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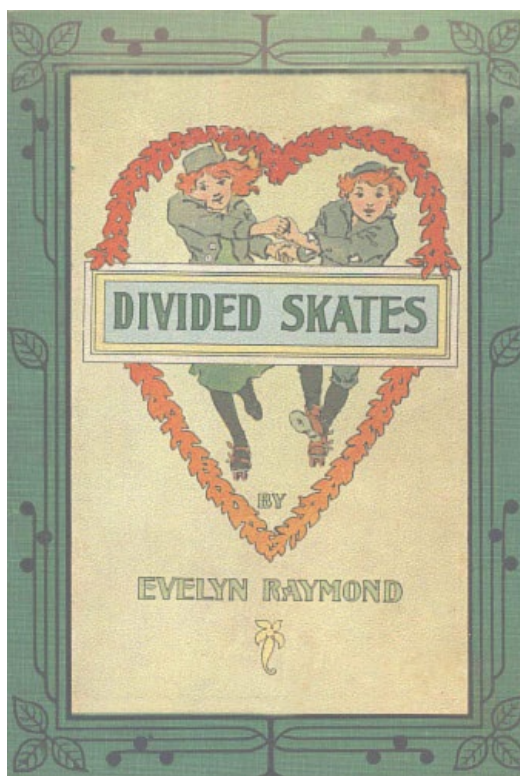
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# DIVIDED SKATES

BY



**EVELYN RAYMOND**

AUTHOR OF "MONICA",  
"MIXED PICKLES" ETC.



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THE WAY IT BEGAN.

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## DIVIDED SKATES.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE WAY IT BEGAN.

Nobody except Miss Lucy Armacost would have thought of starting an orphan asylum with one orphan. Even she might not have done it but for Molly Johns. As for Molly, she never dreamed of such a thing.

She was just careering down the avenue one windy afternoon in early December, upon one roller skate, and Miss Lucy was just coming up the block, walking rather unsteadily upon

her two small feet. The dear little old lady was so tiny and so timid, and the wind so big and boisterous, that even without the accident she would have had difficulty in climbing the slope to her big house on the corner.

This was the way of it. Molly was making a reckless speed toward the bottom of the hill, swinging one arm to keep herself in balance, and now and then just touching the foot which wore no skate to the pavement; with the free hand she grasped the thin little fingers of a ragged boy, who also wore one skate, and forced him along beside her at her own rapid pace.

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She was talking and laughing and singing, apparently all in one breath, just as she always was, and the thin little boy was doing his best to imitate her. Between them they made such a jolly racket that they heard nothing else, not even the trolley cars whizzing by, till Miss Lucy screamed:

“Oh! my dears! my dears!”

Down they all went in a heap; and it was the first time in her life that Miss Lucy remembered to have made such an exhibition of herself.

“The idea!—of my falling flat in the public street! Oh! this is dreadful!”

Molly and the boy were up almost as quick as they were down, and each had an arm about the lady, while the girl’s tones were full of shame and sympathy.

“Oh! please forgive me! I am so sorry! I didn’t see you and he didn’t, and we were having such a good time. Are you hurt? Are you hurt very much? Shall I call a policeman? Would you like an ambulance? Are you the lady that lives in the house on the Avenue, the corner house with sixteen rooms and a garden and side yard, and——”

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Miss Armacost was also upon her feet once more and had regained her self-possession. After one hasty glance around, she had satisfied herself that her mishap had not been observed by “the neighbors,” and her dignity had promptly returned.

“Whoever I may be, you are certainly the girl who asks questions!” she returned, rather crisply.

“Yes’m, I reckon I am. I’m Molly Johns. I live on Side Street. My house is the one runs right back of your garden. That’s the way I knew you. I often see you out around, pottering.”

“Oh! you do, do you? You are a very observing young person—at the wrong times.”

Molly opened her big gray eyes to their widest.

The little old lady was as odd as she looked, after all. Then she reflected that when people spoke in that tone of voice they were usually suffering in some manner. It was the very sound Father Johns’ speech had, whenever he came home from an especially hard day’s toil and his rheumatism bothered him. She again slipped her strong arm about Miss Lucy’s waist and remarked, anxiously:

[Pg 4]

“I do believe I did hurt you badly! Please lean on me and I’ll help you home in a jiffy. Then some of your ‘girls’ will take care of you.”

By “girls” Molly meant servants, of which there were at least three in the big corner house.

“Very well. The sooner we bring this episode to an end the better pleased I shall be,” answered the other. In reality, she had been more touched than she herself quite understood by the frank commiseration in Molly’s eyes, and she could not remember when anybody had clasped her body so affectionately. The sensation it gave her was an odd one; else a person so eminently correct and punctilious as Miss Armacost would never have walked the whole length of the finest block on the Avenue, and in full sight of her aristocratic neighbors’ windows, within the embrace of a girl from Side Street.

“But, my child, you should be more careful. You might have broken my bones.”

“Yes’m, I might; might-be’s aren’t half so bad as did-do’s,” returned Molly airily, and again Miss Lucy flashed a penetrating glance into the merry, freckled face.

But there was no disrespect manifest upon it, and the lady remarked:

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“You seem a very cheerful person.”

“Why, of course. Aren’t you?”

“Sometimes. But how you hobble along on that one skate! Why in the world don’t you use two, or go without entirely?”

"Well, you see, if I wore both, Towsley couldn't have any. If he wore both and I none, there'd be nobody to teach him how. That's why."

"What—what did you say his name was?"

Miss Lucy was very thankful that the dirty little urchin was on the further side of Molly, who was quite clean, and that her own dainty garments could not be soiled by contact with his.

"He doesn't know, exactly. The folks around call him 'Towsley,' 'cause his hair's never combed, except once in a while when I take him in hand. It's such a pretty yellow color, too, isn't it? It seems a pity it couldn't always be tidy, doesn't it?"

Molly had a disconcerting habit of appealing to anybody near for confirmation of any opinion she expressed, and this was annoying to Miss Lucy. She considered it distinctly ill-bred, and whatever was ill-bred was disagreeable to her. She was very glad that she had reached the big marble steps which led up to her own front door, and she disengaged herself from Molly's supporting arm with a brisk little motion which emphasized her words:

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"This thing has gone far enough!"

But the girl from Side Street didn't notice this. She rarely did notice unpleasant small things. She hadn't time; being always so busy looking after the larger pleasant ones, of which her world seemed full.

"Yes, I suppose it has. I'm so glad, more glad than I can say, that I didn't hurt you. It would have made me so unhappy, and I just hate to be unhappy."

"Oh! you do, do you?"

"Yes'm. Well, if you think you're all right now, Towsley and I'll just take another try at it and see if we can't keep our eyes right front next time. Good-by. I hope you'll not feel shook up, afterward, as mother did the day she fell down-stairs. Didn't appear to hurt her a mite, then, but she was all trembling and queer-headed for a week afterward. Come on, Tows! I didn't have but fifteen minutes for play, to begin with, and a lot of that's been wasted already. Good-by."

Before the servant had opened the door to admit her mistress the two children and the one pair of skates had whisked away to the foot of the block; this time, however, keeping well to the asphalt in the centre of the Avenue, where they would not be apt to collide with anything smaller than a horse and wagon, which would be better able to resist their onslaught than Miss Lucy had been.

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"Why, mistress! Whatever has happened? Your cloak is all dusty and your bonnet——"

Miss Armacost interrupted. She had not thought of any damage to her attire, and her servant's exclamation revived unpleasant ideas. After all, the neighbors might have seen and commented; might even, at that moment, be gazing at her from behind their lace curtains. The thought was painful, and the lady retreated through her vestibule into the dimness of the hall beyond. There she paused and bade her maid:

"Wait where you are, Mary, till those two children come back up the Avenue. Then ask them to step inside."

Much wondering, Mary remained. "Whatever does mistress want with such truck? Side Street, even Alley, kids they look to be. Pshaw! That's the girl from the house in the rear. 'Jolly Molly,' the youngsters call her. She's the smartest one I ever saw. Say, hello! Molly! Oh, Molly!"

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It wasn't so easy skating up hill, and the children approached more slowly than they had descended; yet as soon as the girl came within reach of Mary's summons she let go her playmate's hand and ran to the foot of the steps.

"What is it? Did she really get hurt?"

"Hurt? I don't know what you're talking about. I only know that my mistress wants to see you, for some reason or another, and that it's mighty cold standing here. Come in. Yes. I suppose she wants you both. She said 'children.'"

Molly whisked off Towsley's skate, then her own, and hastily dragged him after her up into the house.

"That's so. I suppose it is cold standing, though we didn't notice it skating. We did have such fun. Come, boy; don't be bashful. It's the same lady, isn't it?"

"Yes. 'Spouse it is. 'Tain't the same house, though."

"That's no matter. It's but a house, after all's said and done. A little bigger and nicer than we're used to, but my father says folks are the same sort all the world round, and he knows. John Johns knows a heap. Come on. Just mind your manners, sharp."

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Thus beguiled, Towsley shuffled on his worn shoes after his more confident guide into a distant, sunny back parlor. There Miss Armacost had laid aside her hat and wrap and sat resting in an easy-chair. In its depths she looked even smaller and frailer than she had done out of doors, but also very much more determined and at home.

"Just like she'd been sitting in big chairs and giving orders all her life," as Molly afterward expressed it.

"Did you want us, ma'am?"

"Yes, I did. You may sit down."

"Thank you. Sit down, Towsley."

Molly promptly availed herself of the permission given, while her admiring gaze roved over the apartment, but the shyer boy dared not seat himself upon any of those handsome satin-covered chairs. He slunk behind Molly, casting his eyes down and nervously twirling his cap. For, little vagrant though he was, his street life had already taught him that it was the correct thing for lads and men to bare the head in the presence of a lady.

Now he did not know that this one simple action on his part did more to interest Miss Lucy in him than an hour's argument would have done. For the first time she observed that his hair was of a lovely color, as Molly had suggested, and that after a good shampooing it would be even beautiful in texture. From his hair to his eyes was not far; and the fleeting glimpses she caught of them, as they timidly uplifted, showed them a clear hazel. Long silky lashes swept the thin cheek and—but it's better to go no further at present. There was too much soil of the street upon the rest of the little face to make it pleasing in Miss Lucy's sight. Besides, her dainty nose already detected a peculiar odor, one unfamiliar to her home, and that in her mind she designated as the "poor smell." Which was not surprising, since not even Molly could have told when Towsley's ragged clothing had been cleansed by soap and water.

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To relieve herself, as well as him, the lady pointed to a carved, wooden stool in the bay window, and Towsley went to it. The stool could be washed and thus purified after contact with the child's dusty garments, as the satin chairs could not be.

Another servant came in and placed a silver tray upon a table. The tray bore a plate of fruit cake and some saucers of ice-cream; and at sight of these luxuries Towsley's shyness almost disappeared. He was such a very hungry little boy. He always had been hungry, for the scraps which he picked up out of garbage barrels and at the back-doors of houses were not very satisfying. He began to stare at the food in a fascinated way that made Miss Lucy also stare, but at him. She had never seen just such a look on anybody's face, and though it expressed greediness it did not shock her, as she felt it ought to do. Because it was so ill-bred!

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Just then, while Towsley was watching the ice-cream begin to melt, the portiere was again lifted and the maid re-entered, leading a fat, fuzzy dog. She led him by a beautiful blue satin ribbon, and he blundered along in a haphazard sort of way that was exceedingly curious.

Molly's gaze left the pictures on the walls to regard him.

"Why, what a funny creature! He is really almost as broad as he is long, and how he does wobble! What sort of a dog is he? What's the matter with him? What—why——"

Her questions died upon her lips, and they remained parted in surprise as she watched what followed. For the maid spread a white towel upon the carpet before the register and placed an exquisite saucer of finest china upon the towel. Into the saucer she ladled a generous helping of the cream, and seizing the poodle's head with one vigorous hand thrust his black nose into the frozen mass.

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Sir Christopher drew back his head and sneezed, then immediately sought to feel the cream again. His actions were so odd that Molly again demanded:

"What is the matter with him?"

"He is blind," answered Miss Lucy sadly. "He is very old. Seventeen years last summer, and he has lost all his teeth. He suffers greatly with the rheumatism——"

"So does father! He uses a liniment and it helps him. I might run and get you some. I'm sure mother would be glad to lend it to you. She is a real good neighbor, mother is. I never heard of a dog with the rheumatism, and— isn't he funny? The funniest thing I've seen to-day! Does he always have his table set in that way? Won't he break the saucer? He's fumbling it all around, and he's as stiff in his joints as father ever was the very worst day he's had. I'll run and get—"

But Miss Armacost held up a protesting hand.

"Don't trouble, I beg. Sir Christopher is past cure. Besides, I could not endure the odor of any liniment. He has had the best advice in the city. My own doctor has treated him, as a great favor, of course, and out of consideration for my feelings. But the case is hopeless. It is but a matter of time and—and we must part." [Pg 13]

"Why—why—he's only a dog, isn't he?" exclaimed the too frank girl from Side Street.

"Indeed! If he is, there are some dogs which are higher than some people. He has been my constant companion for seventeen years and—and—Mary, help that boy to some of that cream. His eyes will come out of his head if he stares at it much longer. Give him plenty, and a big slice of cake."

"Yes, mistress; but he does look as if he'd enjoy his victuals better if his face was washed first."

Poor Towsley! Only that terrible shyness, which again gripped him so that he turned all cold and shivery, prevented him making a dash for the door and liberty. The glances of both mistress and servant seemed to pierce him like knives; and he wished—oh! how he wished!—that he had never walked into that trap of a parlor to be scorned and talked at as if he were a wooden boy.

But Molly was nothing if not loyal, and she came to the rescue in fine style. [Pg 14]

"No doubt he'd like his face clean same as another; but if a body doesn't happen to have a bowl and towels handy, what is a body going to do? If we'd known we were coming to pay this visit I'd a had him in to our kitchen and scrubbed and combed him well. But we didn't. We just met, out on the Avenue, and tried a skate together. That's all. But it makes me think my fifteen minutes is more than up. I must go home right away. Mother'll be displeased if I'm disobedient and overstay. So if you please, ma'am, I'll be going."

Again Miss Lucy lifted her white hand to stay proceedings.

"Wait, child. How impetuous you are! Mary, just step to this girl's house and tell her mother where she is; also that I request the favor of her company for a short time. Assure Mrs.—What did you say your name was?"

"Johns, ma'am. Father's John Johns, mother's Mary. I'm Molly, then come the three J's, and Sarah Jane—Never mind, though. You'd not be apt to remember or care. Shall I sit by Towsley? I think he'd feel more comfortable if I did."

