of a boy-girl in fisherman's togs. "I'd be pleased to see you some more. I like you."

"Oh!" stammered the boy-girl in fisherman's togs, a flush of pleasure reddening her brown face. No one had even said "I'd be pleased to see you," to her before, though Blossom, of course, *was* always pleased. No one but Blossom had ever said, "I like you," and Blossom's way was, "I love you."

"I must go—she's 'most here," went on the child, rather anxiously. "But first I wish you'd tell me who Blossom is. You spoke about Blossom, didn't you?"

"Yes. She's my little sister. Her regular name is Janet. It's only me calls her Blossom."

"Oh, but that's lots the prettiest name! *I'm* going to call her that, too. I'd be pleased to see Blossom. Is she about my tallness?"

Judith's face had undergone one of its swift changes. It had grown defensive and a little fierce. She should not see Blossom!—this other child who could walk away over the sand to meet Elises, whoever Elises were. She should not see Blossom! Blossom should not see her!

"But, maybe—prob'ly she's a baby—"

"No, she's six. She'd be about as tall as you are, if she was straightened—I mean if she could stand up beside o' you. I guess you better go to that woman in the cap or she'll scold, won't she?"

"Goodness, yes! Elise always scolds. But I'd rather be scolded than not hear about that little Blossom girl—"

"Mademoiselle!" called the woman in the cap sharply. She came up puffing with her hurry. "Mademoiselle has escape again—Mademoiselle is ba-ad!" she scolded.

"I didn't ex-scape, either—I only walked. You don't walk when you ex-scape. You sat and sat and sat, and I wanted to walk."

The child's voice was full of grievance. Sometimes she dreaded Elise—when she saw her coming down the beach—but she was never afraid of her "near to."

"But it is not for Mademoiselle to walk so far—what is it the doctor say? Mademoiselle is ba-ad when she walk so far!"

With a sudden gesture of defiance the Dainty One sprang away across the sand, looking over her shoulder willfully. "But it's so good to walk!" she cried. "You'd walk if you was me, Elise—you'd walk and walk and walk! Like this—see me! See me run—like this!"

The eyes of the woman in the white nurse's cap met for an instant the eyes of the boy-girl in the oilskins, and Judith smiled. But Elise was gravely tender—Elise's face could undergo swift changes, too.

"Yes, certainment I would," muttered Elise, looking away to the naughty little figure. It was running back now.

"And then you'd be goody again—see me!" chanted the child. "And you'd go right straight back to Elise—that would be *me*, if you were I—and you'd put your arms round her, so, and say, "Scuse me,—hear me!"

Judith Lynn got into the old brown dory and rowed away to her lobster-traps. There was no laughter any more in her eyes; they were fierce with longing and envy. Not for herself—Judith was sixteen, but she had never been fierce or envious for herself. It had always been—it would always be—for Blossom, the frail little wisp of a girl she loved.

She was thinking intensely, What if that were Blossom, running down the beach? They were about of a "tallness"—why shouldn't it be Blossom? Why shouldn't Blossom run down the beach like that and call "See me!"

She would walk and walk and walk—it would feel so good to walk! Once she had said to Judith—the great oars stopped as Judith remembered—once Blossom had said, "Oh, Judy, if I ever walk, I shall walk right across the sea. You couldn't stop me!"

But Blossom would never walk. Judith bent to the great oars again and toiled out into the bay. Her lips were set in the old familiar lines of pain. In the distance was just visible a fleck of white and a fleck of blue—Elise and the Dainty One on the sands.

"I never want to set eyes on them again—not on her, anyway!" thought Judith as she toiled. "What did she want to speak to me for, in her nice little mincing voice! She belongs to hotels and I belong to the—sea. Blossom and I—what has she got to do with Blossom!"

But the little mincing voice had said, "I'd be pleased to see you—I like you." It had said, "I'd be pleased to see Blossom."

"She sha'n't! I won't have her! I won't have Blossom see her!" Judith stormed in her pain.

The picture of the little frail wisp of a child who would never walk was so distinct to her—and this other picture of the Dainty One who walked and laughed, "See me!" The two little pictures, side by side, were more than Judith could bear.

The traps were nearly empty. It was going to be a poor lobster season. To hotels like that one down the beach that would be a disappointment. To Judith, who stood for fisher-folk, it would mean serious loss. When the lobster season was a good one, more than one little comfort and luxury found its way into more than one humble fisher-home. And Blossom—Blossom would suffer if the lobster-traps were empty. For Judith and her mother had agreed to set apart enough of the lobster-money to get Blossom a wheel-chair. Judith had seen one once on a trip to the nearest town, and ever since she had dreamed about a little wheel-chair with Blossom in it. To wheel up and down the smooth, hard sand, with Blossom laughing and crying, "See me!"

"There's got to be lobsters!" Judith stormed, jerking up her traps one after the other. "There *shall* be lobsters!"

But she rowed back with the old brown dory almost as empty as when she had rowed it toilsomely out to her traps.

There were but three Lynns in the small home upshore. Two years ago there had been six, but father and the boys, one day, had gone out of sight beyond the bay and had never come into sight again. It is the sad way with those "who go down to the sea in ships."

Judith was the only man left to 'tend the traps and fish in the safer waters of the bay. At fourteen one is young to begin toil like that. Even at sixteen one is not old. But Judith's heart was as strong as her pair of brown, boy-muscled arms. She and the old dory were well acquainted with each other.

To-day Judith did not hurry homeward across the stretch of bright water. She let the old dory lag along almost at its own sweet will. For Judith dreaded to go home with her news of the poor little "haul" of lobsters. She knew so well how mother would sigh and how little Blossom would try to smile. Blossom always tried to smile when the news was bad. That was the *Blossomness* of her, Judith said fondly.

"That's Lynn luck," mother would sigh. Poor mother, who was too worn and sad to try to smile!

"Never mind, Judy," Blossom's little, brave smile would say. "Never mind—who cares!" But Judy knew who cared.

Strange fancies came sometimes to the fisherman-girl in the great dory, out there on the bay. Alone, with the sky above and the sea beneath, the girl let her thoughts have loose rein and

built her frail castles in the salt, sweet air. Out there, she had been a beautiful princess in a fairy craft, going across seas to her kingdom; she had been a great explorer, traveling to unknown worlds; she had been a pirate—a millionaire in his yacht—a sailor in a man-of-war. She had always had a dream-Blossom with her, on her wonder-trips, and sometimes they were altogether Blossom-dreams. Like to-day—to-day it was a Blossom-dream, a wistful little one with not much heart in it. They seemed to be drifting home, away from something beautiful behind them that they had wanted very much. They had been sailing after it—in the dream—with their hands stretched out to reach it. And it had beckoned them on—and further on—with its golden fingers, till at last it had vanished into the sunset, down behind the sea, and left them empty-handed after all. They had had to turn back without it. And Blossom—the little dream-Blossom in the dream—had tried to smile.

“Never mind, Judy,” she had said. “Never mind—who cares!” But they had both cared so much!

Then quite suddenly Judith’s fancy had changed the dream from a sad one to a glad one. She had rested lazily on her great black oars and painted another picture on her canvas of sea and sky—this time of Blossom riding way over a beautiful glimmery sea-road in a little wheel-chair, soft-cushioned and beautiful. She, Judith, followed in the old dory, and Blossom laughed with delight and called back over her shoulder, “See me! See me!”

A whiff of night-breeze warned Judith that it was growing late and the dream-fancies must stop. She leaned over the side of the dory and pretended to drop them, one at a time, into the sea. That was another of her odd little whimsies.

“Good-by, sad dream—good-by, glad dream,” she said. “You will never go ashore. You will always stay out here in the sea where I drop you—unless I decide to dream you over again some day. If I do, good-by till then.” For Judith never dreamed her day-dreams on land. They were a part of the sea and the sea-sky and the old black dory.

She must make her trip to the Hotel with her poor little haul of lobsters, for she had promised all she got to Mrs. Ben. But for a wonder Judith’s pride deserted her, and she decided to tramp away down the beach in her fisherman-clothes. When had she done that before! When *hadn’t* she walked the weary little distance inshore and back, to and from her home, for the sake of going down the beach in her own girl-things. But to-night—“Never mind, Judy—who cares!” she said to herself, with a shrug. Let Mrs. Ben laugh—let the fine people lounging about laugh—let everybody laugh! Who cared? To-night Judith was tired, and the stout little heart had gone out of her.

“Land!” laughed Mrs. Ben, in her kitchen door. But the sober face under the old tarpaulin checked her. Mrs. Ben’s heart was tender.

“I shouldn’t think I looked very landish,” Judith retorted. “And I guess you won’t say ‘land!’ when you see your lobsters. That’s every one I got to-day, Mrs. Ben!”

But Mrs. Ben said “Land!” again. Then, with an unexpected whirl of her big, comely person, she had her hands on the boy-girls’ shoulders and was gently pushing her toward a chair by the window.

“You poor dear, you! Never mind the lobsters. Just you set there in that chair and eat some o’ my tarts! You look clean tuckered out.”

“Not *clean* tuckered,” laughed Judith rather tremulously. It was good to be pushed about like that by big, kind hands. And how good the tarts were! She sank into the chair with a grateful sigh.

“I don’t suppose you can be expected to bring lobsters when there ain’t any in the traps! All is, the folks ’ll have to eat tarts!” Mrs. Ben’s folks were the people who lounged about in gay summer clothes. Judith could see them out of the window as she ate her tarts.

Some ladies were sitting on the doorsteps very near by, and their voices drifted in to Judith with intervals of silence. She began to notice what the voices were saying. They were talking about a little figure in dainty white that was circling about not far away, and the little figure in white was Judith’s acquaintance of the beach.

One of the voices was a mother-voice—Judith was sure of that from the tenderness in it. The other voice was just a plain *voice*, Judith decided. It sounded interested and curious, and it began to ask strange questions about the dainty little figure. Judith grew interested, too—then, very interested indeed.

Suddenly Judith caught her breath in an inarticulate little cry. For she could hear what the mother-voice was answering.

Chapter II.

"It seems very wonderful," the cool, interested voice said, a little more interested, if anything.

"It seems glorious!" broke in the mother-voice; and the throb in it beat upon Judith's heart through the waves of air between them. Judith's heart was throbbing, too.

"You can't think how it 'seems,'—you don't know anything about it!" the earnest, tremulous voice went on. "How can anyone know who never had a little daughter?"

"I had one once." The other voice now was soft and earnest.

"But she walked. *Your* little daughter walked. How can anyone know whose little daughter always walk—"

"She never walked." It was very soft now, and the throb had crept into it that was in the mother-voice and in Judith's heart. "I only had her a year."

They were both mother-voices! Judith could not see, but she felt sure the two sat up a little nearer to each other and their hands touched.

"Oh!—then you can know," the first voice said, after a tiny silence. "I will tell you all about it—there have only been a few I have wanted to tell. It has seemed almost too precious and—and—sacred."

"I know," the other said.

"But you must begin right at the beginning, with me—at the time when my little daughter was a year old, when the time came for her to learn to walk. That is where my story begins."

"And mine ends. Go on."

"Well, you can see how I must have watched and waited and planned."

"Oh, yes, and planned—I planned."

"You poor dear!" Another tiny silence-space, while hand crept to hand again, Judith was sure. Then the story went on.

"You say I ought to have known. Everybody says I ought to have. *They* knew, they say, and I was the baby's mother. The baby's mother ought to have known. But that was just why. I was her mother—I *wouldn't* know. I kept putting it off. 'Wait,' I kept saying to myself. 'She isn't old enough to walk yet; when she is old enough, she will walk. Can't you *wait*?' And I waited. When they did not any of them know, I kept trying to stand her on her poor little legs—I wouldn't stop trying. When she was fifteen months—sixteen months—seventeen, eighteen—when she was two years old, I tried. I would not let them talk to me. 'Some children are so late in walking,' I said. 'Her legs are such little ones!' I would catch her up from the floor and hug her fiercely. 'They sha'n't hurry you, my darling. You shall take all the time you want. Then, some day, you'll surprise mother, won't you? You'll get up on your two little legs and walk! And we'll take hold of hands and walk out there to all those bad people that try to say things to us. We'll show them!' But we never did. When she was two and a half I began to believe it—perhaps I had believed all along—and when she was three, I gave it up. 'She will never walk,' I told them, and they let me alone. There was no more need of talking then."

Judith was leaning forward, straining her ears to hear. She had forgotten Mrs. Ben's tarts—she had forgotten everything but the story that was going on out there, out of her sight. It was so much—oh, how much it was like Blossom's story! When Blossom was three, Judith had given up, too. But not till then. She had kept on and on trying to teach the helpless little legs to walk. Father and mother and the boys had given up, but Judith had kept on. "She *shall* walk!" she had said.

Sometimes she had taken Blossom down to the beach, tugging her all the way in her own childish arms, and selected the hardest, smoothest stretch of sand. "Now we'll walk!" she had laughed, and Blossom had laughed, too. "Stand up all nice and straight, darling, and walk all beautiful to Judith!" But Blossom had never stood up all nice and straight; she had never walked all beautiful to Judith. And when she was three, Judith had given up.

The story out there was going on: "After that I never tried to make her walk again, poor little sweet! We carried her round in our arms till we got her a little wheel-chair that she could wheel a little herself. She liked that so much—she called it 'walking.' It would have broken your heart to hear her say, 'See me walk, mamma!'"

"Oh, yes—yes, it would have," the other voice responded gently. It had grown a very gentle voice indeed. Judith wondered in the little flash of thought she could spare from Blossom, if the other mother were not thinking there might be harder things even than laying a little daughter away in a little white casket.

"But when she was five"—sudden animation, joy and a thrill of laughter had taken possession of the voice that was telling the story—"a little more than five—she's just six now—when she was a little more than five, they told us she could walk! There was a way! It was not a very hard way, they said. A splendid doctor, with a heart big enough to hold all the little crippled children in the universe, would make her walk. And so—this is the end of the story—we took her across the sea to him. Look at her now! Where is she? Oh, there! Marie! Marie! Come here to mother!"

Judith slipped away. She was never quite definite how she got there, but she found herself presently in the old black dory that was drawn up on the beach. It was the best place to think, and Judith wanted to think. She wanted air enough and room enough to think in—this Wonderful Thing took up so much room! It was so big—so wonderful!

She sat a long time with her brown chin in her brown palms, her eyes on the splendid expanse of shining, undulating sea before her. It reached *'way across to him*—to that tender doctor who made little children walk! If one were to cross it—she and Blossom in the old black dory—and to find *him* somewhere over across there and say to him—if one were to hold out little Blossom and say—"Here's Blossom; oh, please teach her little legs to walk!"—if one were to do that—

Judith sunk her brown chin deeper into the little scoop of her brown, hard palms. Her eyes were beginning to shine. She began to rock herself back and forth and to hum a little song of joy, as if already it had happened. The fancy took her that it had happened—that when she went up the beach, home, she would come on Blossom walking to meet her! "See me!" Blossom would call out gayly.

The fancy faded by and by, as did all Judith's dreams. And Judith went plodding home alone—no one came walking to meet her. But there was hope in her heart. How it could ever be, she did not know—she had not had time to get to that yet—but somehow it would be. It should be!

"I won't tell mother—I'll tell Uncle Jem," she decided. "Mother must not be worried—she must be surprised!" Judith had decided that. Some day, some way, Blossom must walk in on the worn, weary little mother and surprise her.

"I'll ask Uncle Jem how," Judith nodded, as she went. Uncle Jem was the old bed-ridden fisherman that Judith loved and trusted and consulted. She had always consulted Uncle Jem. He lived with Jem Three in a tiny, weather-worn cabin near the Lynns. Jem Three was Judith's age—Jem Two was dead.

"I'll go over to-night after supper," Judith said.