"Certainly, if you like. Please help yourself, since Mary has gone on my errand. No, I thank you. I do not care for any." [Pg 15]

Miss Armacost caught the astonishment in Towsley's eyes as she thus indifferently declined ice-cream, and was amused by it. A whimsical impulse seized her to furnish the waif with all of the dainty which he could possibly consume, and satisfy his craving for one time, at least. In all her life she had never seen any person eat the cold stuff as he did. His mouth opened like a trap, a spoonful went into it, the mouth closed, reopened, another spoonful—no pause, no effort of swallowing, no lingering enjoyment of a delicious dish. She remarked:

"You like ice-cream, Towsley, I perceive."

"Um'm."

"Can't you take time to answer properly?"

"Ye-e-m, but it's—melt—ing," jerked out the boy between dips. Yet the greediness was dying out of his face and a serene content taking its place. All unconsciously to their owner the boy's feet began to swing themselves back and forth, occasionally hitting the base of the stool upon which he sat.

Miss Armacost did not know that this was a habit of all young children and a sign of material enjoyment; but she was just beginning to worry about her stool and the damage he would do it, when her attention was diverted to Sir Christopher. [Pg 16]

He had licked feebly, and half disdainfully, at his own saucer of cream, then curled himself

round upon the towel beside it. But he could not lie still. Up and down, around and about, he turned and twisted, and all the time emitting groans that clearly bespoke distress of some sort, and that his mistress fancied were almost human in tone.

"Why, my blessed doggie! What ails him, the dear? Is he sick? Does he ache all over? Tell Miss Lucy, Chrissy, tell what is wrong with her pet!"

"Why!" cried Molly, aghast. "Why! you talk to him just as mother does to Ivanora or Idelia! Does he understand you? Can he tell?"

"Yes. He understands. But there's something seriously wrong with him. He was never so bad as this. Ring for one of the girls, child. Ring at once."

Molly knew nothing about bells. In her own little home of six rooms there was no bell at all except one at the front door, and she looked around in some perplexity, wishing to obey but not knowing how.

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"Stupid!" cried Miss Lucy, springing toward the wall and touching the button which sent an electric signal to the basement of the house; then, as Mary returned from her errand to Side Street, demanding anxiously:

"What have you been giving Sir Christopher?"

"Why, nothing, ma'am, but his regular food."

"Did he take his oatmeal this morning as he should?"

"No, ma'am. He never takes it if he can help. He hates it; and when I tried to force him today, he was that sharp and snappish I was afraid. There's a deal of hydrophobia about, I'm hearing."

"Hydrophobia? Nonsense. What else has he had?"

"I really couldn't say, ma'am."

"Somebody must say. Call the cook."

When Chloe's black face showed in the parting of the door curtains Miss Lucy hurled her excited inquiries into the placid countenance.

"Chloe, what have you been giving Sir Christopher? against my orders, for nobody except myself and Mary is ever to feed him. What is it? Don't be so slow. It is important I should know. I may be able to save his life if he is in danger. What? Eh?"

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"Well, ma'am," drawled the negress, in her leisurely way which nothing could alter, "I dunno as I've giv him anything to speak of. Nothing wuth mentioning, leastways. Just a little of that nice lobster salad was left from luncheon; and a cup of custard; being more 'an would go in the floating island. Then a mere taste of the ice-cream, out the freezer was meant for the kitchen, an' he seemed to relish it right well. He licked a right smart of the custard, and as for the lobster, you know yourself, Miss Lucy, he's always plumb crazy for shell-fish. Not like most dogs, Chrissy isn't, won't touch such victuals. He just dotes on anything comes out the salt water, and I——"

Miss Armacost had drawn her slight figure to its utmost height and stood regarding her servant with eyes that fairly blazed her indignation.

"Lobster salad and boiled custard! Not to include the ice-cream, even. A deadly combination; and you may have the satisfaction, if you enjoy it, of knowing that your thoughtless indulgence of his appetite will probably cost him his life. You may go. Send Jefferson for the dog doctor over on Penn Street. And, Mary, you carry him up to my room. Lift him gently, poor fellow! I'm afraid we'll lose him this time."

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There was unaffected grief in the little lady's tone, but Chloe was heard to mutter, composedly, as she departed kitchenward:

"A good riddance, I say. Time he died if his living's going to make fools of human beings."

Miss Armacost led the way, Mary carried the moaning poodle, and Molly's curiosity, getting the better of all other considerations, forced her to bring up the rear.

There followed a dreadful half-hour, in which the girl forgot that she should be at home, because of the hurry and excitement in Miss Lucy's upper sitting-room. By the end of that time Sir Christopher had ceased to suffer the ills of age and indiscretion, and lay quite still upon the silken cushions of his basket where his mistress had placed him.

When she found he was really dead the lady went away by herself, with her grief that was



so real to her, yet might have seemed so foolish to others. Molly stole softly out of the house to tell the unusual happenings of her play hour to the sympathetic ears in Side Street. The short winter day came to a close. Darkness filled the back parlor where the forgotten Towsley had remained to enjoy his treat; and where, at length, the heat and quietude overcame him, so that he slipped from the hard stool to the soft carpet and fell asleep.

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It was nine o'clock in the evening when Miss Armacost re-entered the room and touched another electric button. Instantly the place was flooded with light, and then she discovered the child.

"My, my! what a start that gave me! That boy here yet! What in the world shall I do with him? The threatened snow-storm has come and seems like the beginning of a blizzard. He didn't belong to that Molly, she said, but of course he can't stay here. I—I—Oh, dear! Troubles never come singly. I can't keep him all night. I simply cannot. Yet I wouldn't turn even a dog——"

When Miss Armacost's thoughts reached this point she seemed to see Sir Christopher looking up into her face suggestively. He had been only a dog, to be sure, and this was only a street vagabond; yet the suggestion her mind had received really so staggered the mistress of the corner house on the Avenue that she suddenly sat down and clasped her hands in nervous trepidation.

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"What—what—if I should—actually do it! What would the neighbors say!"

"Ma'am?" asked the waif, drowsily, sitting up and regarding his surroundings with surprise. "I—I—Where am I at?"

"At—home, my child," answered Miss Lucy, with a gasp at her own daring.

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## CHAPTER II.

[Pg 22]

### CONFLICTING IDEAS.

Towsley was now fully awake; and, what was better, he seemed to have lost his shyness during his nap.

"Um'm. Home. That's where folks live that has 'em. This is yours, I s'pose. Well, I'm much obliged to you, ma'am, and I'll be getting on, I guess. Must be dark out-doors, else you wouldn't have the lamps lit, and I must have slept a good while. It was terrible warm and nice, and I couldn't help it. I hope I haven't done no harm, ma'am, and good-night."

This was Miss Lucy's opportunity; her last chance, as she realized. The waif had not at all comprehended her meaning when she spoke of "home," and so she had not committed herself. Many thoughts surged through her troubled mind. She remembered that she was the last of an old, aristocratic family, which had always believed in its womenkind being domestic and not at all strong-minded. She had been inclined to think that other women, who instituted "homes," or engaged in any sort of public charity, rather stepped beyond the limits of good breeding, and had felt herself superior to them.

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Then there were the neighbors. It was an old-fashioned, handsome "square" on which her house stood, and everybody owned his or her home. It was the pride of these people that there was never a house to let. And, indeed, it was a charming locality. Each residence stood upon a double lot, which gave a pretty, open-air sort of appearance to the place; and since there were so few families which could live upon the block, yet remained there so long, each became thoroughly acquainted with the habits and circumstances of the others.

This was sometimes unfortunate. Miss Lucy felt it so now. She went through the long drawing-room and peered between her own lace curtains into the park which filled the centre of the square, and was another of its aristocratic features. She noticed that the trees were loaded with the snow which was accumulating rapidly; and, as a car rattled by, its roof was heaped with a light drift, and the motorman was slapping his breast with his free arm to keep himself warm.

[Pg 24]

"Those horrid cars!" thought the little lady. "With all our efforts to prevent, we couldn't keep them off the Avenue. They are so distinctly plebeian—yet convenient. I suppose it would upset the whole neighborhood worse than they did if I should do it. They might even come and remonstrate; and I should die of shame if I did anything to make myself objectionable to the neighbors. My grandfather's was the first house built here. It was his taste selected and perfected that square, and his firmness which kept it so exclusive till the

land about was all sold and its future assured. What would he say if I should do it! Yet, why shouldn't I? I'm lonesome much of the time, and now that Sir Christopher is gone there's nobody left. I—I—"

Just then a great gust of wind caught up an armful of snow, so to speak, and tossed it against the shining window where Miss Lucy stood. That decided her; and it was like the little lady to be extremely cautious and timid up to a certain point, then to rush energetically toward the opposite extreme. She turned from the spot with a jerk and hurried into the inner room.

Not a moment too soon. Towsley had taken his ragged cap in his hand, fastened his torn jacket by its one button, and was shuffling carefully along the hall toward the front door. Miss Armacost espied him just in time. [Pg 25]

"Wait, child. I've something to say to you. Come back into the light and warmth. It's cold and dark outside."

"Yes'm. So I s'pose," he answered, obeying her rather reluctantly.

"Don't you want to stay? Isn't it pretty here?"

"Oh, yes'm. It's mighty pretty. But, you see, if I don't get down to the office early, the other kids'll get my place. If I lose it once I mayn't never get it again."

"The office? Your place? What do you mean?"

"Down to th' *Express*. There's some steam holes in the sidewalk, you know, and they're as warm as summer. We newsboys lie around 'em, waiting for our papers, and sleep there till they're ready. Each of us has his own spot, and mine's an inside one, close to the wall of the building. You ain't so likely to get trod on if you're inside, and the whole crew's after my 'bed.' If I shouldn't get there to look out for it, and another fellow got it, it'd be all day for Towsley. So I'll be going, ma'am, and much obliged for the stuff." [Pg 26]

Poor Miss Lucy's face had grown very white. She had never heard anything so pitiful as this, yet the lad explained his circumstances in a cheery, matter-of-fact way that showed he found nothing depressing in them.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that that story is true?"

"What about it? I ain't meaning anything, only telling why I've got to hurry. Could you, please, ma'am, say the time of night?"

"It's a little after nine."

"That all? Then I can take it easy. Too late for the night papers, and the mornings ain't out till four o'clock, about."

"To go to such a 'bed,' on such a night, after a supper of ice-cream and cake! I've always skipped such articles in the newspapers, for they're so unpleasant, and I've never half believed them. But you mean it, do you?"

"That I must go? I don't know what you want me to say. I guess I've slept my wits away, as Molly says."

"Towsley, ring that bell. My! what a name!" [Pg 27]

But the lady was pleased to see that he had remembered how to summon Mary, and as soon as that young woman appeared she was directed to get a supper ready in the breakfast-room.

"At once. Put on any cold meat there happens to be, and warm up the soup was left from dinner. I couldn't touch it, you know, I was feeling so sad. Get plenty of bread and butter, and milk—and, yes, a piece of mince pie. Mrs. Livingston, across the square, never gives her children pie. She believes in oatmeal as a staple diet, but their grandmother indulges them when they visit her. For once, I fancy, it won't hurt, and in the future I'll—Oh! what a lot I shall have to learn; and how delightfully exciting it all is! Mary, don't stare at me like that. It's impertinent. I know you don't mean it so, and you think I'm a little flighty. Well, I am. Very flighty, indeed! But—fancy old Madame Satterlee's face!"

"Ma'am?" asked the puzzled servant, really afraid that grief for Sir Christopher had upset her mistress' mind.

"I said: Get a supper ready in the breakfast-room. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am. For one or two?" [Pg 28]

"For two. For this young gentleman and myself."

"The land's sake!" ejaculated the waitress, as she obeyed, though more astonished than ever. "Young gentleman, says she!"

Towsley began to understand that he was to have supper. He would not have troubled about such a small matter, of his own accord, remembering the cream and cake; but since it was mentioned he did feel a sort of emptiness inside, and his hazel eyes grew eager again. Miss Lucy's own eyes were looking at the fire in the grate, and she was not, therefore, offended a second time by the child's greediness. She was seeing pictures in the coals, and all of them were of Towsley—though such a different Towsley from the real one. Presently a doubt arose in her mind. Supposing that there should be some obstacle to her carrying out the plans which the pictures in the fire suggested? She turned suddenly and rather sharply upon the lad:

"Have you any people?"

"Ma'am?"

"Child, never say that. 'Ma'am' is vulgar and belongs to servants. Gentlefolks use the person's name instead. You should have said, 'Miss Armacost?' or 'Miss Lucy?'"

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"Miss Lucy?"

"That's right. You are quick-witted. That's in your favor. I asked about your people; who they are and where they live."

"I don't know as I've got any. There's Molly—she's about the nicest one I know. Of course, there's Mother Molloy, up alley, where I stay sometimes, with the other kids. That's when I have the cash to pay up. Mother don't take in nobody for nothing, Mother don't. Can't blame her, neither. It's business. And once when I fell and got scared of the hospital she was real good to me. She made me tea and done up my head and treated me real square. When I got well I gave her something. Course I wanted to buy her a shirt waist, but they hadn't any big enough, so I bought her a ring with a red stone. The ring was too small, but she could put it away for a keepsake. She's dreadful fat, Mother Molloy is. She gets real good stuff to eat, 'cause the kids she keeps regular are on the best streets; and the 'coons' that live in the big houses save a lot for them. One of the boys works your kitchen, I believe. And—there's Mary."

Miss Armacost rose and led the way to the basement. She was very much perplexed. Not that she wavered in her decision to take in this homeless boy and provide for his welfare, but because he did not at all fit in with her previous ideas of what such a child should be. He was neither humble nor bold, and now that he had forgotten his shyness was keen and business-like. He neither complained of his poverty nor was ashamed of it; and his manner as he walked toward the table and drew out a chair for Miss Armacost was as gallant as possible.

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"That's the checker!" he said to himself. "That's the way I've seen the gentlemen do in the hotel dining-rooms when I've been peeking through, or the waiters, I mean. The gentlemen would have done it, if the waiters hadn't been there, and it goes. Some day, when I own the papers I sell now, I'll know just how to act. Ma'am—I mean, Miss Armacost? Did you speak?"

"I—Yes, I did. I thought that as you had had a nap since—since you had made your toilet, it would be as well to make yourself fresh before meat. There's a bowl and water in that closet; and towels."

"Well, I declare!" thought the watchful Mary. "If that don't beat all! 'Stead of ordering the little chap to wash himself, or even me to do it for him, she's treating him same's if he was a Livingston or Satterlee, himself. And—he's doing it! My land! he's doing it."

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Towsley retired to the pantry and drew some water in the bowl. Such lavatories were familiar enough to him, among the railway stations and hotel corridors which he frequented to sell his papers, but he had never seen one more richly appointed than this. He was rather short for the stationary bowl, but he succeeded in wetting the tips of his very dirty fingers and drawing them down over his face. This operation left streaks of a lighter color upon the dusty cheeks and several dingy marks upon the damask towel which he applied to dry them. With the silver-backed brush which lay beside the bowl he made a frantic dab at his tangled hair, shook himself deeper into his over-large jacket, and presented himself before his hostess.