Uncle Jem lay in the cool, salt twilight, listening, as he always did, to the sound of the waves. It was his great comfort. He wouldn't swop his "pa'r o' ears," he said, for a mint o' money—no, sir! Give him them ears—Uncle Jem had never been to school—an' he'd make out without legs nor arms nor *head!* That was Uncle Jem's favorite joke.

"Judy! I hear ye stompin' round out there. I'm layin' low fur ye!" the cheerful voice called, as Judith entered the little cabin.

"Is Jem Three here?" demanded Judith.

"*Here?*—Jemmy Three! I guess you're failin' in your mind, honey."

"Well, I'm glad he isn't. I don't want anybody but you—Uncle Jem, how can I get Blossom across the sea?" Judith's eager face followed up this rather astonishing speech. Uncle Jem turned to meet them both.

"Wal, there's the old dory—or ye mought swim," he answered gravely. He was used to Judy's speeches.

"Because there's a great man over there that makes lame little children walk—he can make Blossom. There's a little child down at the hotel that he made walk. I've got to take her across, Uncle Jem—I mean Blossom. But I don't know how."

"No, deary, no; I do' know's I much wonder. It would be consid'able great of a job fur ye. An' I allow it would take a mint o' money."

Strange Judith had not thought of the money! Money was so very hard indeed to get, and a *mint* of it—

"Not a mint—don't say a mint, Uncle Jem!" she pleaded. She went up close to the bed and took one of the gnarled old hands in hers and beat it with soft impatience up and down on the quilt.

"Not a *mint!*" she repeated.

"Wal, deary, wal, we'll see," comforted the old man. "You set down in that cheer there an' out with it, the hull story! Mind ye don't leave out none o' the fixin's! Ye can't rightly see things without ye have all the fixin's by ye. Now, then, deary—"

Judith told the thrilling little story with all the details at her command. At its end Uncle Jem's eyes were shining as hers had shone.

"Judy!" he cried, "Judy, it's got to be did! Ye've got to do it!"

"Of course," Judy answered, with rapt little brown face. "I'm *going* to, Uncle Jem. But you must help me find a way."

"Wal,"—slowly, as Uncle Jem thought with wrinkled brows—"Wal, I guess about the fust thing to do is to go an' ask that hotel child's ma how much it cost her to go acrost. Then we'll have that to go by. We ain't got nothin' to go by now, deary."

"No," Judith answered, dreamily. She was looking out of the little, many-paned window across the distant water. It looked like a very great way.

"I suppose it's—pretty far," she murmured wistfully.

"Oh, consid'able—consid'able," the old man agreed vaguely. "But ye won't mind that. It won't be fur *comin' home!*"

The faith of the old child and the young was good that this beautiful miracle could be brought about. Judith went home with elastic step and lifted, trustful face.

Jem Three, scuffling barefoot through the sandy soil, met this radiant dream-maiden with the exalted mien. Jem Three was not of exalted mien, and he never dreamed. He was brown up to the red rim of his hair, and big and homely. But the freckles in line across the brownness of his face spelled h-o-n-e-s-t-y. At least, they always had before to Judith Lynn and all the world. Tonight Judith was to read them differently.

"Hullo, Jude!"

It is hard to come out of a beautiful dream, plump upon a prosaic boy who says, "Hullo!" It is apt to jolt one. It jolted Judith.

"Oh! Oh, it's you!" she came out enough to say, and then went back. The prosaic boy regarded her in puzzled wonder. Head up, shoulders back, eyes looking right through you—what kind of a Jude was this! Was she walking in her sleep?

"Hullo, I *said*," he repeated. "If you've left your manners to home—"

"Oh!—oh, hello, Jem! I guess I was busy thinking."

"Looked like it. Bad habit to get into. Better look out! I never indulge, myself. Well, how's luck?"

"Luck? Oh, you mean lobsters?" Judith had not been busy thinking of lobsters, but now her grievance came back to her. "Oh, Jem! I never got but three! All my pains for three lobsters! And two of those just long enough not to be short. It means—I suppose it means a bad season, doesn't it?"

Jem Three pursed his lips into a whistle. Afterward, when Judith's evil thoughts had invaded her mind, she remembered that Jem Three had avoided looking at her; yes, certainly he had shifted his bare toes about in the sand. And when he spoke, his voice had certainly sounded muttery.

"Guess somethin' ails your traps," he had said. "Warn't nothin' the matter with mine."

"Did you get more than three?"

"Got a-plenty."

"Jemmy Three, how many's a-plenty?"

"'Bout twenty-four."

Jemmy Three had got twenty-four! Judith turned away in bitterness and envy, and afterwards suspicion.

There was nothing the matter with her traps. If Jem Three got twenty-four lobsters in his, why did she get only three in hers? Twenty-four and three. What kind of fairness was that! She could set lobster-traps as well as any Jem Three—or Jem Four—or Five—or Six.

There had always been good-natured rivalry between the fisher-boy and the fisher-girl, and Judith had usually held her own jubilantly. There had never been any such difference as this.

Suddenly was born the evil thought in Judith's brain. It crept in slinkingly, after the way of evil things. "How do you know but he helped himself out o' your traps?" That was the whisper it whispered to Judith. Then, well started, how it ran on! "When you and he quarreled a while ago, didn't he say, 'I'll pay you back'?—didn't he? You think if he didn't."

"Oh, he did," groaned Judith.

"Well, isn't helping himself to your lobsters paying you back?"

"Yes—oh, yes, if he *did*. But Jemmy Three never—"

"How do you know he never? Is twenty-four to three a fair average? Is it? Is it?"

"No, oh, no! But I don't believe—"

"Oh, you needn't believe! *Don't* believe. Go right on finding your traps empty and believing Jemmy Three'd never! I thought you were going to save your lobster-money for Blossom."

"Oh, I was—I am going to! I'm going to save it to take her across the ocean to that doctor. It was going to be a little wheel-chair, but now it's going to be *legs*."

"But supposing there isn't any lobster-money? You can't do much with three lobsters a day. If somebody helps himself—"

"Stop!" cried Judith angrily, and the evil thought slunk away. But it came again—it kept coming. One by one, little trivial circumstances built themselves into suspicions, until the little brown freckles on Jemmy Three's face came to spell "Dishonesty" to Judith Lynn. If it had not been for the terrible need of lobster-money—Judith would have fought harder against the evil thing if it had not been for that.

"I've got to have it! There's got to be lobsters in the traps!" she cried to herself. "The doctor over there might die! If he died before I could carry Blossom to him, do you think I'd ever forgive Jemmy Three?"—which showed that the Evil Thing had done its work. It might slink away now and stay.

It was a hard night for Judith. Joyful thoughts and evil ones conflicted with each other, and among them all she could not sleep. It was nearly morning before she snuggled up against Blossom's little warm body and shut her eyes. Her plans were made, as far as she could make them. To-morrow she would go down and question the hotel mother, as Uncle Jem said. To-morrow—she must not wait. And after that—after that, heaven and earth and the waters of the sea must help her. There must be no faithlessness or turning back.

"You shall walk, little Blossom," Judith whispered softly.

How could she know how soon the sea would help?

Chapter III.

"I want to go, Judy—please, please!"

Blossom was up on her elbow, pleading earnestly. Judith was dressing.

"It's a Blossom day—you know it's a Blossom day! And Jemmy Three'll carry me down. *I* know Jemmy Three will! I haven't been out a-dorying for such a long time; Judy—please!"

It was always hard work for Judith to refuse Blossom anything. Besides—Judith went to the window and lifted the scant little curtain—yes, it certainly was a "Blossom day." The sky was Blossom-blue, the sea spread away out of sight, Blossom-smooth and shining. And the little pleader there in the bed looked so eager and longing—so Blossom-sweet! She should go "a-dorying," decided Judith, but it would not be Jemmy Three that carried her down to the sea.

"You little tease, come on, then!" laughed Judith. "I'll dress you in double-quick, for I've got to get out to my traps."

Judith had overslept, for a wonder. When had Judith done a thing like that before! For two hours Blossom had been awake, lying very quietly for fear of waking Judy; poor, tired Judy must not be disturbed. Downstairs mother had gone away to her work at the beautiful summer cottage down-beach, beyond the hotel. It was ironing-day at the cottage, and all day mother would stand at the ironing-board, ironing dainty summer skirts and gowns.

"I'll ride in front an' be a—a what'll I be, Judy?"

"A little bother of a Blossom in a pink dress," laughed Judith, as she buttoned the small garments with the swift, deft fingers that had buttoned them for six years.

"No, no! a—don't you know, the kind of a thing that brings good luck? You read it to me your own self, Judy Lynn!"

"I guess you mean a *mastif*," Judith said slowly. "Queer it sounds so much like a dog!—it didn't make me think of a dog when I read it."

"M-m—yes, I'll be a mastif"—Blossom's voice was doubtful; it hadn't reminded her so much of a dog, either, at the time. "An' so you'll have good luck. You'll find your traps brim-up full, Judy! Then I guess you'll say, 'Oh, how thankful I am I brought that child!'"

Judith caught the little crippled figure closer in a loving hug. "I'm thankful a'ready!" she cried.

They hurried through the simple breakfast that mother had left for them, and then Judith shouldered the joyous child and tramped away over the half-mile that separated them from the old black dory.

"Now, Judy, now le's begin right off an' pretend! Go ahead—you pretending?"

"I'm pretending. I'm a chariot and you're a fine lady in pink ging—"

"Ging—!" scorned Blossom. "Silk, Judy—in pink silk, a-ridin' in the chariot. It's a very nice, *easy* chariot an' doesn't joggle her hip—Oh, I forgot she hasn't got any hips, of course! Well, here she goes a-riding and a-riding along, just as comfortable, but pretty soon she says—we're coming to the beautiful part now, Judy!—'I guess I better get out an' walk now,' she says. Now pretend she *got out and walked, Judy*—you pretending?"

"I'm pretending," cried Judy, her clasp on the little figure tightening and her eyes shining mysteriously. Sometime the little fine lady should get out and walk! She should—she should!

"Now she's walking—no, she isn't, either, she's riding, and it isn't in a chariot, it's in her sister's arms, an' she's *Blossom*. Don't le's pretend any more, Judy. There's days it's easy to an' there's days it's hard to—it's a hard-to day, I guess, to-day. Those days you can't pretend get out and walk very well."

"Pretend I'm an elephant!" laughed Judy, though the laugh trembled in her throat. "That's an easy-to-pretend! And you're an—Oh, an Arab, driving me! You must talk *Arabese*, Blossom!"

Blossom was gay again when they got to the dory, and Judith dropped her into the bow, out of her own weary arms.

"Now say 'Heave-ho!—heave-ho!'" commanded Judith, "to help me drag her down, you know. Here we go!"

"I don't know the Arabese for 'heave-ho,'" laughed little Blossom, mischievously. "I could say it in American."

"Say it in 'American,' then, you little rogue!" panted Judith, all her tough little muscles a-stretch for the haul.

They were presently out on the water, rocking gently with the gentle waves. And Blossom was presently shouting with delight. Her little lean, sharp face was keen with excitement.

"Now pretend—now, now, now! It's easy to out here! The fine lady's going abroad, Judy—do you hear? She's going right straight over 'cross this sea, in this han'some ship! When she gets there she'll *step out* on the shore an' say what a beautiful voyage she's had, an' good-by to the cap'n—you're the cap'n, Judy. An' you'll say, 'Oh, my lady, sha'n't I help you ashore?' An' she'll laugh right out, it's so ridic'lous! 'Help me, my good man!' she'll 'xclaim. 'I guess you must think I can't walk!'"

Blossom's face was alive with the joy of the beautiful "pretend." But Judith's face was sober.

"Laugh, why don't you, Judy?" cried the child.

"I'm laugh—I mean I will, dear. But I've got to row like everything now, so you must do the pretending for us both. We've got to get out there to those traps before you can say 'scat!'"

"Scat!" shrilled Blossom.

It was Blossom's sharp eyes that discovered Jem Three "out there." Judith was bending to her work.

"There's Jemmy Three, Judy! True-honest, out there a-trapping! He looks 's if he was coming away from our place—he is, Judy! He's got our lobsters, to s'prise us, maybe."

"It won't surprise me," muttered Judy, in the clutch of the Evil Thought again. She was

watching the distant boat now keenly, her eyes hard with suspicion. Jem Three it surely was, and he was rowing slowly away from Judith's lobster "grounds." It seemed to her his dory was deep in the water as if heavily weighted. He had been—had been to her traps again. He was whistling—Judith could hear the faint, sweet sound—but that didn't hide anything. Let him whistle all he wanted to—she knew what he had been up to!

"Ship aho-oy!" came across faintly to them, but it was only Blossom that answered.

"Ahoy! Ship ahoy!" she sent back clearly. Judith bent over her toiling oars.

"He's going away from us, we sha'n't meet him," Blossom said in disappointment.

"Of course he's going away—of course he won't meet us," Judith retorted between her little white teeth.

"An' I wanted to 'speak him,'" the disappointed little voice ran on; "I was going to call out, 'How's the folks abroad? We're on our way 'cross, in the Judiana B.,'—this is the Judiana B., Judy, after both of us. B. stands for me."

"Funny way to spell me!" laughed Judith with an effort. She must hide away her black suspicions. Not for the world would she have Blossom know! Blossom was so fond of Jemmy Three, and she had so few folks to be fond of.

A surprise was waiting for them "out there." The traps were pretty well loaded! Not full, any of them, but not one of them empty. In all, there were seventeen great, full-grown, glistening, black fellows for Blossom to shudder over as she never failed to do—Blossom was no part of a fisherman.

"He didn't dare to take them all," thought Judith, refusing to let the Evil Thought get away from her. "Probably he saw us coming. If he'd let 'em alone there might have been a lot more—perhaps there were fifty!"

"One, two, three,"—counted Blossom slowly. "Why, Judy, there's seventeen. You didn't s'pose there'd be as many as seventeen, did you? Isn't that a splendid lot?"

"Not as splendid as fifty," answered Judy, assured now that there had been as many as that.

"Seventeen from fifty is thirty—thirty-two," whispered the Evil Thing in her ear. Evil things cannot be expected to be good in arithmetic or anything else. "So he helped himself to thirty-two, did he! Nice haul! Thirty-two big fellows will bring him in—"

"Don't!" groaned Judith.

"I don't wonder you say 'don't!' Thirty-two nice big fellows would have brought *you* in a pretty little sum. You could have put it away in a stocking in your bureau drawer, for the Blossom-fund."

"Oh, I was going to! I was going to!"

"Thought so—well, you'll have to get along with seventeen. That comes of having boys like that for friends!"

"He isn't my friend!" Judith cried sharply to the Evil Thing in her breast. "He never will be again. If it wasn't for Uncle Jem I'd never look at him again as long as I live!"

All this little dialogue had gone on unsuspected by the little pink "mastif" in the bow of the little dory. Blossom had been busy edging out of the reach of the ugly things in the bottom of the boat. If Judith had only edged away from her Ugly Thing!

Another surprise was even now on the way—a surprise so stupendous and unexpected that, beside it, the lobster-surprise would dwindle away into insignificance and be quite forgotten for the rest of the day. And oddly enough, it was to be Blossom who should be discoverer again.

"I'm going a little farther out and fish awhile," Judith announced over her last trap. "I've got all my tackle aboard and maybe I can find something Mrs. Ben will want. You sit still as a mouse, Blossom, for I can't be watching you and fishing, too."

"I'll sit still as *two* mice. Needn't think o' me!" answered the little one proudly. Did Judy think she was little like that? Just because she hadn't legs that would go! They didn't need to go, did they, out here in the middle of the sea!

"What makes it look so ripply an' bubbly out there?" she questioned with grown-up dignity. Judy should see she could sit still and talk like anybody.

"Where?" asked Judith absently. She did not take the trouble to follow the little pointing finger with her eyes.

"*There*—why don't you look? It's all pretty an' ripply an' kind of queer. Doesn't look like plain

water 'xactly. Look, Judy—why don't you?"