Concealing a smile at his peculiar appearance she motioned him to his place, with the remark:

"It is so long past the regular dinner hour that I hardly know which of these dishes you would like first. But suppose we take the soup. Shall we begin with that? Eh? No? Don't you care for soup?"

"I like pie better."

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Mary smiled, and both mistress and guest observed it. She was promptly dismissed with the statement that Miss Armacost would herself attend upon the table, and the request to go to the third floor and make a warm bath ready there.

Towsley was grateful for her departure, but suspicious of its object. Like most others of his class he hated water, save in summer when he could go swimming. However, he was not a boy who went half-way to meet trouble. The bath was a future possibility and the pie a delightfully present one.

"Which sort? Mince or apple?"

Two possibilities, in fact!

"Mince, please. I had that once at a dinner the rich folks gave us. I tell you it was prime!"

Miss Lucy smiled again. The little lad with his honest, outspoken ways interested her greatly. She remembered that when she was a child herself she had used to wish her dinners might always begin with the dessert. But they never had. She resolved that Towsley should escape this disappointment of her own early days, and drawing the pie toward her divided it into quarters. It was a large pie and might easily have been served in eighths without any skimpiness; but she gave him a quarter. Then she offered him the cheese, which he declined by a negative wave of his grimy hand; his mouth being at the instant too much occupied for speech.

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Before Miss Armacost had carved a slice of beef, as a second course for the young gentleman, his pie plate was empty.

"Would you like another piece, Towsley?"

"I'd like it, if you can spare it."

"Oh! certainly. I am glad you enjoy it. Chloe does make rather nice pastry, I think."

"Should say she did! Is that the black one, 'at stuck her head in the door curtain and sniffed?"

"She is the black one. Yes. I did not observe the sniffing."

The lad did not explain. He was biting the last mouthful from the second quarter of the pie, which he had held in his hand as he ate it. This was the custom at the sidewalk table where he generally dined, and where forks were things unknown.

Miss Armacost gazed at the boy in astonishment. He had now consumed a half pie, yet seemed as eager as ever. She resolved that he should have the whole of it, if he so desired, but that she would instil a bit of instruction along with the mince-meat. She placed the third quarter upon a fresh plate and ostentatiously laid a fork beside it.

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Towsley accepted this third portion and being in less haste attempted to use the fork, as Miss Lucy's action had suggested. He succeeded fairly well, considering his inexperience, and his hostess was delighted by his aptness. As soon as the third piece had disappeared she gave him the fourth, and all that remained.

"There!" she thought; "by the time that is gone he will have learned the fork lesson completely!"

But the fourth quarter went slowly. Towsley eyed it lingeringly, even lovingly, yet the passes toward his crumby lips were few and far between. The lady grew somewhat disturbed, for, from his previous exhibition of it, she had supposed there could be no limit to the child's appetite.

"Is there anything wrong with it, Towsley? Doesn't it taste as nicely as the rest?"

"Well, ma'am—Miss Armacost, not quite. I think it's getting—getting a little—little bitter."

The hostess checked another smile and proffered the beef which she had carved. This was declined. So was everything else she suggested, and they rose from the table.

Miss Lucy rang the bell that summoned Jefferson, who was not only coachman but a man-of-all-work in the quiet establishment. When this gray-headed "boy" appeared, the newsboy was put into his charge with the order:

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"Take him to the third floor bath. He is to sleep in the front hall bedroom. After you have attended him to bed, come to me. I will have something else for you to do."

Jefferson was good-natured and devoted to Miss Armacost; but he liked things to go along in an orderly way. Commonly, he would have been through with all his tasks for the day, and he looked with something like disgust at this dirty street arab who was thus turning the household "all tipsy-topsy." But he dared not show his feelings to his mistress, and with a gruff "Come along, then," he guided Towsley toward the top of the house.

An hour later Miss Lucy called Mary.

"Did he take his bath nicely? Was he troublesome to Jefferson? I thought I heard voices—rather loud ones."

"Yes, ma'am, I guess you did. They had some words, them two. No, ma'am, he didn't take his bath. He didn't even touch to do it. Jefferson says the kid shut the door in his face, and the next he knew he heard the water running out the tub. 'Twasn't a minute then, before he hopped right into the middle of that lovely clean bed with a kind of a yell. 'I'm a gentleman for one night, I am!' says he, 'and when I'm a man I'll be one all the time!' But the dirty little scamp! Fooling old Jeff that way."

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"Well, he'll do better after a little. He's a very bright child. I can see that distinctly."

"After a while, ma'am? Is he to stop—then?"

"Yes, Mary. He is to live here if he will. Do you know how early the stores are open in the morning?"

"Oh! along about eight o'clock, ma'am, I think."

"Call me at seven, if you do not hear me stirring before. I suppose Jefferson could hardly have the horse ready so early?"

"He'd think it a great hardship, ma'am, and he'd be cross as two sticks all day after."

"Yes, I suppose he would. I wish people were born without tempers."

"'Twould be a fine thing," assented the housemaid, recalling some occasions when Miss Lucy had been a little "sharp" herself.

"Well, you may go now. No; I shall need nothing more. I am going up into the storeroom to look over some trunks. In the morning I will take a car down-town and we'll have a late breakfast afterward. Good-night."

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"Good-night, ma'am. But I'm thinking I wouldn't count too much on the cars being early tomorrow, ma'am. It's a regular blizzard snowing, and the tracks are getting blocked."

"Humph! that's always the way. After our admitting the railway on this avenue the company run their cars to suit themselves, not our convenience. Because I happen to need a car in the morning, they will, of course, not be running. Well, I must not be unjust. I suppose they lose more by stopping than I do by having them stop."

Miss Armacost climbed to the storeroom at the back of the top of her house. In this room were rows of trunks and boxes, and two big wardrobes hung full of cast-off clothing. The garments had belonged to dead and gone Armacosts, of various ages, and after some hesitation the lady knelt before one leather-covered chest that bore the initials "L. A." painted in red upon its cover.

"He was a dear little boy!" sighed Miss Lucy, as she turned a key and raised the lid. "My only brother's only son. Well, brother was always a generous fellow, and he had less of family pride than most of us. I mean of the silly kind of pride. He wouldn't do anything to disgrace his name, but he—well, he fancied the Armacosts were not the only people in the world! He used to say: 'It doesn't matter about birth, so long as a man is a "gentleman,"' and 'gentleman,' in his mind, meant everything that was brave and strong and noble. I believe that, dearly as he loved his boy, he would be pleased to have these useless garments do somebody some good. I've often thought of giving away a lot of the things up here, yet could never quite make up my mind to do it. Now the Lord has sent me the need, and I must supply it."

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Thus thinking, Miss Lucy lifted several suits of small clothing, and finally selected a black velvet blouse and knickers, with a pair of red silk stockings, some dainty kid shoes, and a broad-brimmed hat decorated by a long, drooping feather.

Having made her choice, Miss Armacost closed and locked the trunk, turned off the light, and descended to her own room. There she carefully brushed and arranged the fantastic

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costume and made herself ready for bed.

But she found herself exceedingly restless, and before seeking her own couch she decided to visit her new charge and see if all was well with him; though she had lingered over her task till midnight.

“That pie might disagree with him; who knows? and as he is so strange to the house he might lie and suffer without disturbing anybody by calling for help.”

She need not have worried. It would have taken more than one pie to have injured the digestion of such a boy as Towsley. He lay in beatific slumber, his sunny hair gleaming in the rays from his visitor’s candle, his long lashes sweeping his dirty cheeks, and his lips parted in a happy smile.

Miss Lucy’s heart bounded with delight. “What a beauty he is, or will be when he’s clean! How I shall love him! I will give him our Lionel’s own name and bring him up to take Lionel’s own place. Surely, that was a happy accident which sent him tumbling against me on his one borrowed skate. Though nothing which the Lord permits is ever an accident,” she corrected herself.

Now the lady had a habit of talking to herself, and Towsley was a light sleeper. He presently opened his eyes and regarded her curiously. She seemed to him, at first, some fellow newsboy, strangely transformed. Then his ideas righted themselves, and he inquired, respectfully:

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“Were you calling me, Miss Armacost?”

“No, you darling. I was just looking at you.”

Abashed, Towsley dug his head into the pillow and drew the covers over his face.

“I’ve brought you a nice suit of clothes to put on in the morning. They will be rather too good for every-day wear, but on account of the storm we can’t do better for to-morrow. There will be another bath made ready for you, when you are called, and to please me I hope you’ll take it. Then dress yourself in these things and come quietly down-stairs. We always have prayers before breakfast, and I expect you to be present. One thing more. What is your last name?”

“I don’t know, ma’am—I mean, Miss Lucy. The kids call me Towhead. Towsley Towhead is all I know, though Mother Molloy, she thinks it may be Smith or Jones or something. Why, ma’am? I haven’t done any harm, have I?”

“No, child. No, none at all. I merely wish to have everything understood from the beginning. I am going to adopt you. You are to be my little boy hereafter. You are no longer Towsley Towhead. You are Lionel Armacost. You are to have no further connection with Mother Molloy or any other objectionable person. Your home is now at Number One-thousand-and-one, Washington Avenue, West. Good night. I would like to kiss you, but your face is too dirty. To-morrow, at breakfast, when you are in proper condition, I will do so. Good-night.”

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Towsley listened in increasing astonishment and—terror. Whether owing to a diet of mince pie exclusively or to the unusual daintiness of his surroundings, he had not rested as well as he was accustomed to do upon the steam hole of the *Express* office cellar. He had never seen anybody that looked just like Miss Lucy, with her high-crowned night cap, her long trailing wrapper, her gleaming glasses, and her air of stern determination, which the flare of her candle flame seemed to accentuate. This grim expression, had he known it, was due mainly to the fact that her fastidious gaze had become riveted upon his very black finger-nails, as they clutched the white spread, and her resolution to alter their aspect as soon as daylight dawned. But he did not know this, of course, and he watched her go away—glide, he fancied—till she melted into the dimness of the hall beyond, and finally slipped, slipped, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, in her cloth shoes, down the stairs and out of hearing.

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Then he sat up. The room was very warm and comfortable and it made him drowsy. Yet he could not now afford this drowsiness. While that queer little old lady was safely out of the way he must act, and act quickly.

As noiselessly as a cat the child stole out of bed, and fumbled around for his clothes—his own clothes; the familiar rags and tatters which, at Jefferson’s command, he had removed outside the bathroom door, and from which he had never before been separated since they came into his possession, the “cast-offs” of a bigger companion.

Of course he did not find them. Jefferson had taken the best of care that he should not, and they had already been consumed among the coals of the great furnace which heated the house.

When he became convinced that he could not recover his own attire, Towsley accepted that which Miss Lucy had provided. He drew on the underwear with a gratified sense of its comfort and daintiness, but with the idea that he was only "borrowing."

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"Adopted me, did she? I know what that means. Peter-the-Cripple he got adopted, that time he was run over by a lady's carriage. She adopted him, and he went to a big house and he died. No, siree! there isn't anybody going to catch me that way! least of all a little wizzly old lady like her! No, siree! Of course, I'll have to wear these things till I get down-town and can borrow some more of a kid, and then I'll send 'em back. Say, if I'm a swell like she said I was, and my name's Lionel Armacost, if you please, what's the matter with my pressing the button and getting a little light on a dark subject?"

Towsley's bright eyes had observed where the electric button was, when Jefferson had lighted the hall bedroom earlier in the night, and he now manipulated it for his own benefit. A soft radiance promptly filled the pretty room and showed him where each article lay. In a wonderfully brief time the waif had arrayed himself from head to foot, and coolly surveyed himself in the long mirror that stood upon its rollers in one corner.

"Pshaw! Ain't I a guy! But—but—it's sort of tasty, too. I wonder what the fellows'll say! Wait till they see that feather and feel that velvet! Cracky! then you'll hear them howl! I wonder what time it is? I wonder if I'm too late to get my papers? If I'm not, what a haul I'll make in these duds! Maybe enough to buy a suit for myself down at Cheap John's store. Then I'd have these wrapped in brown paper and sent back to Miss Armacost with my compliments. The compliments of Mister Towsley Lionel Towhead Armacost, esquire! Hi! ain't that a notion! But plague take these shoes! They aren't half as comfortable as my own old holeys! But it all goes! And she really is a dear little old lady. I'd like to oblige her if I could, but—adopted! No, siree!"

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A country child of Towsley's age would have been puzzled how to escape from the well-locked and bolted mansion; but the keen-witted gamin of the city's streets had little difficulty. True, the great front door did open rather slowly to his puny grasp, but that was on account of the storm.

The wind swept and howled around the corner where the big house stood, and the white marble steps were heaped with snow. A great mass of the snow was dislodged by the movement of the door and fell in clouds over Towsley's big hat and fine costume; also the tight shoes upon his feet seemed to make him stumble and stagger sadly; but he was not to be deterred by such trifles as these. The cold breath of the wind was delightful to him, the rush of outer air meant freedom.

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All the delightful interests of his vagabond life rose up to beguile him; all its miseries were forgotten. He must get to the office right away. This was a blizzard, sure enough! and that meant "extras" to cry, sidewalks to shovel, a mad haste to get ahead of his mates and gather in more nickels than they, maybe stolen rides behind livery sleighs when the storm was over, and a thousand and one enjoyable things such as poor Miss Armacost could never even dream of!

"Hi! Here's for it!" shouted the happy boy, and leaped forward into the night and the storm, which silently received him.

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## CHAPTER III.

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### THE BLIZZARD.

"Whew! I've never seen such a storm since I lived in Baltimore city!" cried John Johns, looking out of the window, early on the morning following Molly's visit to Miss Armacost. "It snows as if it never meant to stop. How still it is, too! Not a car running, not a wagon rattling over the stones, everything as quiet as a country graveyard."

"Not quite, John. There's a milk cart trying to force itself through the drifts. My! look into the alley between us and Miss Armacost's! The snow is heaped as high as the fence, in some spots."

"Well, I'm glad I'm a plumber! There'll be plenty of work for me and my kind to-day. We're not used to anything of this sort down here, and nobody'll think to look out for his water pipes. Just listen to that wind, will you?"

"I'd rather not. It makes me think of poor folks without coals, and babies without their milk,

and lots of suffering.”

“Not so much, wife. Not so much. The coal wagons will be the first astir, and they’ll break the roads nicely with their heavy wheels. The bakers and butchers and milkmen will follow mighty soon. The boys that want a bit of money for Christmas will all be out with any sort of broom, or shovel, or even a stick, they can pick up. It’ll give work for idle men, clearing the streets, and the liverymen will make a lot of money as soon as it settles a little. Oh! a rousing snow-storm is a good thing once in a while.”