"I am looking now—Oh, Oh, wait! It looks like—Blossom, I believe it's a school! That's the way the water always loo—Blossom, Blossom, do you hear me, it's a school! A school of mackerel—a *school*, I tell you!"

"Well, you needn't keep on a-telling me." Blossom, anyway, was calm. "I'm not deaf o' hearing, am I? If it's a school, le's us go right straight out there an' fish it up, Judy."

Judy was going right straight out there with all the strength of her powerful young arms. She was not calm; her face was quivering with excitement and joy. A school! A school! Oh, but that meant so much for the Blossom-fund, to put away in the stocking in the bureau drawer! If it should prove a big school—but she and Blossom could not manage a big one, never in the world. If Jemmy Thr—no, no, not Jemmy Three! This was not Jemmy Three's school—what had he to do with it?

In all the stress and excitement of sending the old dory out there where the water was rippling its news to her, Judy had time to think of several things. She had time to remember how she and Jem Three had used, from the time they were little brown things in pinafores, to plan about their first school o' mackerel—what they would do with all the wealth it should bring them, how they would share it together, how they would pull in the silvery, glistening fellows, side by side. What plans—what plans they had made! They had practiced a shrill, piercing call that was to summon the one of them who should happen to be absent when the "school" was descried out there in the bay. Even lately, big and old as they had grown, they had laughingly reviewed that call. Now—this minute—if Judith were to utter it, piercing and far-carrying and jubilant, perhaps Jemmy Three might hear and come plowing through the waves to get his share—had he any share? Because when they were little brown things they had made vows, did that give him any rights now?

Of course, if—if things had been different—lobster-things—Judith might have pursed her lips into that triumphant summons. But—

"Sit still! I'm going to swing her round!" called Judith sharply. "I've got to go ashore for father's old net. It's in the boat-house."

"You won't leave me, Judy—promise you'll take me out with you!" pleaded Blossom, eagerly.

"I'll have to," Judith responded briefly. "There isn't time to carry you home—I don't dare *take* time."

She made her plans as she went in, and put out again with the clumsy heap of netting towering at her feet. The thing she meant to do was stupendous for a girl to attempt alone, but she was going to attempt it. The shabby old net had lain in its corner, useless, for two years. Now it should be used—she, Judith Lynn would use it! She was glad as she pulled seaward again that she had thrown in two scoops—perhaps when the time came Blossom could make out to use one a little.

The net was like a long—a very long—fence, with its lower edge weighted heavily and its upper edge provided with wooden floats, to insure its standing erect under water. When in position properly it surrounded the school of fish, completely fencing in the darting, glimmering, silver fellows. Then the circle could be gradually narrowed and the fish brought together in a mass, when scoops could be used to dip them up into the boat.

The school once located, Judith began to circle slowly round it, "paying out" her fence of netting with no small difficulty, but gradually surrounding the unsuspected fish, until at length she had them penned.

"What did I tell you! I told you I'd be the—the mastif, Judy!" Blossom chattered. "I told you you'd say how thankful you was you brought that child!"

"How thankful I am!" chattered Judy. Then, launched into the thick of the arduous work, they both fell into breathless silence and only worked. It was not much Blossom could do, but she did her little splendidly. And Judith toiled with all her strength.

They stopped at last, not because there were no more of the glistening, silver fellows about them, but because the old black dory was weighted almost to the water's edge. They had to stop. And then began Judith's terrible hour. For the heavy boat must somehow be worked back, a weary little at a time, to the distant shore. Judith set herself to this new task gallantly, but it was almost too much for her. Over and over again it seemed to her she must give it up and toss overboard part, at least, of her silver freight, to lighten her load. But over and over again she nerved herself to another spurt of strength.

She must do it! She could not give up! She would shut her eyes, like this, and row ten more strokes—just ten more. Then she would row ten with her eyes open. Ten, shut—ten, open. Perhaps that would help. She tried it. She tried other poor little devices—calling the strokes "eenie, meenie, minie, mo," the way she and Jemmy Three had "counted out" for tag when they were little—brown—things. Her strength—was surely—giving out—it shouldn't give out!

Blossom, watching silently from her weary perch, grew frightened at Judy's tense, set face and began to sob. And then Judy must find breath enough to laugh reassuringly and to nod over her shoulder at the child.

They had gone out late—had been out a wearisome time—and the journey back to land was measured off by slow, laboring oar-strokes that scarcely seemed to move the great boat. So it was late afternoon when at length Judith's hard task was done. She seemed to possess but one desire—to rest. To get Blossom over the remaining half mile between her and home and then to tumble over on the bed and sleep—what more could anyone wish than that?

But there would be more than that to do. She must get food for tired little Blossom, if not for herself. And before this towered gigantically the two last feats of strength that faced her and seemed to laugh at her with sardonic glee.

"Drag me up on the beach—drag me up!" the old black dory taunted her.

"Carry me home, Judy, I'm so tired!—carry me home," Blossom pleaded, like a little wilted blossom.

She did both things, but she never quite realized just how she could have done them. She remembered telling herself she couldn't and then finding them done. Of covering her load of mackerel with an old rubber blanket she was dimly conscious. It was not until she lay drowsing in utter exhaustion on her own bed that she thought of all of the rest that must be done to that boat-load of precious freight. Then she tried to sit up, with a cry of distress.

"I must go! I can't stay here! Or I shall lose—Oh, what shall I lose?" she groaned in her drowsiness and dread. Something would happen if she did not get up at once—she would lose something that she *mustn't* lose. She must get up now, at once.

"I shall lose Blossom—no, I mean Blossom will lose—oh, yes, Blossom will lose her legs, if I don't get up," she drowsed, and fell asleep.

Chapter IV.

Judith awoke with a bewildering sensation of guilt and need of action. What had happened? What had she done that she ought not to have done?—or was it something that she ought to? Memory struggled back to her dimly, then flashed upon her in sudden clearness.

She had taken a school of mackerel—that was what she had done that was praiseworthy. She had left them down there in the old black dory, undressed and unpacked—that was the thing she ought not to have done. That was the awful thing! For if they were not dressed and packed at once—

"Oh, I shall lose them! I shall lose them!" moaned poor Judith, sitting up in bed and wringing her hands in the keenness of her distress. "How could I have *let* myself fall asleep! How could I have slept all this time like a log!"

It was very dark, so it must be midnight or later. There was no light anywhere, on land or sea, or in Judith's troubled soul. To her remorseful mind all her terrible labor and strain of body had been in vain; she had gone to sleep and spoiled everything, everything!

Judith had never been so utterly tired out as when she went to sleep; she had never been so tired as she was now. She felt lame in every joint and muscle of her body. But her conscience stood up before her in the dark and arraigned her with pitiless, scathing scorn.

"Well, aren't you ashamed of yourself? See what you've done! All those beautiful fish lost, when you might have saved them—just by staying awake and attending to them. A little thing like that! And you worked so hard to get them—I was proud of you for that. Ah-h, but I'm ashamed of you now!"

"Don't! don't—you hurt!" sighed Judith, "I'll get up now, this minute, and go down there. Don't you see me getting up? I've got one shoe on now."

Judith was not experienced in the dressing of many fish at a time and the packing of them in barrels for market. At sixteen, how can one be—and one a girl? But she knew in a rather indefinite way the importance of having it done promptly. She remembered father's and the boys' last school of fish—how she had hurried down to the shore and watched the dory come creeping heavily in, how the boys had cheered, as they came, how father had let her help at the dressing, and mother had brought down hot coffee for them all and then "fallen to," herself and worked like a man. How they all had worked to get the barrels packed full of the shining layers in time for the steamer next morning!

All this Judith remembered as she crept silently away through the darkness and turned toward the salty spray that the wind tossed in her face. That had been a phenomenally large school of mackerel—eighteen barrels for market in the distant city. Judith was not quite sure, but she thought the check that came back to father had been for a hundred and fifty dollars. Mackerel had been in great demand then. A hundred and fifty dollars! Judith stopped short and caught her breath.

“But my school was just a little one,” she thought, “and maybe people aren’t very mackerel hungry now.” Still, a hundred dollars—or even fifty—fifty dollars would go so far toward that doctor across the sea! Supposing she had lost fifty dollars! She hurried on through the black night, not knowing what she should do when she got to her destination, but eager to do something. The lantern she carried cast a small glimmer into the great dark.

Judith was not afraid—how long had it been since she was afraid of the dark? But a distant thrill shot through her when she saw another faint glimmer ahead of her. Then it seemed to divide into two glimmers—they blinked at her like evil eyes. They were straight ahead; she was going toward them! She must go toward them if she went to the old dory drawn up on the beach.

“And I’m goin!” Judy said defiantly. “Blink away, you old bad-y two-eyes! Wait till I get there and fix you!” It helped to laugh a little and nod defiance at the blinking eyes.

The salty spray increased to a gentle rain, buffeting her cheeks. The steady boom of the breakers was in her ears like the familiar voice of a friend. Judith tramped on resolutely.

The lights were two lanterns, sheltered from the wind, beside the old black dory. Judith came upon them and cried out in astonishment. For she had come upon something else—a boy, dressing fish as if his life depended on it!

“Jemmy Three!” she ejaculated shrilly.

The boy neither turned about nor stopped.

“Hullo! That you, Jude? Got a lantern? Take that knife there an’ go to work like chain lightnin’. I’ve filled two barrels—there isn’t any time to lose, now, I tell you! Steamer’s due at seven.”

“But—but—I don’t understand—” faltered Judith.

“Well, you needn’t, till you get plenty o’ time. Understandin’ don’t dress no fish.” Jemmy Three, like Jem One, had missed his rightful share of schooling. “What we got to do now is dress fish.”

Judith went to work obediently, but the wonder went on in her mind. What did it all mean? How had Jemmy Three found out about the mackerel? Why was he down here in the dead of night dressing and packing them?

By and by the boy saw fit to explain in little jerks over his shoulder. Judith pieced them together into a strange, beautiful story that made her throat throb.

“Saw you had a load here—saw ’twas mackerel—knew they’d got to be ’tended to—’tended to ’em,” Jemmy Three slung over his shoulder, as he worked.

“Suspicioned you’d struck a school, and gone home clean tuckered. Oh, but you’re a smart one, Jude! Couldn’t no other girl ’a’ done it, sir, this side o’ the Atlantic!”

He caught up the dressed fish and bent over a fresh barrel; his voice sounded muffled and hollow to Judith.

“Knew there weren’t no time to spare—nobody hereabouts to help out—went at it myself all flyin’,—been down here since seven o’clock.”

“Oh, Jemmy!” Judith trembled. The throb in her throat hurt her. “What time is it now?” she asked.

A grunt issued from the barrel depths. “Time! Ain’t any time now! I told you we’d got to fly!”

It was almost twelve. They worked on, for the most part silently, until daylight began to redden the east. One barrel after another was headed up by Jemmy Three’s tireless hands. Judith counted barrels mechanically as she toiled.

“Four!” she cried. Then, “Five!” “Six!”

“There’ll be a good eight—you see,” Jem Three said, rolling a new one into position. “You’ll get a good fifty dollars, Jude; see if you don’t! How’s that for one haul? Ain’t any other girl could ’a’ done it!”

“Oh, don’t!” sobbed Judith suddenly. She let a little silver fellow slip to the ground, half-dressed, and went over to Jemmy Three.

"Don't say another word—don't dress another fish—don't move till I tell you!" she cried. "I can't stand it another minute! I—I thought you helped yourself to my lobsters—I *thought* I thought it. And you've been here all night working for me—"

"Oh!" cried Jemmy Three softly. But he did not stop working.

"I thought that was why there were only three yesterday—I thought there'd have been fifty today," ran on Judith. The new daylight lighted her ashamed face redly, like a blush.

"There wouldn't 'a' been but five—" said Jemmy Three, then caught himself up in confusion. The blush was on his face now.

Judith's cry rang out above the sea-talk. "Then you *put some in!*" she cried, "instead of helping yourself. You put some in my traps, Jemmy Three—that's what you did! You put in *twelve!*"

"Guess there's somethin' the matter with your traps, Jude," muttered the boy. "Guess they better be overhauled—guess a fellow's gotter right to go shares, ain't he?"

"Jemmy Three, I'm going to hug you!"

"Oh, oh—say, look out; I'm all scales!"

"I had scales on my eyes, but they've fallen off now," laughed the girl tremulously. "It's worse to have scales on your eyes than all over the rest o' you. I can see things as plain as day now, and—and—you look perfectly beautiful!"

"Hold on—I'm dressin' fish! The steamer's due at seven—"

"I don't care if she's due this minute, I've got to talk! If she was in plain sight—if I could see her smokestack—I should have to talk. I tell you I can *see* now, and you look splendid—splendid, and I look like a little black—blot. To think of my being up home asleep, and you working down here, dressing *my* fish—and me thinking those mean thoughts of you! It makes me so ashamed I can't hold my kn-knife."

Judith was crying now in good earnest. She had sunk down on the sand, and her crouching figure with the red glow from the east upon it looked oddly childish and small. Jemmy Three saw it over his shoulder.

"Look a-here, Judy," he said gently, dropping his own knife and going over to the rocking, sobbing figure. "You look *a-here*, I tell you! What you cryin' for, with eight barrels o' fish 'most packed an' a good fifty dollars 'most in your pocket? You better laugh! Come on, get up, and let's give a rouser! Three cheers for the only girl in the land o' the free an' the home o' the brave that darst tackle a school o' mack'rel alone! Hip, hip—"

"Jemmy, Jemmy, don't!"

"*Hooray!* Now let's dress fish. You're all right—don't you worry about bein' a blot, when I tell you you're a reg'lar brick! I'm proud o' you!"

It was the longest speech Jemmy Three had ever made, and the peroration surprised himself as much as it did Judith. He put up his hand and cleared something away from his eyes—it couldn't have been scales, for he left the scales there.

At five mother came hurrying down to find Judith. The scale-strewn beach and the scale-strewn children, the barrels in orderly rows waiting to be rolled to the little landing-place of the steamer, the heap of clumsy wet netting—all told her the whole astonishing story. And what they did not tell, Judith supplemented eagerly.

"I declare! I declare!" gasped mother in mingled pride and pity, "you two poor things, putting in like this! You'll be tired to death—you'll be sick abed!"

"Guess we'll weather it," nodded Jemmy Three, working steadily. "But if you think we ain't hungry enough to eat a pine shing—"

"I'll go right home and boil some coffee and eggs and bring 'em down, and then I'll go to work, too," cried mother energetically. "You poor starved things!"

After a salt toilet in the surf, they ate a hurried breakfast with keen relish. Judith had forgotten her aching joints and lame muscles, and Jemmy Three had forgotten his sleepless night. Victory lay just ahead of them, and who cared for muscles or sleep!

"This is the best bread 'n' butter I ever ate," said Judith between bites.

There proved to be the "good eight" barrels, when they were done, and they were done by six o'clock, or a very little after. By half-past six, the barrels had been rolled down the slope of the beach to the little wharf not far away. Then the tired two rested, and remembered muscles and sleep.

They dropped in the soft, moist sand and rubbed their aching arms.

"I'm proud o' *you*, Jemmy!" Judith said shyly, and looked away over the water. Her repentance had come back and lay heavily on her heart. She longed unutterably to recall those evil thoughts—to have another chance out there beyond to summon Jemmy Three with the little shrill old signal. How she would send it shrilling forth now!

"Jemmy," she said slowly, as they waited, "you know our signal, don't you? The one we used to practice so much."

For answer Jemmy Three pursed his lips and sent out a clear "carrying" cry.

"Well, I wish—don't you know what I wish?"

"'Twas Christmas," Jemmy said flippantly, but he knew. He dug his bare toes in the sand—a sign of embarrassment.