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“I declare, John, you are the cheerfullest soul. Nothing is ever wrong with you, and Molly is as like you as two peas! But I must say, I wish you wouldn’t go to work to-day. I’ll worry lest you get overcome or frozen, or something.”

“That so? Glad to hear it. Makes a man feel happy inside to know his folks’ll worry about him when he’s in danger. But isn’t it an odd fact that a soft little thing like a snowflake can stop the traffic of a whole city! Hello there, Molly! Got my coat and mittens ready? Well, you don’t look as if the storm had kept you awake much. Give the father a kiss, lass, to sort of sweeten his breakfast. Are the Jays awake? Hunt them up a spade or a shovel and set them digging their neighbors out. And, Mary wife, if I were you I’d keep a pot of coffee on the range all day. There’s maybe a poor teamster or huckster passing who’ll be the better for a warm cup of drink, and the coffee’ll keep him from thinking of beer or whiskey.”

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“That might cost a good bit, all day so.”

“Never mind; never mind. What they drink we’ll go without. We’re hale and hearty folks, who’ll thrive well enough on cold water, if need be. Thank the Lord for all His mercies, say I.”

“Well, breakfast is ready. I’ll dish it up while you two have your own morning talk,” said the mother, patting Molly’s sturdy shoulder as she passed tableward. For the girl and her father were the closest of friends, which isn’t always the case between parent and child. But Molly’s day would have seemed imperfect without that few minutes’ chat with the cheery plumber at its beginning; and he managed always to leave a bit of his wisdom or philosophy in the girl’s thoughts.

The three brothers, Jim, Joe, and Jack, known in the household as the “three Jays,” came tumbling down the short flight of stairs from the bedroom above to the little first-floor kitchen, which they immediately seemed to fill with their noisy presence. They were so nearly of one size that strangers often mistook one for another, and they were all as ruddy and round as boys could be. Yet their noise was happy noise and disturbed nobody; and they good-naturedly made room for Sarah Jane, their “sister next youngest but the twins,” as they commonly mentioned her.

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Those twins! My! but weren’t they the pride of everybody’s heart, with their fair little faces, like a pair of dolls; and their round blue eyes which were always watching out for mischief to be done. Their names had been selected “right out of a story book” that their mother had once read, and expressed about the only “foolishness” of which the busy woman had ever been guilty.

“Ivanora! Idelia! Truck and dicker! Why, Mary wife, such names will handicap the babies from the start. Who can imagine an Ivanora making bread? or an Idelia scrubbing a floor? But, however, if it pleases you, all right, though I do think a sensible Susan or Hannah would be more useful to girls of our walk in life.”

“Oh! I don’t object to those either. Let’s put them on behind the pretty ones; and maybe they’ll not have to scrub floors or make bread, the sweet darlings,” answered the wife, when soon after the babies’ birth the important matter of naming them arose.

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At the moment when the father and Molly were watching the storm from one small window, while the three Jays and Sarah Jane occupied the other, these youngest members of the big family were seated upon a gray blanket behind the stove. They had been placed there by their careful mother, as a safeguard against cold and exposure, and in dangerous proximity to a pan of bread dough which had been set to rise. It was due to the excitement of the storm that, for once, their mother forgot them; and it was not till she called, “All hands round!” and the family filed into place about the big table that she remembered them; or, rather, had her attention called to them by Sarah Jane, the caretaker of the household.

“Oh! mother Johns! the twins! the twins!”

“Bless me! the twins, indeed! the bread-maker’s beginning early, Mary wife!” laughed the plumber.

“Oh! oh! oh! you naughty dears! You naughty, naughty dears! To think that great big girls,



almost two years old, should waste mother's nice dough like that!"

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The pair had plunged their fat little arms deep in the soft, yielding mass and plucked handfuls of it, to smear upon each other's faces and curls; and what remained in the raiser had been plentifully dotted with bits of coal from the near-by hod. They looked so funny, and were themselves so hilarious with glee over their own mischief, that there was nothing left for their elders to do except join in the general merriment.

But Mrs. Johns' face sobered soon.

"It's a pity, it's a pity. All that good bread gone to do nobody any good, when there are so many hungry people will be needing food before this storm's over. And we almost out of flour, too."

"Seems to me we're almost always out of flour—or shoes!" laughed the father. "And it's a blessing, that, so long as I've the money to pay for either. There wouldn't be empty flour buckets if there weren't healthy appetites in the house; and shoes wouldn't wear out if the feet inside them weren't active and strong."

"Hm'm. I'd like a chance to save a cent, now and then. What if your own health should fail, or you lose your job? And I've been wanting a set of cheap, pretty lace curtains to the front-room windows ever since I could remember. All the neighbors have them, but we never can."

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For the first time a shadow passed across the genial face of the plumber, though it vanished quickly.

"The curtains shall come, Mary wife, some time, if my strong arm can earn them. But we'll not have any silly imitation laces at our windows. They're shams, and a sham is a lie. Plain simple muslin, with as many frills and ruffles as you've the patience to keep starched and ironed—they're honest and suitable to our station. Meanwhile, is there a prettier sight at anybody's windows than the row of healthy, happy faces of our children? Look at that great house, across alley, with not a chick nor child in it. What do you suppose its mistress would give for such a batch of jolly little tackers as ours?" Then, reaching across the table corner to drop another hot cake upon the empty plate of the youngest Jay, he quoted, merrily: "This is my boy, I know by the building of him; bread and meat and pancakes right in the middle of him."

Of course, all the children laughed at the familiar jest, and each took heart to send up his own plate for another helping.

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"They've had their allowance, John. There's no use to make a rule and break it, dear."

"No, Mary wife. Surely not. That is, in ordinary. But in a blizzard? Everything gets out of gear in a blizzard, even boys' appetites. As many cakes as a child is years old is a safe rule to follow; but not on blizzard mornings, that come but seldom in a lifetime. Hark! Quiet! I hear a bell ringing somewhere. A dinner bell. It sounds like a summons."

All fell perfectly silent for the space of a half-minute, maybe; then Molly burst forth with a thought she had been pondering:

"What a good thing it was that Miss Armacost had Sir Christopher buried last night, before this snow came! If she hadn't I don't know what she would have done. But—I believe that bell is from her house. It sounds out the back way, the alley side."

There was a general stampede from the table, that was as promptly checked.

"Come back to your places, every youngster of you! Of course, it's an exciting time, but manners to a body's mother must never be forgotten."

So the flock marched back to the table, and, beginning with Jim, the eldest, each inquired respectfully:

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"Mother, will you excuse me?"

"Certainly," came the prompt response.

Even the babies lisped and gurgled their merry, imitative "'Scuse me's," though with no thought of any attention being paid them.

"Folks without much money can't afford to go without manners," laughed father John, and, himself asking leave of the little woman behind the coffeepot, followed his children to the rear window.

For the ringing of the bell was so prolonged and so insistent in its demands that he no

longer doubted it to be a signal of distress. But it was almost impossible to see even a few feet through the blinding clouds of snow, and raising the sash the plumber hallooed:

"What's wanted? Anybody in trouble?"

"Help's wanted! Awful trouble!" came the answering shout.

"Where?"

"Armacost's. Will you lend a hand? All afloat and frozen up!"

"Lend a pair of them! Which door will I try?"

"Front. The back one's blocked. Hurry up, please. Have you any tools? Bring everything!" [Pg 55]

"Quite a contract!" ejaculated John, closing the window and brushing the snow from his head and shoulders. "But it's a good thing I always keep a 'kit' handy here at home. Now, lads, you all get to work, too. There are some pieces of boards in the cellar. Take them and nail a sort of snow shovel together. Never mind if it's a bit rough, it'll be easier than clearing off the whole mass of snow with common spades or brooms. If you don't know how, ask mother. She's as handy as a master mechanic, any day. Then pitch in on our own front steps. Make a path for misery to enter, if need be, and for comfort to go out."

"What do you mean, father?" asked Molly.

"Some poor creature might be floundering along outside, chilled and discouraged, and a ready-made path to a warm house would be tempting. Over the same road out, mother's coffee and flapjacks can pass!"

"Flapjacks? That's the first I heard about *them*," said Mrs. Johns, smiling.

"Chance of your life to make yourself famous to-day," answered her husband. "You may believe that any poor wretch who tastes your cakes and coffee, this terrible day, will never forget them. And, lads, after you've cut a way to our own door go and help that widow across the street who keeps the boarders. She has a hard time of it, any way, and it's part of her business to keep things comfortable for those who live with her." [Pg 56]

"She wouldn't give us a cent, if we shovelled at her sidewalk all day," grumbled Joseph.

"The other side the bed, lad! Quickly!" ordered the father, pausing on his way to the door to see his command obeyed.

Everybody laughed, even the culprit, who had to ascend to his own sleeping-room, get into the bed at one side—the side from which he had originally climbed—and get out at the other. A simple operation, and one not helpful to mother Mary's housekeeping labors; but she never minded that, because the novel punishment always sent the grumbler down-stairs again in good humor.

Then they all clustered about that rear window which commanded a view of the Armacost yard, and watched their father floundering through the drifts between the small house and the large. He disappeared around the corner of the mansion, and mother Mary set her young folks all to work: Molly to washing the dishes and tidying the house; while she herself bathed and dressed the twins, stirred up a fresh lot of bread dough, rolled out her sewing-machine, and made flying visits to the small cellar where the three Jays were sawing and nailing and chattering like magpies. [Pg 57]

They were all so busy and happy that the morning flew by like magic and dinner time came before anybody realized it. Meanwhile, the three boys had kept their own steps passably free from the gathering snow, and had shovelled a way into the widow's house, not once but twice. Coal carts and milk wagons had, as father John prophesied, come out and forced their passage through the street, and a gang of workmen, each with a shovel over his shoulder, had made their way to the Avenue for the purpose of clearing the car tracks. But they had not remained. Their task was such a great one that, until the storm was really over, there was no use in their beginning it.

Yet even these few moving figures rendered the outlook more natural, and Molly had almost forgotten to worry over any possible suffering to the poor, much less the rich, when her father came in and she saw, at once, how much graver than usual he was. [Pg 58]

"Why, father, dear! Has anything happened? Was there real trouble over at the lady's?"

"Plenty has happened, and there is real trouble. But let's have dinner first; and, Mary wife, when I go back I'll take a pot of coffee and a bit of this hot stew for our neighbor."

"Which neighbor, John?"

“Miss Armacost.”

“Miss—Armacost! What in the world would she, with all her luxuries, want with stew from our plain table?”

“Well, the boiler in her kitchen burst this morning. Pipes frozen, and no fire till things are fixed; that is, to cook by. Pipes over the handsome parlor frozen, too, and leaking down into all the fancy stuff with which it is filled. Two of the servants sleep at their own homes, as you know, and the two who are left have all they can do helping me. I’ve ‘phoned for somebody from the factory to come out and help, too, but there are so many orders ahead the boss says I must do the best I can. Yet the worst of all is—Towsley.”

Molly dropped her fork with a rattle. “Towsley! Has anything happened to him?”

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“That’s what I’d like to know. That’s what that poor rich woman, yonder, is grieving herself ill over.”

“Tell us. Tell us, quick, father, please!”

“There’s not so much. She says she found him asleep in her back parlor at nine o’clock. It was snowing fast then, and she kept him all night. That’s what she meant to do, at least. She gave him his supper and had him put to bed on her top floor. She knows he was there till midnight, for she went up to see if he was all right. Then she went to bed herself, and this morning he was gone. The front door was unfastened, and he must have gone out that way. At one moment she blames herself for neglect of him, and the next for having been kind to him.”

Molly sprang up from the table.

“Oh! mother, let *me* go across and carry the stew and tea. Maybe I could help her to think of something would tell where he was. Anyway, I can tell her just what kind of a boy Towsley is and how well he can take care of himself. He isn’t lost. He mustn’t be. He cannot—shall not be!” cried the girl, excitedly.

“Very well. Put the stew in the china bowl”—the one nice dish that their cupboard possessed—“and take your grandmother’s little stone teapot. If Miss Armacost is a real lady, as I think, she will appreciate the motive of our gift, if not the gift itself. And if she’s not a gentlewoman her opinion would not matter.”

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“But she is, mother; she is. I’m so glad I can do something for her! She was nice to me, and ‘giff-gaff makes good friends.’”

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## CHAPTER IV.

[Pg 61]

### THE WANDERING KINDNESS.

On the morning of the blizzard, at that dark hour which comes just before daylight, Dr. Frank Winthrop left his own house for a visit to the hospital. There were no cars running, and he would not think of rousing his coachman, or even his horses, to breast such a storm; for his errand might be a prolonged one, and was, indeed, a case of life or death. At ten o’clock he had left a patient in a most critical condition, and was now returning to further attend the sufferer. His ulster was fastened tightly about him, his head thrust deeply into his collar, his hands in his pockets, and with teeth grimly set he faced the night.

“Two miles, if it’s a block! Well, it’s useless to try and see one’s way. The street lamps, such as are still burning, make an occasional glimmer in the fog of snowflakes and are almost more misleading than none at all. But I’ve walked the route so often, I’ll just trust to my feet to find their own road, and to Providence that I may reach my man in time!”

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Robust and determined as the good physician was, he was almost overcome by the cold and the struggle through the unbroken drifts; while his whole person soon became so covered with the flying flakes that he looked like a great snow-man itself, suddenly made alive and set in motion. But the hope of easing pain gave him courage to persevere; and finally he came within a short distance of the great building whose dimly lighted windows made a dull redness through the storm.

“There she is, the blessed old house of comfort! Her wards are like to be full this night. And that was the very hardest walk I ever took. I hope, I pray, it has not been for nothing.”

Just then his foot stumbled against some half-buried obstruction, and stooping, the doctor

touched the object with his hands.

"Oh! as I feared! A human being. A child—a boy. Overcome and maybe frozen. Poor little chap, poor little chap!"

Unbuttoning his overcoat the physician struck a match within the shelter of its flap, and by its flare scanned the small face from which he had brushed away the snow. Then he uttered another exclamation of surprise and lifting the little, rigid figure in his arms, folded his great-coat about it and started forward with renewed energy.

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"Whatever is a child like this doing down here in this part of town? If it weren't for his clothes I might think he was a newsboy headed for Newspaper Square, yonder; but newsboys don't wear velvet attire, or hats with wide brims and drooping feathers, like a girl's 'picture' headgear. Thank God, we're almost there!"

On such a night, more than ever alert, the attendant at the door of the accident ward opened it wide to the slightest summons of the good doctor, who staggered into the light and warmth, shaking the snow from him in clouds and ordering:

"Promptest attention. Child overcome in the snow. Call nurse Brady. She'll know."