"I wish I'd called you out there at the school!" lamented Judith, "even if you couldn't have heard. I wish—I wish—I *wish* I'd called! If I ever strike another school—Jemmy, I'd give you half o' this one if I dared to. But I'm afraid to have Blossom wait—I don't *dare* to!"

"O' course not," agreed Jem Three vaguely. He did not at all know what Judith meant. Girls had queer ways of beginnin' things in the middle like that. No knowin' what a girl was drivin' at, half the time!

"Jemmy—say—"

"What say? Ain't that smoke out there?"

"No, it's a cloud. Jemmy Three, I'm going to tell you something. I *want* to. I'm going to tell you what that money's going to do—you're listening, aren't you?"

"With both ears—go ahead."

"Well—oh, it's going to be something so *beautiful*, Jemmy! I never knew till day before yesterday that you *could* do anything so beautiful—I mean that anybody could. I never dreamed it! But you can—somebody can! There's a man can, Jemmy! All you need is money to take you across to him and—there's the money!" waving her hand toward the rows of barrels. Her eyes were shining like twin stars. She had forgotten aches and lameness again.

"I told Uncle Jem," she went on rapidly, while Jem Three gazed at her in puzzled wonder and thought more things about girls. "He told me to go down to the hotel and ask that other little girl's mother, and I meant to go last night! But I went to sleep last night! So I'm going to-day—I'm going to ask her to tell me just exactly how to do it."

"Do what?" inquired Jem Three quietly. That was the only way to do with girls—pull 'em up smart, like that!

"Mercy! Haven't I told you?" cried Judith. "Well, then—Jemmy, if you were a little mite of a thing—a Blossom, say—and a fairy came to you and said, 'Wish a wish, my dear; what would you rather have in all the world?' what would you answer, Jemmy? Remember, if you were a little mite of a Blossom with a—with a—little broken stem." Judith's voice sank to a tender softness. She didn't know she was "making poetry."

The boy with his toes deep in the sand was visibly embarrassed. Whatever poetry lay soul-deep within him, there was none he could call to his lips.

"Wouldn't you answer her, 'Legs to walk with?'" went on the girl beside him softly. "You know you would, Jemmy! *I* would—everybody would. You'd say, 'The beautifulest thing in the world would be to *walk*—dear fairy, I want to walk so much!' And then supposing—are you supposing?—the fairy waved her wand over you and you—*walked*! Do you know what you'd say then? *I* know—you'd say, 'See me! Judy, see me! Jemmy, everybody, see me!'"

Judith laughed to herself under her breath. The twin stars in her eyes shone even a little brighter.

"The fairy's a great doctor—he's across there, 'way, 'way out of sight. He's going to wave his wand over Blossom. He waved it over another little broken girl, *and she walked*. I saw her. *She* said, 'See me!'—I heard her. That's what the money is going to do, Jemmy."

"Gee!" breathed Jemmy softly. It was his way of making poetry.

"And you see, I don't dare to wait—I'm afraid something might happen to that doctor."

"O' course!—you go down there all flyin' an' see that woman, Jude."

And that afternoon Judith went. It was to Mrs. Ben she went first; she felt acquainted with Mrs. Ben.

"Can I see—I'd like to see that mother whose little girl can walk," Judith said eagerly.

"Land!" ejaculated Mrs. Ben.

"I mean," explained Judith, smiling, "whose little girl was lame and a doctor made her walk by waving his wa—I mean by—by curing her. I heard her telling another mother. I'd like to see—do you suppose I could see that lady?"

"I guess I know who you mean—there ain't been but one little girl here lately," Mrs. Ben said. "But there ain't any now. They've gone away."

Chapter V.

Judith went straight to Uncle Jem, sobbing all the way unconsciously; she was not conscious of anything but what Mrs. Ben had said.

"They've gone away!—they've gone away!—they've gone away!" It reiterated itself to her in dull monotony, keeping slow time with the throbbing pain of her disappointment.

Uncle Jem heard her coming—in some surprise, she came so fast. What was the child hurrying like that for? What had happened?

"I hear ye, child!" he called cheerily. The time-worn little pleasantries did him service as usual. "I'm layin' low for ye!"

She crossed the outer threshold and the little box of a kitchen without slackening her excited pace, and appeared in the old man's doorway, breathless and flushed.

"It's too late!" she gasped, briefly. Then, because she needed comforting and Uncle Jem was her comforter of old, her head went down on the patchwork quilt that covered his twisted old frame, and she cried like a grief-struck little child.

"There, there, deary!" he crooned, his twisted fingers traveling across her hair, "jest you lay there an' cry it all out—don't ye hurry any. When ye get all done an' good an' ready, tell Uncle Jem what it's all about. But take your time, little un—take your time."

The child was worn out in every thread of the over-strained young body. The excitement and nervous rack of the last twenty-four hours was having sway now, and would not be put aside. And the keen disappointment that Mrs. Ben's words had brought, added to all the rest, had proved too much even for Judith Lynn. She cried on, taking her time.

"There now! that's right, storm's clearin'!" said Uncle Jem, as at length the brown head lifted slowly. "Now we'll pull out o' harbor and get to work." Which meant that now explanations were in order. Judith understood.

"They've gone away!" she said thickly. It takes time for throbbing throats to come back to their own. "It's too late to find out. If I'd gone yesterday—" She stopped hastily, on the verge of fresh tears.

"Go ahead, little un; weather's a little too thick yet to see clear. Who's gone away? What's it too late for?" But even as he said it, Uncle Jem, too, understood. He went on without waiting, to give Judith more time.

"Hold on!—I can pull out o' the fog myself. That mother o' that little cured un—she's the one that's gone away, eh? You was too late to see her an' ask your questions. I see. Well, now, I call that too bad. But 'tain't worth another cry, deary."

"Well, I won't cry another one, so there!" cried Judith. "Only—only—"

"I know—I know! We've got to slew off on another tack. You give Uncle Jem time to think, Judy. There's a powerful lot o' thinkin'-time handy when you lay here on your back for a livin'. Jest you run home an' let your ma put you to bed. I've heard all about your goin's-on, an' I guess bed's the best place for you! I'll think it out while you're restin' up."

But to unlettered people who rarely get in touch with what is going on in the thick of things, "thinking it out" is no easy matter. Their one frail little hold on the miracle that could make Blossom whole had snapped when the hotel mother and child went away. Where to turn next for information—what to do next—was a puzzle that would not unravel for any of them. In vain Uncle Jem wrestled with it, as he lay through long, patient hours. And Judith wrestled untiringly.

The mackerel-money came in due time, but the wondrous little blue check that came out of the

official-looking envelope and lay outspread on Judith's hard, brown palm had lost its power to give legs to little Blossom, and Judith gazed at it resentfully. What was the use of it now? A small part of it would get the little wheel-chair, but it was not a wheel-chair Judith longed for now. She put away the blue check safely, and took up the wrestling again. She would find the clue to the puzzle—she refused to give it up.

Then quite privately and uninvited, Jemmy Three began to think. No one had thought of asking his advice; thinking had never been Jemmy Three's stronghold.

He went into his grandfather's room one early morning arrayed in his best clothes. Not much in the way of a "best," but Jemmy had "pieced out" as well as possible with scraps of his dead father's best that had been packed away. He looked unduly big and plain and awkward in the unaccustomed finery, but the freckles across the deep brown background of his face spelled d-e-t-e-r-m-i-n-a-t-i-o-n. Uncle Jem spelled it out slowly. His astonished gaze wandered downward, then, from "best" to "best."

"Well?" he interrogated, and waited.

"I'm goin' to the city, gran'father," the boy said. "I've gotter, on a—a—errand. I thought I'd tell you."

"Good idea!" nodded the old head on the pillows. The old eyes twinkled kindly. "I suppose ye want me to go out to your traps, don't ye? An' do a little trawlin' while I'm out? Jest speak the word!"

Uncle Jemmy said nothing about getting his own dinner, but the boy had thought of that.

"Judy's comin' in at noon," he explained. "I've got everythin' cooked up. An' she's goin' to look at my traps when she goes out to hers. I'll be back in the night, sometime; don't you lay awake for me, now, gran'father!"