The nurse was instantly at hand, and received the new "case" from the attendant; while the physician took off his own snow-covered ulster and brushed the melting flakes from his beard. All the while his keen eyes were studying the child's countenance and following his motionless figure as, with that haste which is never waste, the trained nurse carried it away toward the great ward where so many other "cases" were receiving the care which should save life.

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Finding, by brief question and answer, that the patient he had come especially to see was neither better nor worse, Dr. Winthrop followed nurse Brady and her new charge; watching and directing as it seemed necessary, and finally announcing:

"I'll have him put in a private room; this ward is so full already, and there'll be more coming right along. A boy who wears velvet and feathers must belong to some rich family, who'll gladly pay for every attention. Poor, little, bedraggled bird of paradise!"

So it happened that when Towsley opened his eyes, a few hours later, it was in a room whose comfort quite equalled that of the one from which he had fled, even though its furnishings were much plainer. And over his pillow leaned another woman wearing a snowy cap, far daintier in shape than had adorned Miss Lucy's gray curls. There were no gleaming glasses shading the kindly eyes which regarded him, and no sternness in the lips that said slowly and gently:

"So my little patient is better. I am so glad of that."

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After a long, silent stare into nurse Brady's face, Towsley asked:

"Be you? Where's I at?"

"In a nice warm bed, all safe and sound, with a fine breakfast waiting for you."

"Where's it at, I say?"

"The hospital."

"What for?"

"Because you must have been taking a little walk in the storm and got too tired to go very far. A kind man found you and brought you in here, and now if you'll please drink this hot soup you'll feel as fine as a fiddler!"

"Humph. I can fiddle—some, myself. Is the pie all gone? Oh! I mean—I—I—my head's funny."

"That will come right enough when you set your empty stomach to work. Afterward you will tell me your name and where you live, and I'll send for your people. But the soup first."

Towsley sat up against the nurse's arm and obediently drank all the broth she offered him, even to the last drop. Then he lay back with a sigh of deep content and fell into a sound, refreshing sleep. When he awoke again the pretty nurse was gone and in her chair sat a gentleman gazing at him with a curious sort of stare, as if Towsley were some new kind of animal in whom the stranger was interested.

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The stare nettled Towsley, who felt strangely cross and irritable. He knew he was saucy, but he couldn't help making a little grimace of disgust and demanding:

"Think you'll know me next time you see me, governor?"

"I certainly hope so. That's why I'm studying your face. Hm'm. I see you are decidedly better. Quite all right, in fact. Feeling prime, aren't you? Ready to run away again?"

"What you mean? How did you know I ran away?"

"By your clothes. A little lad who wears velvet blouses and fine hats had no business away from his home in such a storm as we have had. Now, your people will probably have grieved themselves ill about you, and you're to tell me your name and address at once, so I can send them word where you are. The storm is over and people are beginning to get about again. The street cars should be running by to-morrow, as usual."

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Towsley regarded the gentleman wistfully for a moment; then cried out, impatiently:

"I'll bet the fellows got a beat on me!"

"Eh? What?"

"Have the 'lines' been tied up? I thought they was goin' to be, last night."

"Eh! What? What do you know about 'lines,' and 'beats,' and such matters?"

"Well, I guess I know as much as the next one," answered the lad proudly. "Ain't I been on the *Xpress* since I was so high?" measuring a short space between his thin, and now—thanks to nurse Brady's attention—very white little hands.

"The dickens you have! Then why were you masquerading in borrowed plumes, my lad? Your story and your clothing don't agree. What is your name? Give it right, now, mind."

"Why shouldn't I? I ain't ashamed of it, if it isn't pretty. I'm Towsley. Towsley Towhead, some the Alley folks call me. I'm one the boys on the *Xpress*. That's who I am, and I can sell more'n any other fellow of my size on the whole force."

"I believe it. You look as sharp as a razor. But let's keep to facts. You tacitly admitted that you ran away, and your velvet attire is certainly against you!"

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There was something both whimsical and kindly in the doctor's expression, and Towsley's confidence was won.

"Don't you s'pose I know that? Don't you s'pose I reckoned I was a guy; and that all the fellows would laugh at me when they saw me? But I couldn't help it, could I? That old black man took my own clothes away and left these, and I couldn't go out without any, could I? She was a nice old lady and her pie was good. Pretty good, I mean. But she wasn't going to catch Towsley and adopt him, not if he could help himself! No, siree! So I waited till everybody was asleep, then I lit out."

"Smart boy! Tell me the whole story; from start to finish."

"Say, you tell me, first. Was I half dead in the snow? Did you find me and fetch me here, like I heard them say? 'Cause if you did, I—I—I'd like to do something back for you, yourself."

"Oh! that's all right, my lad. You'll have a chance. Don't fear."

"What do you mean, sir? What can I do?" asked Towsley eagerly.

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"Did you ever hear, as you went along the street, somebody start humming or whistling a tune? any kind of a tune, but a catchy one the best. In a little while you'll hear another person pick it up and hum or whistle, just the same way; so on, till nobody knows how many have caught and heard the wandering melody and passed it onward through a crowd. Did you ever notice anything like that?"

"Heaps of times. I've done it myself. Started it or picked it up, either."

"Well, that's like kindness. Pick it up, pass it along. Let everybody who hears it, catch on; understand? So, that's what I mean. You may never have a chance to do anything especially for me—and you may have dozens; but that doesn't matter. Keep it moving. The first time you have an opportunity to be decent to somebody else, why—just be decent, and say to yourself: 'That's because the doctor picked me out of a snow-drift.' The Lord will keep the account all straight, and settle it in His own good time. We don't have to worry about that part, fortunately; else our spiritual book-keeping would get sadly mixed."

They were both silent for a brief while, and the words made a deep impression upon Towsley's heart; a warm and gentle heart at all times, though not always a wise one in its judgments.

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"Well, my boy. I'm waiting for your story, and I'm a pretty busy man. Along about time for giving out the papers you wouldn't care to be hindered needlessly, would you?"

A brilliant smile broke over the sharp little face upon the pillow.

"No, I wouldn't, and you don't. Well, here it is;" and very briefly, but graphically, the alley vagrant sketched the story of his acquaintance with Miss Armacost and his flight from her house.

The doctor listened without interruption till after the tale was done; then he asked:

"How about that wandering melody of kindness, eh, my boy?"

"I don't know what you mean. I mean—I—I——"

Down in his warm heart Towsley did know, though he hated to acknowledge it. He tried to justify himself in his own eyes as well as in those of the good physician.

"She hadn't any right to take away my clothes. All the clothes I had. She took away my name, too." [Pg 71]

"Were they very good clothes, Towsley?"

"No. But they were *mine!*" fiercely.

"And the name. Is it a very honorable name, laddie?"

"It's just as honorable as I make it, sir! I needn't be an Alley boy always, just because—because—nobody knows who my folks were."

"No, indeed. That you need not. That you will not be, for you've the spirit to succeed. Only you need a little of the spirit of generosity, too. The wandering melody again, you see. We can never quite get away from it. Now, I'm going on my rounds through the wards. I'll stop in, after an hour or so, and see if you have any errand for me to do. Good-by. Take a nap, then think it over. I'll be back again."

Towsley didn't nap at all. He lay wide-eyed and full of thought, staring at the white ceiling overhead, and occasionally touching a pansy which nurse Brady had laid beside him on his pillow. As he fondled and looked at the flower, more and more it gradually began to assume the face and features of a delicate little old lady whom he knew. It was a white pansy, with faint lavender patches on its lateral and lower petals; dashed, like all its kind, by little touches of darker hue. Yes, it was a face—Miss Lucy's face. Those two white upper leaves were her snowy curls under her every-day lace cap. The eyes, the keen, whimsical little mouth—all were there; and the newsboy looked and remembered—till the eyes seemed to gather tears and the pursed-up mouth to tremble like a child's—like Sarah Jane's, when she had been denied a share in her brothers' games. [Pg 72]

Had there been tears in Miss Lucy's eyes, last night, behind those gleaming glasses? Had it been out of love, after all, that she had given him her dead nephew's pretty garments and her dead nephew's aristocratic name?

It was all very puzzling, and Towsley felt unequal to solving the riddle, although it was he who always was first among the fellows to find the answers to the printed riddles on the children's page of the weekly *Express*. He shut his eyes a moment, to see things a little better, and after the ceiling and the pansy were thus put out of sight he did begin to understand quite clearly.

Tears? He hated them. There should never any be shed for him, that he could prevent. On that point he made up his mind, and he shut his lids down tighter, so that nothing should alter his sudden resolution. [Pg 73]

What was that sound?

Towsley's eyes opened with a snap. He was sure that they had not been closed a second, but the nurse laughed when he so declared; he always afterward believed that some sort of magic had been used to change things about in that little hospital bedroom.

For there on the tiny dresser was lightly tossed a rich fur robe that looked as if it had just slipped off somebody's slender shoulders. It was an old-fashioned robe, Towsley saw that, and the bonnet which had fallen to the floor beside it was quite out of style, also.

"Regular old timer, ain't it! And she's an old timer, too, but—the tears! Shucks! He wished nobody would ever cry. He hated tears!" again thought Towsley. And then he stole his hand around the neck of the little old lady who was kneeling beside his cot, and remarked, generously:

"Oh! I say, Miss Lucy, please don't. It's all right. I didn't behave very—very gentlemanly, I guess, but if you like I'm willing to try it over again. I'll be your little boy if you want me, and if I have to be 'Lionel,' just make it Towsley, too, can't you?"

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"Oh! you darling! I didn't know that it could be possible; that in so short a time a stranger child could creep so closely into my affection. I've been hearing such a lot about you, from Molly, you know. Oh! my dear, I am so thankful that you did not perish. So thankful that my eyes have been opened to see how lonely and selfish a life I've led. Just to think, to think, that I have at last a dear little human boy to love and to love me! All day I've thought about you and seemed to feel that it was Lionel, our own Lionel, who had wandered out into the storm to suffer so; and—and——"

This was too much for the gamin. He was still that. He had not yet been transformed into the gentleman he aspired to become, and in a way that was more honest than courteous he forestalled another hysterical outburst on the part of his overwrought benefactress.

"Hold on, Miss Lucy. It's all right. I ain't dead nor dyin'. It's the wandering melody of the kindness, as the doctor said. Don't you know? He was good to me, and I'll be good to you, and you'll be good to somebody else; and that's the way it goes. I can tell you of a lot of fellows to be kind to. Whistling Jerry, and Battles, and Shiner. Oh! there are a plenty to fill the house full, but there won't any of them stand being cried over. It would scare the life out of 'em. A kick or a blow—that they wouldn't mind, being used to it, you see, but tears—they'd scat! like kittens with a dog after them. They would, indeed."

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"Oh!" gasped Miss Lucy, rising from her knees—"Oh! but I've nothing to do with these—these boys with the objectionable names. It is yourself only, my child, whom I want to live with me. Just you; to be my one, only, little precious boy."

"Then, I guess we'd better drop it. I was only trying to be good to you."

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## CHAPTER V.

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### LIONEL TOWSLEY GOES HOME.

"Towsley, boy! you're quite well enough to go home. Especially as there is, just outside the hospital gate, a red-plumed sleigh waiting, with great fox robes big enough to wrap a dozen newsboys in; with horses in a tinkling harness, and more red plumes at their heads; and a coachman named Jefferson sitting up front with a mighty fur collar on and a Christmas favor in his hat, and—I've lost my breath, telling the wonders! For you, my snow-bank youngster!"

The genial doctor entered the room just in time to witness the little scene between Miss Armacost and her protégé; and knowing both parties fairly well, he judged that the best way out of a difficulty was to get rid of the difficulty. Which he did in the manner above.

For there was never a newsboy on Newspaper Square, not even the independent Master Towsley, who could resist the charm of a sleigh ride; especially in a city where sleighing was a rare occurrence, and where enormous prices were asked and obtained for any sort of vehicle that would glide over the snow.

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Towsley forgot everything but the prospect before him. Even the objectionable velvet suit and girlish hat would be endurable under the circumstances. What if some fellow of his own craft did see and laugh at him? He laughs best who laughs last, and in this case that would be the boy in the sleigh. So he clapped his hands and cried out, excitedly:

"Oh! may I? And will Miss Lucy please go away, and somebody send me back my clothes?"

"Certainly. Everybody shall clear out except you and me," said the physician, pulling a brown paper parcel from beneath his arm and tossing it upon the foot of the cot.

So Miss Armacost and nurse Brady went away and the doctor closed the door behind them. Then he unfastened the mysterious parcel and spread before Towsley's wondering gaze a complete suit for a boy of Towsley's size. Everything was there, down to the shoes and stockings, though all were of coarse material.

"Oh, ginger! Ain't that prime? For me? Are they for me, doctor?"

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"If they fit."

"Oh! they'll fit. Anything fits me."

"Velvet knickers and plumed hats?"

The lad, who had tried to spring out of bed, and had succeeded only in climbing out rather slowly and shakily, looked up with a twinkle in his eye; then he answered very seriously:

"Yes, sir; even them. I'd hate 'em. I'd hate to have the fellows see me in 'em; but I'd wear them forever, rather than make her cry again. I can't get over that. To s'pose that she, a rich lady living on the Avenue, should cry over an Alley kid! It ain't nice to think about, her saying I've got to be her only, 'one precious.' I'll about die of lonesomeness; but—it's the wandering kindness, you know, sir. I'll pass it on, and maybe it'll all come right. Do you s'pose she'll make me sit in front of a window and be dressed up, and make myself a show for the fellows to come and gibe at?"

"Those shoes all right, eh? Look here, Towsley. I'm not a 'supposing' sort of a man. I've no time to speculate over things. I have to take them as they come and keep hustling. That's pretty much the way it is in the newspaper business, isn't it?"

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"Yes. You just believe it."

"I do. Well, though I rarely give away advice—that being a luxury I dare not afford, in general—I'm going to present you with a bit now, as a kind of keepsake: Don't you stop to worry or 's'pose' anything. Life's too short. Just keep hustling. Do right, as near as you can, straight along and all the time, and let results take care of themselves or leave them to the Lord who will do it for us. And remember one other thing: If you do a kindness to anybody you have to like them. Fact; you can't help it. You will like them, whether or no. Now I didn't care a nickel about you till I tumbled over you in the snow-drift. Never heard of you, indeed. But then I had a chance to help you, and right away I liked you. So I've been downtown, this afternoon, and bought you this outfit. Between you and me, Towsley, I shouldn't care for the velvets, either. But they must have been all that Miss Armacost had on hand and so she gave them to you. These I'm not giving; I'm simply advancing. Men like us don't care to accept what we can't pay for, you know. Anything that Miss Lucy will offer you, you'll have a chance to repay: by love, and attention, and the deference that a son of her own house would render a gentlewoman who befriended him. But you'll have no further use for me, and so I'm merely lending you this suit. If you should ever be able, as you may, to collect what I've spent on it—about five dollars—you just remember the wandering kindness and send it along. I'd get a scrap of paper, if I were you, and write it down: 'Five dollars received of Dr. Frank Winthrop'; and when you use something for some needy person, consider that it is so much toward the liquidation of the debt and write it opposite: 'Paid Dr. Frank Winthrop, so and so.' Understand?"

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"Yes. I will repay, too. Though I'd rather do it to you, yourself."

"Doubtless. Yet that doesn't matter. The real thing is to be systematic and exact in our charities. Slovenliness or carelessness in such things is worse than a bad habit—it's a sin. Now, how are you? A trifle queer in the legs, eh? Things in the room look a bit hazy? That's all right. Effect of an active boy lying in bed. The air will set you straight. My! but you are a dandy in that suit! Fits you like a duck's bill in the mud, doesn't it?"

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Towsley laughed, so gayly and loudly that anxious Miss Lucy tiptoed to the outside of the closed door and asked, eagerly:

"Can't I come in yet?"

The jolly doctor gave a nod of his head and Towsley opened to admit his friend. In all his little life he had never been so well, so completely clothed as he was at that moment; and the consciousness of being suitably dressed went far toward giving him the ease of manner which belonged to the "gentleman" whom he aspired to become.

The alteration in his appearance was so great and his bow so correctly made that Miss Lucy cried out in delight and surprise, and was about to throw her arms about the child and caress him before them all.

But the wise doctor prevented that, by saying in his quick way:

"All ready, Miss Armacost; and I fancy your horses and coachman won't be sorry. If this young fellow gives you any trouble just let me know. I'll attend to his case, short order; with a dose of picra or some other disagreeable stuff! But I wish you both the compliments of the season and—this way out, please. Say good-by to nurse Brady, Towsley Lionel Armacost, and don't forget that but for her care you might not be starting on a sleigh-ride now."

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Then he was gone, and they had to hurry along the halls and down the stairs to follow him toward that outer door, before which stood the chestnuts, jingling their bells and pawing balls of the light snow, in their impatience to be trotting over the white roads and up to the



park where other horses were flying about, as merry, apparently, as the people whom they carried.

So with a mere nod of his head, old Jefferson whisked the newsboy into a corner of the cushioned seat and Miss Armacost followed without assistance; but her doing so made Towsley remember something and sent a blush to his pale cheek. That was, the manner in which real gentlemen helped their women folk on any similar occasion.

"To Druid Hill!" said Miss Lucy, briefly; and Jefferson drove briskly away.

For some time neither of the occupants of that warm back seat said a word. Each was too thoroughly engrossed by his and her own thoughts; but finally Miss Lucy stole a glance toward her small companion and inquired:

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"Do you like sleighing, Lionel?"

"Yes, Miss Armacost. Only—it all seems like—like make-believe. I keep wondering when I'll wake up. And I wish—I wish Battles and Shiner were here. I don't believe that Shiner ever had a sleigh-ride in his life—Never; not once."

"Indeed?" asked the lady, coldly.

"No, ma'am. I mean, no, Miss Lucy. And he ain't much more'n a baby, Shiner ain't. Not near as old as I am."

"How old are you, my dear?"

"I guess I'm going on eight. Molly thinks I am. You know Molly; the girl that took me to your house or run me into you on her skate. She's a dreadful nice girl, Molly is; but I don't believe she ever had a sleigh-ride, either. Poor Molly."

The lad's eyes were shining from his own pleasure; his pale face was rapidly taking on a healthy glow; he was a very presentable little fellow, indeed, in his modern suit of well-shaped clothing, so Miss Armacost thought, but—he was also spoiling her ride for her as thoroughly as he could. Spoiling it without the slightest intention or desire on his own part to do so.

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"Molly spent the greater part of yesterday with me, Lionel."

"She did? What for?"

"Because I was in trouble, of more sorts than one; and her kind heart sent her—in the first place. After she came I begged her to stay. I am already very fond of Molly; she is so gay and cheerful."

Towsley's face became radiant.

"Oh, jimmeny! Ain't that prime! Have you adopted her, too?"

"No, indeed. She has no need for such an action on my part. She has both parents living. But our plumbing went to wreck, yesterday, in the unlooked-for cold snap, and her father came to our rescue. He had to work there all day, and when he found I was grieving so about your—your running away into the storm, he told Molly and she came. She very kindly brought me some of their own dinner, hot and steaming; and I assure you it did taste fine! I was almost really hungry, for once."

"That's just like Molly. She's an awful generous girl, Molly is."

Miss Lucy was about to suggest that some other adjective than "awful" would better apply to "generous," but refrained. It would not do, she considered, to begin too sternly or suddenly in the reconstruction of her charge. She simply replied:

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"Yes. She is generous and lovable. She has excellent common sense."

Towsley found his tongue and launched into praise of the whole family of Johns, with such graphic pictures of their daily life that Miss Armacost felt well acquainted with the entire household. Then the little fellow became absorbed in the excitement of the ride, and the novelty of dashing around and around the lake, in that endless line of prancing horses and skimming vehicles, set his tongue a-chatter ceaselessly.

Miss Lucy listened, in a sort of charm. The few children whom she knew were apt to be rather quiet in her presence, but not so this lad from the back alley. He enjoyed everything, saw everything, described everything, like a keen reporter of the papers he had used to sell.

"Look-a-there! and there! and there! Did you see that? That was a regular clothes-basket,

set on a pair of runners! Sure; it all goes. Snow doesn't come down here very often. Why, up north, in New York, or Boston, or such places, they have sleighing whenever they've a mind to! but not down here. Folks daren't lose a chance, dare they? See! There's a regular old vender's wagon, that a lot of young folks have hired, and they're old cow-bells they've put on the horses. Ki! look-a-there! look-a-there! Them's woman's college girls—sure! Whew! regular hay-riggers, ain't they! They must have took all their money to pay for it! And—shucks! just see them bobs!”

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In his excitement the little boy stood up and pointed frantically toward a group of boys who had brought out their long sleds and were hastening toward that hill of the park where coasting would be permitted. Unconsciously he attracted a deal of attention from the throngs of pleasure-seekers, and Miss Armacost felt herself unpleasantly conspicuous. Yet there was not an eye which beheld him that did not brighten because of his happiness; and in spite of her annoyance at the gaze of her fellow townsmen, the owner of the chestnuts felt also a sort of pride in its cause.

But at last she ordered the coachman homeward, and they rode slowly out of the park, down the beautiful Avenue toward the Armacost mansion and Towsley's new home. He sank back into his place with a profound sigh of mingled pleasure and regret:

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“To think they never had a sleigh-ride!”

“Humph! How many have *you* had, before this one, Lionel?”

“Why—why—why—none.”

“I thought so. Have you pitied yourself?”

“No, ma'am. I mean, no, Miss Lucy.”

“Then save your sympathy. One cannot miss what one has never enjoyed. For myself, I see little good of this snow. It's made no end of trouble and expense to house owners, and filled the streets with stuff which the city will have to remove, and——”

“It's made a heap of fun, hasn't it? Won't it give idle men a lot of shovelling to do? I've always heard them saying how glad they were when a snow-storm came; those tramps around the city buildings. I'm sure I think it's jolly. Only I wish——”

“Well, what?”

“That I had as much money as I wanted. I'd hire the big picnic stage and have it put on runners, and I'd go 'round Newspaper Square, and the Swamp, and the asylums and—and places—and I'd give every little kid that never had a ride, I'd give him one to-morrow, as sure as I live. Oh! I wish I had it!”

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Miss Armacost lost all manner of patience with this boy. If he'd only be contented with enjoying himself and let his neighbors rest. But here they were at home. How odd it looked, to see those great heaps of snow which had been shovelled from the sidewalk and piled up in banks before the houses, between the curbstone and the driveway. And over in the “Square” which filled the centre of the block the children of the bordering houses had all come out with sleds and happy laughter, and were making the old silence ring.

“Maybe, after all, anything which pleases the children is not an unmitigated annoyance,” observed Miss Armacost, reflectively.

Jefferson brought the horses to a standstill and stepped down to loosen the robes about his mistress and help her alight, if need be. But Towsley had been before him. He had pulled off his hat, thrust it under his arm, and extended his hand toward the lady, to assist her, as courteously and gracefully as any grown gentleman could have done; even if not with quite so much strength.

Repressing a smile at the difference in size between her assistant and herself, Miss Armacost quietly placed her hand within his and stepped to the sidewalk. This was slippery in spots, as Towsley observed, and he remarked:

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“Better let me hold your hand till you get clear up the steps, hadn't you, Miss Lucy?”

“Yes, dear, I think I would much better.” Then when the lad reached the top and she had rung for admittance, she turned to him with a lovely smile:

“Welcome home, Lionel Towsley Armacost.”

“Thank you, Miss Lucy. I hope we won't neither of us ever be sorry I've come.”

She liked his answer; liked it far more than she would have done one full of enthusiasm. So

they went in together, well pleased, and as the boy had been so lately a hospital patient, he was sent early to bed and to sleep.

As she had done before, Miss Lucy visited him afterward, and enjoyed without restraint the sight of her adopted son, lying so peacefully upon his pillow. For there were now no soiled stains of the street to mar his beauty, and the little hands upon the coverlet were as dainty as need be.

But even in slumber Towsley had an uncomfortable effect upon the lady's thoughts: reminding her of the many other little lads who had shared his poverty yet not his present good fortune. She had never considered her house as an especially large one till his small person served to show the size of the empty rooms, and how tiny a space one child could occupy.

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Miss Lucy sat so long that she grew chilled. Then she reflected that she might easily become ill, which would be most unfortunate now, since she had taken a child to care for. So she rose rather stiffly and started for her own room; though she had not taken a dozen steps in its direction before she came to a sudden, startled pause. Somebody was ringing her door-bell. Ringing it persistently, without waiting for any response.

"Oh, dear! That must be somebody in trouble! Or, possibly, a special delivery message from the post-office or express; though I'm sure I have nobody near and dear enough to call upon me in that manner. Yes, yes, I'm coming!" she cried to the invisible visitor, though she knew perfectly that her voice could not reach him.

At that hour, Jefferson and Mary, who slept in the house, were both in bed, and their mistress would not disturb them. She preferred to hurry to the door herself and learn what was wanted. But when she reached and opened it there was nobody waiting. Even though she drew her shoulder shawl closer about her and stepped out upon the marble stoop to look, there was nobody in sight. In that quiet neighborhood all lights had long since been extinguished, and there was no sign of life in any of the stately homes bordering the snowy Square.

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"That's very odd! The bell did certainly ring. Not once but several times. Well, whoever it was must have been in a hurry, and may have disappeared around Side Street corner."

So she locked the door, extinguished the light she had turned on, and climbed the carpeted stairs toward her own apartment. Her slippered feet made no sound, and the stillness all over the house was profound; but, just as she turned the first landing, it was broken again. There came the same prolonged, insistent ringing, and fairly flying back to the door, Miss Lucy exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be in time now, I think!"

Yet, just as before, she opened to silence and the moonlight only.

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### MYSTERIES.

"Come, Master Lionel! It's time to be stirring. Your bath's ready and breakfast will be before you are dressed. Miss Lucy says you are not to delay, and to open your window when you leave your room, and to be in your place in the breakfast-room when she comes down to lead morning worship. Now, don't go to sleep any more, that's a good boy, and make me climb three flights of stairs again, just for nothing at all. Hear?"

"Yes, ma'am, I hear," responded Towsley, sleepily. But he was much mixed in his ideas at that moment, and quite mistook Mary for her mistress; also that he had been instructed by his benefactress, during the past evening, as to his demeanor toward the servants of the house, whom he was to treat with all kindness, yet not to "ma'am" nor "mister," as seemed natural to an Alley-trained boy.

"I can trust you, can I?" again demanded the voice outside the half-closed door.

"Yes. I'm awake. But, say, Mary!"

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"Well, what is it?"

"Did you say bath? Have I got to wash myself again? They washed me at the hospital enough to kill. I won't be dirty again this winter."

Mary laughed. "The idea! Did you ever hear of a young gentleman as didn't take his bath every day? Ridic'ulous. Come, step lively. Here's a bath-robe by the door used to belong to the other Lionel. Miss Lucy says, wear it."

Towsley had seen such robes in the shop windows; and as he folded this one about him and thrust his feet into the warm little slippers, also provided, he had a curious feeling that he was thus investing himself with his new life.

But this made him very unhappy. Odd! that a boy who had never had a home should be homesick! Yet that was the real name of the miserable, sinking sensation at his heart; and as he crossed the hall to the bathroom, his face was the picture of woe.

However he had no idea of disobedience; and though it was with a shiver of repugnance that he stepped into the porcelain tub, his emotions underwent a sudden and radical change.

"Hi! this is nicer than swimming! And them towels—for me! Ain't they prime! I wonder what Shiner would say if he could see 'em." [Pg 94]

This was an unfortunate suggestion. It almost, though not quite, upset the exhilaration of the bath, and as he stepped out upon the rug he seemed to see the reproachful face of his mate looking up at him and questioning:

"Why ain't I in it, too?"

"Why wasn't he? Why did I happen to be the one, just the only one, who should skate bang into Miss Lucy and be taken in and done for? And I couldn't skate, either. I was just a-learning. Pshaw! I wish I hadn't. I wish—I wish. 'Bout this time, I s'pose, the fellows have near sold out. There'll be some running on the down-town cars, though, and the gents that go to business late; bankers and lawyers and such. I s'pose somebody's got my route, already. If a chap gets out the line—there's another hops into his place—spang! I wonder —"

But just there Lionel Towsley's reflections became so sombre that some very unusual tears crept into his eyes. This fact restored him to a sense of his own foolishness.

"Shucks! if I ain't crying! I—Towsley! Well, that beats all. I ain't never done it since I can remember, only now I'm adopted I 'pear to be losing all my snap. Is that the way with rich folks always? Am I a rich one, now, just because I stay in Miss Lucy's house? Well, I can't let myself get to be a girl, even if I do live like one." [Pg 95]

Then the lad remembered Doctor Frank and that, although the gentleman wore fine attire, he was the manliest person he knew. Yet he was evidently wealthy, since he could afford to give away, or advance—to penniless Towsley this seemed the same thing—a five-dollar suit of clothing. So he hurried himself and brushed his hair, as far as he could reach around; and he tried to use all the accessories of his toilet which Miss Lucy had provided and he could understand. In his efforts he forgot to be so lonely; and it was a really bright-faced little fellow who presented himself in the breakfast-room, where the house mistress sat waiting, and who addressed her very respectfully:

"Good-morning, Miss Armacost. Am I late? I guess I fooled 'round some. I—I ain't got used to things yet."