He went out, but presently appeared again, fumbling his best cap in palpable embarrassment.

"I wish—I don't suppose—you wouldn't mind wishin' me good luck, gran'father, would you?" he stammered. "I'd kind of like to be wished good luck."

"Come here where I can reach ye," the old man said cheerily, putting out his hand. "Wish ye luck? I guess I will! Ye're a good boy, Jemmy. I don't know what your arrant is, an' I don't need to know, but here's good luck on it!"

"I tell you what it is, if—if it succeeds," Jem Three said, gripping the twisted old fingers warmly. "I kind of thought I'd rather not tell first off. But I can, of course."

"Off with ye, boy! Ye distract me when I'm doin' a bit of thinkin' for a lady! When ye get good an' ready, then will be time enough to do your tellin'. Queer if I couldn't trust a Jem!"

The city was twenty miles inland from the little flag-station, and the flag-station was ten miles away from Jemmy Three. He trudged away with his precious boots over his shoulder, to be put on at the little station.

Once in the city, he went directly about his "arrant." He chose a street set thick with dwelling-houses as like one another as peas in a pod are like. He tramped down one side of the street, up the other, till at last he came upon what he sought. A smart sign hung on that particular house, and Jem Three mounted the high steps and rang the door-bell.

"Is this a doctor's house? There's a sign that says—"

"The doctor isn't at home," the smart maid said smartly. "Will you leave your address on the slate, or will you call again at office hours—two till six."

"I'll call somewheres else," Jem Three said briefly.

He called at many doors in many rows of pea—of houses. It was sometime before he succeeded in his quest. When at length he found a doctor at home, he was closeted with him for a brief space and then drove away with him in a trim little gig to a great, many-windowed house where pale people were sunning themselves in wheel-chairs about the doors. Jem Three made a call at the many-windowed house.

It was with considerable curiosity that two people down by the sea awaited the boy's return from his trip, but oddly enough it was neither Uncle Jem nor Judith that he sought out at first. It was Judith's mother, at her work down-beach at the summer cottage. Jemmy Three went straight to her. He had got home earlier than he expected and mother had worked later, so they walked back together in the cool, clear evening, talking all the way.

"Don't tell Judy," the boy said the last thing, as they parted. "I mean, not *it*. It'll be splendid to surprise her, Mis' Lynn!"

"If we can, Jemmy," the mother answered gently. "If it succeeds. The more I think of it the more it makes me tremble, Jemmy; but we'll do our best and leave the part we can't do with the One who can do it." The gentle voice trembled into silence. Mother could "make poetry," too. Jemmy caught off his hat suddenly, and the very act was a little prayer.

"Judy, are you awake?"

Mother stood over the bed in her scant white nightgown. When Judith answered, she sat down beside her and felt for one of her calloused, oar-toughened little hands.

"Judy, would it be—be all right to use some of the mackerel-money? Mother's got to go away for a little while—just a little while, Judy. Jemmy says he talked with a man in the city who would give me some work to do in his kitchen for a little while. But—why, I thought I'd take Blossom, Judy, and of course that would mean spending some money—"

"Blossom!"

Judith sat straight up in bed, her eyes like glints of light in the darkness.

"Why, yes, dear; she's never been away from the sea in her little life. You think of that, Judy! You've been away twice. Blossom never saw a steam-car nor a city, nor—nor heard a hand-organ! Jemmy says he heard three to-day. You think how pleased Blossom would be to hear a hand-organ!"

"Sh!" cautioned Judith, "don't wake her, mother. If—she's going, she mustn't know beforehand."

Blossom going away! Not *Blossom!* Not put one hand out, so, in the dark and feel her there beside you—little warm Blossom! Not dress her in the morning and carry her downstairs—you the chariot and she the fine lady! Not hurry home to her from the traps! Judith lay and thought about all that, after mother went away. She put out her hand on the empty side of the bed, where no Blossom was, and tried to get used to the emptiness. She said stern things to herself.

"You, Judy, are you selfish as *that?*" she said. "To go and begrudge your little Blossom a chance to go away and see things and *hear* things! Don't you want her to hear a hand-organ? And perhaps see a *monkey?* When she's never been anywhere, nor heard anything, nor seen anything! When mother's going, anyway, and can take her as well as not—you Judy, you Judy, you Judy! Oh, I can't sleep with you, I'm so ashamed of you!"

They went at once, and Judith settled down to her loneliness as best she could, and bore it as bravely. They were to be gone a month—perhaps two—perhaps three. A month—two, maybe—three, maybe—without Blossom!

Uncle Jem and Jemmy Three helped out—how much they did help out! Then there were the rare, precious letters. Judith had never had letters from mother before in all her sixteen years. She was rather disappointed that there were no bits of ragged, printed ones from Blossom, but mother's letters had Blossom-bulletins. Blossom sent her love, Blossom had heard two hand-organs—three hand-organs; Blossom said tell Judy she loved her, oh, my! Blossom was very patient and sweet.

"She's always patient and sweet," wondered Judy. Queer mother put that in!

"You little sweet, patient Blossom!" Judith's heart cried tenderly, "when I get you in my arms again—"

Would the time ever come? Why were days made so long? Twenty-four hours were too many—why weren't they made with only twenty?

"Uncle Jem, why don't you tell *me* how to be sweet and patient?" Judith said, folding up the Blossom-bulletin she had been reading to him. "Tell me a good receipt."

"Well, deary—well, give me time," laughed the cheery old voice. "I guess we can fix up somethin' that will meet your case."

A very few weeks later Judith went wearily homeward to her lonely home. She had been out to her traps and down to the hotel with the lobsters for Mrs. Ben. Her body was weary, but her heart was wearier still. It did seem, she was telling herself as she plodded through the sand, as if she could not wait any longer for mother and Blossom to come home.

Suddenly a clear little trill of laughter crept into her ears and set her pulses throbbing. Then another trill—then Blossom's voice, calling something that thrilled her to her soul.

"See me!" called the little triumphant voice of Blossom. And Judy, lifting frightened eyes and holding her breath as she looked, *saw*. A small, swaying figure was coming toward her very slowly, over the hard sand. Blossom—it was Blossom! She was swaying unsteadily a step or two, but—*she was walking!*

"See me! See me!" cried Blossom. "I'm walkin', Judy, don't you see? I came a-walkin' down to meet you! It's a s'prise!"

Someone caught up the little figure and came leaping down to Judith with great strides of triumph.

"That's enough to s'prise her—mustn't do much of it at a time yet," Jemmy Three said gayly. "You've got to begin easy. Yes!" in answer to Judy's speechless pleading, "yes, sir, she's goin' to be a reg'lar walker, now, ain't you, Blossom? Yes, sir; no more bein' toted—she's *folks!*"

"Yes, yes, yes!" trilled Blossom exultantly. "They pulled my legs out an' put 'em in over, where they b'long. Only I've got to go easy till I'm uncasted."

"Till you're—what? But never mind what! You're my Blossom, and you're home again, and you're *walking!*" Judith cried in her exceeding great joy. But by and by Jemmy Three explained.

"They put her legs in kind o' casts, you know, that she cant't have taken off yet awhile, but when they do take 'em off—"

"Then I'll run!" Blossom interrupted, radiantly.

"Oh, oh—and to think we were going to surprise mother, and you surprised me!" breathed Judy. "But I thought—we were going across the ocean—"

"You needn't have," Jemmy said. "That great doctor's over there, but there's plenty o' second-great ones over here that make children walk his way. That's what I went to find out. I thought maybe—"

"You went to find out—you thought—oh, Jemmy, what a boy you are!"

"See here—hold on—wait! Let Blossom do it!" warded off Jemmy Three, backing away precipitately.

The beautiful secret was out. Judith had been "s'prised." There were still months of uncertainty, but Judith was not uncertain. She went about in a cloud of rapture. At night she lay awake beside Blossom, and dreamed her rosy, happy dreams. And, in truth, if she could have looked ahead into the certain months, and beyond, she would have seen Blossom walking steadily through all the years.

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