"Good-morning, my child. Did you rest well?"

"Prime. I hope you did, too," he replied, sitting down upon a chair near her own. [Pg 96]

Yet she did not look as if she had, and the child opened his lips to remark this; but she motioned him to be quiet, and immediately took up the Bible lying ready on a little stand beside her. He noticed that all the servants were present, sitting in an orderly row upon one side of the room, which was very still. Then Miss Lucy read a portion of the Word and offered a brief prayer, to which Towsley listened in a scared sort of way. For she mentioned him in her petition, asking for a blessing upon the new relation established between them.

This gave the matter a dignity and importance really startling to the waif. If he and what happened to him were worth mentioning to the Lord he had no right to grumble about them; and, during that few moments upon his knees, there was born in the boy's heart a self-respect that was never after to forsake him.

But when they had taken their places at the table, and Mary was passing the food, he saw how Miss Lucy's hand shook, and inquired, anxiously:

"Miss Lucy, are you sick? What makes you tremble so? Are you cold? Can I get you something?" [Pg 97]

She was much pleased by his quick observation, yet shook her head in a way that made him understand he was to ask no more questions while Mary remained in the room. After she had served them and gone, he ventured again:

“Didn’t you sleep as nice as I did, Miss Lucy? You look awful tired.”

The little lady regarded him very attentively for a moment. Then she inquired:

“Lionel, if I tell you a secret, will you keep it?”

“Yes, indeed. I will. Hope to die if I don’t.”

“Needn’t say that. It wouldn’t be true. But there was something very queer going on here last night; and it kept me awake, and I’m all upset this morning.”

Even to herself it seemed strange that Miss Armacost should turn to this stranger child for sympathy, when she would not allow herself to do so toward any of the servants who had known her so long.

“What was it, Miss Lucy? P’raps I can find out what it was. I’d like to if I could. I’d like to, first rate. I heard what you said when you were praying, and I ain’t going to forget. I’d rather be back to my old place in the Square, with my papers under my arm, but if I can’t help myself—if the Lord’s took a hand in it—I’d like to be the next best thing I can. That’s to help you, ain’t it?”

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The mistress of the mansion gasped. This was frankness, indeed,—a frankness most unflattering to herself, but it served to rouse and brace her jaded nerves. She replied, a little sharply:

“If you don’t like it you needn’t stay. That is, after you’ve given the matter a good trial, and I have. That’s fair for both sides. But—hark! There it goes again!”

At that instant, the electric door-bell rang in a peculiar, prolonged, and rather gentle fashion. Towsley couldn’t understand why Miss Lucy’s face paled still further; nor why, after Mary had answered the summons, she should slam the door viciously, and almost run back along the hall to her own quarters.

Miss Lucy touched the table bell and summoned her; then inquired, in as calm a voice as she could command:

“What was it, this time, Mary?”

“The same old story, ma’am; nothing.”

“Very well. You may go.”

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“Yes, ma’am. I think I will. Cook and I are both talking of going. You see, *we’ve* been hearing it this two or three days, and we wouldn’t dare to stay in a house that had a ‘haunt.’”

“Nonsense. There is nothing of the sort. Some reasonable explanation will be found. You may return to your dusting.”

“Yes, ma’am. But if it happens again, just once, please, ma’am, I’d like to be let off, and I’ll try to find somebody to take my place if you want me to.”

Miss Armacost vouchsafed no response to this suggestion, and pretended to sip her coffee. Yet her hand shook so that she set the cup down, and, as soon as Mary had disappeared again, folded her arms and looked toward the eager-faced boy opposite, in a helpless sort of way.

“What did she mean by that, Miss Lucy?”

Then she told him. How for several days before she had herself heard it, there had been a most mysterious ringing at the front door-bell; that the servants had as often answered the summons, yet found nobody demanding admittance; that they believed there was some ghostly influence at work; that being superstitious, like all the colored race, they had decided it would be unsafe for them to remain in the house; that at frequent intervals, all last night and now this morning, as Lionel had himself observed, the ringing had again occurred.

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“It’s very, very distracting and uncomfortable. I’m quite upset by it, and don’t know what to do.”

“It’s electric, ain’t it?”

"What? The bell? Yes, certainly."

"Then I'd send for a 'lectrician. He'd find out the trouble in a jiffy. But, shucks! wouldn't it be prime!"

"What would be prime?" Yet Miss Lucy sighed in relief, as she added: "What an extremely simple thing; and why didn't I think of it before?"

"Don't know, except 'cause you didn't."

"Hm'm. Immediately after breakfast I'll send for a man. Now—my goodness! What's all this?"

The glances of both flew to the windows which were on a level with the street. There were four of these lace-draped windows, two in front and two upon the side. At each was a small face peering in, and at some there were two faces.

Towsley forgot everything. All the changed conditions of his life, his determination to be very thoughtful of Miss Lucy, the gentlemanly behavior which belonged to a boy who lived in the finest house upon the Avenue. They were faces that he knew,—every one! They, were the faces of Shiner, and Battles, and Toothless, and Whistling Jerry. Behind these, Tom the Bugler, and Larry Lameleg.

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His friends were they, his jolly little comrades; who had heard of what had befallen him and had come to condole with him. The mere sight of them brought back the atmosphere so familiar to him: of the alleys and their freedom, of Newspaper Square with its hurry and bustle and eager life! It was too much for Towsley, and with a shout of rapture he rushed to the basement entrance, out upon the street, into the very arms of his mates.

"Say, it was true, then, ain't it?" demanded Tom the Bugler. "What was in our paper last night, and that our man saw up in the park? You dressed up in another boy's clothes and lost yourself in the snow, didn't you? Must been a dumb one to do that. Right here in Baltimore city where you've lived all your life. Say, was it bad in hospital? Be you goin' to stay here? What's the lady doin'? She looks—she looks kind of funny, don't she?"

Lionel Towsley glanced back through the window into the room he had deserted, and his heart sank. Miss Lucy had pushed aside from the table and was watching him with a white, disappointed face. It had been such a little while that she had had him, and yet he had become so dear. She had been so ready, so eager to bestow every comfort and benefit upon him, and he had seemed so deserving; yet now, at a glance, he was back in the old ways among his rude companions, and she and her offered love were quite forgotten.

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"Say, Tows, you're a regular swell now, ain't you? My! see them fine clothes! Look at the pockets of 'em. Money? Money in the pockets, Tows? Give us a nickel all round, you nabob, you. Rides in a sleigh every day, he does, and never thinks no more of Newspaper Square and nights on the old steam holes, he don't!" gibed Battles fiercely.

But Lionel scarcely heard this taunt. A bitter struggle was tearing his manly, loving, loyal little heart—the claims of his old life and his own loneliness on the one side; the claims of Miss Lucy's generosity and her loneliness upon the other. He didn't need her, he thought; but she needed him. She needed him very much. It was his duty to be good to her; and, like many another child under similar circumstances, at that moment Towsley felt that the word "duty" was the most disagreeable one in the language. He took a second real good look at Miss Lucy still sitting, waiting, and this time he saw something in her face that made everything quite easy.

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"She understands!" he thought, and then he nodded to her with a happy smile. A second later, with a hurried, "Wait a minute, fellows!" he had darted back into the breakfast-room and, now indifferent to the stares of his comrades, flung his arms about the lady's neck, crying:

"It's all right, dear Miss Armacost! I'm not a-going to run away with them. But I've just thought of something and I want it, I want it—oh! so much! It's a little thing! But I want, I do want, before I give up the newspaper business to get just one 'beat' on th' others. May I? May I just go down to the office, and before anybody else gets hold of it, get our ghost story in? It would make a whopper, it would! I'll carry the boys away with me, and I won't let on a bit, and I'll come back surely. Just this once, may I? I never had a chance before?"

It struck even Towsley himself as an odd circumstance that he should ask this permission; he who had never before consulted anybody as to his goings or comings; or that he should wait so eagerly for her reply.

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But Miss Lucy scarcely heard him. She was thinking of something else. The clasp of those

young arms about her neck thrilled her with a joy unspeakable. With such an expression as it now wore, Towsley's face seemed, indeed, that of the lost, innocent Lionel restored to life. She was ready and anxious to give him all he desired, even to the half of her kingdom; and she comprehended less of what he was just then saying, than what he had so greatly desired on the previous evening.

"Yes, my dear. You may. We will certainly hire the great stage, and give a ride to as many as it will hold. You shall tell me just what you want, and I will gratify you if it is possible."

"Thank you—oh! thank you!" he cried, and dashed a kiss at her. At that moment, however, he was more loyal to his paper than generous to his friends, and he ran out hastily.

His mates beheld and construed this action after their own way.

"Pshaw! She's give him the go-by. He ain't no swell. Anybody could work the 'doption racket for just one night, he could. Let's chase him. If she's give him money, he must treat!" cried Battles contemptuously. [Pg 105]

So, in a twinkling, the place was deserted, and Miss Lucy sat alone trying to understand just what had happened.

The silence about her was complete, and continued for a long time.

"What did he mean? Evidently not what I did, or had in mind," pondered the perplexed mistress of the house on the Avenue; and, as if in answer to her unspoken question, again there fell upon the stillness that startling, inexplicable ringing of a bell.

"Oh oh! There is that uncanny sound again! What can cause it? I don't wonder the servants are frightened. I am, myself; though I know, of course, there are no such things as ghosts. And yet——"

As if in derision of her doubt, once more the bell pealed; this time both for long and violently.

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## CHAPTER VII.

[Pg 106]

### THE END OF IT ALL.

Breathless with haste and excitement, Towsley rushed into the editorial rooms of the *Express* office and sank into the nearest chair to recover himself.

For a moment the group of men in the place regarded him without recognition; then one reporter exclaimed:

"Why, it's Tows! Little Towsley of ours!" and gayly extended his hand in greeting.

"Congratulations, young man!" cried another. "The hero of a snow-bank, an adoption, a rescue! The staff is proud to welcome you back!"

A third whipped out pencil and pad and demanded:

"The facts. Straight. First-hand notes keep the right color. Make another item for to-night."

But the boy had regained his speech and held up a protesting hand.

"Don't bother with that old stuff. The fellows said it had been in. Has it?"

"Yes."

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"Anybody else 'round—that don't belong to us?" asked the newsboy cautiously, looking about the room for lurking strangers.

"Not a soul. What's up?"

"Got a good one. A regular ghosty one. Up to the house where I'm livin' now."

"What's that? Don't swell so with pride, aristocrat!"

"Who's a-swelling? If you don't want it, never mind. I ain't suffering to give it away. Don't know as Miss Lucy'd like it, any way."

It was rather late in the affair to think about that, however, and Towsley put the possibility out of mind; or, with the true spirit of newspaper enterprise, decided that private

considerations should give precedence to the public good. Yet what possible good the mysterious ringing of an electric bell was to do the "public" it would be difficult to say.

"Come, you rising young journalist! Give it out. Wouldn't go back on your own paper, would you?"

Whereupon, Towsley related his modern ghost story, with such embellishments as a very lively fancy could furnish; and the active reporter took it down verbatim. After which he tossed his "copy" to an office boy and put on his hat and top-coat. [Pg 108]

"Come on, Tows. I'll go up with you and see the thing for myself."

"It's just as I said," remarked the lad, proudly.

"I'm not denying it. But if I can make two paragraphs go where one would do, you're not the boy to hinder me, I suppose," answered the other.

The cars had resumed their regular running, and the pair boarded one; but when they left it at the corner of the Avenue where Miss Lucy lived, the reporter looked about him and whistled.

"Well, I declare, boy! You're in clover. I wouldn't mind being adopted myself. See that you introduce me properly to the lady. Mention her name first, then present me. We want to do credit to our office, you see."

Master Lionel Towsley had not before felt any personal proprietorship in the big mansion; but he now ran lightly up its marble steps with a new and delightful sense of returning to his home. To his touch upon the door-bell nobody responded, and after several such demands had failed to awake any response, the reason for it came to him.

"Maybe they've gone. Maybe they won't answer it. I'll run down to the basement entry and try that." [Pg 109]

So the reporter waited while the lad did so, and presently there came a sound of eager feet within the front hall, and the door was flung wide. It was Towsley, of course, and his face was flushed with excitement and indignation, as he exclaimed:

"Come right straight in. Quick's you can. She's had a terrible time, I guess, and they've done it!"

All that was clear to the reporter's mind of this announcement was that he was desired to enter and follow his guide; which he did into the cheerful basement breakfast-room, where Miss Armacost still sat. She had not gone upstairs since first coming down that morning, and she was white and tremulous. The sight of her troubled face aroused not only all Towsley's chivalry, but that of the reporter also. Instantly, he regretted that he had so promptly availed himself of the newsboy's "ghost story," and had thought more of furnishing "copy" than of a gentlewoman's feelings.

"For she's not the sort will like to have her private experiences made public gossip," he reflected, ruefully. Also, that it was probably too late, even now, to remedy the evil of his haste. The best course left him was to apologize for his presence and offer his assistance in a case of need. [Pg 110]

But, for once, Miss Lucy was too much disturbed to care about notoriety, and she eagerly accepted his offer of help.

"It's very silly of me. I see and know it perfectly; but this inexplicable ringing has so infected my people that all, except Jefferson, have gone away. Each made a plausible errand, for the moment, yet each declared her intention of leaving for good and right away. As for Jefferson, he claims to be unusually busy at the stable, and only appears—even that very reluctantly—when I ring him up. I'm not much used to doing my own errands, but Lionel's suggestion seems a good one. If I could get hold of an electrician, that dreadful bell might be made to keep still."

"Well, madam, I am not much of an electrician, but I do understand a little about such matters. If you'll allow me to examine your wires I may discover the difficulty. Meanwhile, if you wish, I'll step to the nearest drug store and telephone our own man, who attends to the building in which we are."

The color returned to Miss Lucy's face and the courage to her voice.

"Oh! if you will be so good! It would be a great favor to me. My life runs so smoothly, in ordinary, that I find myself upset by the unusual circumstances of the last few days. The blizzard, Sir Christopher's death, Lionel's coming and terrible experience in the storm, and [Pg 111]



now this extraordinary ringing of my door-bell, which even the neighbors have heard and are inquiring about—altogether I—I am quite unstrung.”

Again the reporter thought regretfully of the item which would appear in that evening’s paper, and earnestly hoped she would not see it. He determined to caution Towsley to keep her from doing so, if possible; so he walked to the nearest drug store, rang up the electrician, returned to the house, and proceeded to do a little investigating on his own account.

Just then Molly arrived, for in her loneliness at the desertion of her “girls” Miss Lucy had sent Jefferson to ask her presence. She had come as soon as possible, which had not, however, been very promptly, because it was market morning for her mother, and a few of the to-be-expected accidents had befallen the twins.

“You see, Miss Armacost,” said Molly, in explanation, “I was just whisking down the kitchen to make all tidy for mother, and had put Ivanora on one side the table and Idelia on the other. I gave Idelia a bag of buttons to play with, and because Ivanora hadn’t eaten much breakfast I gave her a dish of molasses and some bread. I knew, of course, she’d mess herself, but I thought it would keep her contented. And it did!” she cried, going off into such a peal of laughter that the reporter had to join. [Pg 112]

“What’d she do, Molly?” asked Lionel.

“Why, I happened to set her alongside of father’s chair. That has a feather cushion in it and I didn’t know there was a hole in its cover. But there was, and Ivanora found it. I would have known she’d do that if I’d suspected the hole. When I turned around to see if all was right—my sake! There was that precious child all stuck up with feathers till she looked like some big bird. The molasses on her hands had made them stick as tight as burrs. They were all over her curls, her face, her clothes—everything! Well! When I’d done laughing so I could, I took her straight to the bath-tub and put her in, clothes and all. It seemed the easiest way to keep other things clean. Of course, I had to dress her all over again; and when I got back to see to Idelia—she was in a state, too! She had her mouth full of buttons, and I don’t know how many she’d swallowed. I really don’t. She was tasting them to see if they were candy. There was a small cork in the bag, and I declare! if that child hadn’t put that up her nose! Such mischiefs! Over two years old, and ought to know better! [Pg 113]

“So, that’s what kept me, Miss Armacost. I couldn’t leave things in such a fix for mother, so I stayed till I’d helped get everything right. Mother has so much to do, always.”

“I should think so, indeed. Your excuse is most reasonable and does you credit.”

The reporter had listened to the girl’s story, but hastened below stairs to examine the electric arrangements of the house. He could make no helpful discoveries, however, and presently returned to the breakfast-room and the company of the others.

His presence in the house had, however, quite restored Miss Lucy to a normal condition of mind, for he had treated the curious bell-ringing as a trivial matter, easily explainable by the expert he had summoned, if not by himself; and he found the trio discussing the proposed sleigh-ride that Miss Lucy wanted to give the friends of her new charge. [Pg 114]

“A sleigh-ride! For all the newsboys in town! Hurrah!” he cried, entering into the spirit of the thing as if he were a boy himself. “My dear Miss Armacost, you couldn’t do anything that would give so much pleasure. Think what such a treat means in this city! and fancy the sparkling eyes of the little chaps! What can I do to help?”

“Plenty of things, if you have leisure and inclination.”

“I certainly have the inclination, and I’ll make the leisure.”

“How many are there to go?”

The gentleman produced the ever-ready pad and pencil, and aided by Lionel’s suggestions made a list. It was a pretty big list, and Miss Lucy wondered if suitable vehicles could be obtained.

“Surely. Only it should be settled at once. Others besides us will be thinking of big sleighing parties. Moreover, if this sunshine holds the snow will not last long. When would you like to give the ride?”

“When would be best?”

“This afternoon,” broke in Lionel eagerly, and his friend the reporter nodded. [Pg 115]

“So soon? Could it be arranged?”

"Yes, indeed. Easily—if at all."

The lady laughed. "You newspaper people take my breath away with your promptness. I'm so used to thinking things over a long while. But I like it, I like it. I feel waked up by it."

"We newspaper folk don't have much time to 'think over' anything, do we, Tows?" asked the gentleman of his fellow-laborer; and the lad flushed with delight at this gay acceptance of himself into the "force."

"No. Say, Miss Lucy, while we're waiting for that man, couldn't I run down to the store and telephone for the sleighs?"

"*You?* You—you, *child?* Could you do that?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"You—are so young."

"Oh, I've been around!" said the newsboy, airily.

"I'll do it myself, Tows. I think Miss Armacost would be better satisfied, and I'd be surer myself," interrupted the reporter. "You see, lad, it's her picnic."

"O—oh! I thought it was ours."

"So it is. Belongs to all of us."

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The gentleman hurried away; and the moment he did so the bell began again to ring. Towsley, and even Molly, looked frightened, but Miss Lucy was now able to laugh at the incident; and when Molly asked, earnestly:

"Do you suppose it *could* be a ghost, after all?" she replied indignantly:

"No, indeed. But what the gentleman said has reminded me of something else. It must be a 'picnic,' after all. It wouldn't do to take those hungry lads for a ride in the sharp air and then give them nothing to eat afterward. They will have to be fed. We will have to hunt up a caterer and hire a hall, I suppose, and——"

Miss Armacost's face expressed the fact that she was undertaking a vast enterprise, and was rather frightened now by her own temerity.

"Oh! I'll tell you!" cried Molly eagerly.

"Tell what, child?"

"The boarding-house woman! She's the checker!"

"The what?"

"She's the one to feed them! Oh! please! It would be so splendid for her, She's so poor, and has such trouble to pay rent and keep going. She is too generous for her own good, father says, and keeps her house too well. She would cook for them and they could eat in her big dining-room. There'd be plenty of room, for she takes 'mealers' extra. Oh! if you say so I'll run and call her over. Do you?"

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Miss Armacost felt, for one brief moment, as if she were being turned out of her own abode. When she decided to adopt Towsley, she did not decide to open her doors to the whole of Side Street, or even Newspaper Square. Yet here she was, she—the aristocratic Lucy Armacost, who had hitherto associated with nobody whose pedigree could not match her own for length and distinction—here was she, consorting with newsboys, reporters, daughters of plumbers, boarding-house women, and what not! What was worse, according to her past ideas, she had never felt so interested, so warm and comfortable in her heart, in short so human as she did now. So, after that brief interval of reflection, she turned toward the bright-eyed Molly and nodded gayly:

"Run, my dear, and ask the lady if she can step over here for a little while. When the gentleman returns and we learn about the stages, we will hold a general consultation and get everything settled."

As if in emphasis of her decision again, just then, the door-bell gave another of its mysterious rings; but to all who heard it there seemed something quite joyous and full of anticipation in the peal. They all tuned the sound, in fact, to their own happy thoughts.

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Molly laughed and dashed out of the house; Lionel brought a stool and sat by Miss Lucy's feet, and even old Jefferson ventured across from the stable to warm himself at the kitchen range, and, incidentally, to ask if his mistress needed anything.

"Yes, Jefferson, we need your voice in counsel. I have friends with me this morning. A gentleman, a reporter from the *Express* office; a lady from Side Street is expected, and 'Jolly Molly'; besides, your young master here. We are all planning to give a big sleigh-ride to all the poor boys in town, or nearly all; and as you know the prettiest and safest drives about the country, you might tell us where to go. You see, after a turn in the park, I think they'll all enjoy a regular country ride. Away and away, where there are evergreens that they may break, if they choose, and holly bushes bright with berries, that are not prohibited like private property. You are to take the horses and our own sleigh and Molly's mother and Molly, while—well, I'll hunt up somebody to look after the twins while they're gone; and—here comes the gentleman back, and that must be the electrician he is bringing with him."

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"I've 'phoned for the sleighs and engaged enough to carry all the boys in the city; but we can't have them till to-morrow!" cried the reporter gayly. "If I've gone beyond your limit, I'll help foot the bill. Or I and the other men at the office; I know I can pledge for them a share of the expense. This is our electrician—and, if you please, I'll just go down with him and find out what happens. I'm always interested to 'see things.'"

In a few moments there came out from that lower space where the two men were working a hearty peal of laughter; and eager to impart the solution of the ghost story, the reporter rejoined them.

"Mice! Just mice—and nothing more!" quoted the amused Mr. Graham.

"*Mice!* How in the world could mice ring an electric bell?" asked Miss Armacost, as greatly astonished as relieved.

"Much more easily than any other kind."

Then he went on to explain something about "insulations," "gnawing," "running across and completing the circuit," and a deal more of technical description, which confused Miss Lucy quite as much as it did all the others who heard it.

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"Well," declared the lady, after vainly trying to comprehend what seemed so exceedingly simple to Mr. Graham and the electrician, "I don't care at all about all that. Since it's only a mouse, let's forget that subject and get on to a more interesting one—our picnic sleigh-ride. Here come Molly and a lady; I suppose the one who is to help us feed our guests."

It was all very quickly settled, as everything is into which the heart really enters; the happy boarding-house keeper started for market with injunctions from Miss Armacost to "spare no expense and select the best," and quite sure in her own heart that her labor would be well paid for. Besides, she was so kindly herself that, had there been no remuneration for her services, she would gladly have given them. Being a fine cook, and now assured that she would not have to "pinch" anywhere or run herself into the dreaded "debt," she went to work with a will; and the stall-keepers down at Lexington Market fairly opened their eyes at the orders she gave with such a lavish hand.

"Newsboys? sleigh-ride? free dinner afterward? Well, of course we'll help. No; don't take that turkey. It's an old one. Here; I'll pick out a lot for you. How many? My sake! That is a heap, indeed! Well, you just go across and get your cranberries and celery and other stuff, and I'll send my wagon up with you to carry the whole business."

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"Wonderful, how one generous deed begets another!" thought the happy woman, whose face had lost its chronic expression of worryment, and who thought nothing of the hours she would have to spend over a hot range, since her doing so was to help in gladdening the hearts of earth's unfortunate little ones.

"If the snow will only last!" cried Molly Johns, as she took a last peep out of the window on the evening before the "sleigh-ride day," as it was ever after designated.

"Oh! it will last, lassie," answered father Johns, cheerily. "Get you to bed, my child, and to sleep, if you can. What honors have we come to, in our humble Side Street! and all because of a little kindness in the first place. Here are mother and you to go sleighing in a grand equipage, with feathers flying and a mortal-proud coachy on the front seat, heading a procession of the wildest, happiest youngsters in the world. Get you to bed, daughter, without a fear. Do you suppose the dear Lord will let anything arise to prevent the joy He has planned for the morrow? No, indeed."

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Nothing did arise. At twelve o'clock precisely, because that was the warmest, sunniest hour of the day, the big, big sleigh which had to be drawn by eight gray horses, it was so long and awkward, drew into place in Newspaper Square. There were other sleighs, too, and every one was heaped with robes and blankets; so that the little half-clad youngsters who were to ride in them should be well protected from the cold. There were horns and

trumpets—"What is a ride without a trumpet?" demanded reporter Graham, who provided the rackets things—and bells and baskets of sandwiches, "just to keep one contented till the great dinner came on."

So they started, and old Jefferson forgot to be a trifle haughty, as he realized that he was the leader of that happy, happy procession. Be sure he led them a lovely road all about the charming park, and then far beyond, into the open country, where the boys begged to be tumbled out into a snow-drift for a regular pitched battle.

The halt was made, for who could refuse such a petition from a lad on his first sleigh-ride? And for as long as the careful drivers would permit their horses to stand, the snowballs flew through the air, and the countryside was made to ring with the wild sport and laughter. All this but aided appetite; and when at last the ride ended in astonished Side Street, before the doorway of the boarding mistress, every newsboy was so hungry he declared he "could eat his hat."

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"Well, you won't have to!" cried somebody.

There was Doctor Frank, as sure as could be! He wasn't to be left out of any such good times if he could help it. It was he, with Mr. Graham, who marshalled the lads into something like order and planted them all over the boarding mistress' house, wherever a spot could be found for them to sit. But, if you please, Mr. Graham kept that tell-tale pad of his right handy, and between whiles how he would write! For he meant that a thoroughly interesting and inspiring account of the day should be in that very night's paper.

"So that others may go and do likewise!" he thought, and for once without the least concern how much "space" he could occupy and be paid for.

At last it was all over. Everybody had eaten as much as he desired, and the big sleighs came round to convey the lads back to Newspaper Square, to the old lives of labor and, alas! poverty; but which were to be far brighter, for a long time to come, because of that one day's hilarious enjoyment.

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In the cheery back parlor, that evening, Miss Lucy assembled a little group of people. There were father Johns, and Doctor Frank, and Mr. Graham; besides Molly and Towsley—I mean Lionel—sitting cosily together on one of the very same satin sofas of which, such a little while before, they had both been afraid.

With a slight hesitation, Miss Lucy began:

"I believe that this has been the happiest day of my life. I hope it is a happiness which will continue, because it is the beginning of a life for others. But I wish to make that life as wise as possible. I am afraid of mistakes. I want your advice; the advice of every one here present. I mean to adopt this boy, Towsley—the new Lionel Armacost. Tell me, friends, how best can I rear him to be a blessing to his race?"

For a moment nobody answered; then said father Johns, in his wise, cheery way:

"Since our boy here is to be the beneficiary, let us hear his idea of what *he* would think best."

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"Right, right!" said the reporter, who had faith in all his craft.

"Well, am I to tell?" asked the once shy newsboy eagerly.

"Yes, indeed. Tell freely, exactly; without a particle of hesitation."

"Yes, my dear, what would you like your future to be?"

"Well, then, Miss Lucy, I would like first of all to live right here with you and to make you as happy, to take as good care of you, as I can. But I wouldn't like to do it all alone! I'd like to have some other fellows here, too. As many as you could afford to take. I'd like each one to learn just what he likes. There's the Bugler. He's just chock full of tunes. If he had a chance he might make beautiful music some day, like them big duffers what wrote the operas, you know. I'd give him music lessons if I could. I'd have Battles taught to be a regular soldier or sailor. He's forever in a row, and he'd ought to do the right kind of fighting, hadn't he?"

"Very sensibly put, Tows; go on," urged the reporter.

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"Shiner's a whittler. He's always cutting things in the door frames and buildings, and getting scolded by the folks that own them. He ought to be a carpenter and whittle something worth while. There—there are others—but I guess I'm planning too much."

"Not a bit, my dear. Yet you say nothing of yourself. What would you like to become, Lionel?"

"I'd like to learn *everything*; and when I grow up I'll write for a paper!"

It was such a characteristic wish that all the company laughed. Then remarked father Johns:

"I reckon, Miss Armacost, that the lad's idea of a 'home,' an 'asylum,' is a place where poor children can be taught to become useful bread-winners. Apparently, he doesn't think a life of rich idleness can be the happiest."

"I know!" cried Molly eagerly. "The very thing that first brought him here. Dear little Towsley wants to *divide his skates!*"

Miss Lucy laughed—such a merry, heart-young laugh, that everybody forgot her hair was white and laughed with her.

"That's it, Molly; that's just it! We want to share our blessings. We *will* divide our skates, my dear; and we'll begin right away. All that my little Lionel has pointed out shall certainly be done. This shall become a 'home' indeed; a home of busy thrift, and hard study, and joyous life, and open generosity. Towsley's experience—of his few years, shall piece the inexperience of my many; and together, giving of each other to each other, we will make this a model, practical 'home.'" [Pg 127]

"Aye, aye. So you will, so you will, never fear," assured father Johns cheerily. And so they did.

## THE END.

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