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THE SPECTACLE MAN

Out of a song the story grew;
Just how it happened nobody knew,
But, song and story, it all came true.

BOOKS BY MARY F. LEONARD.

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"The Spectacle Man, leaning his elbows on the show-case"

The Spectacle Man

A Story of the Missing Bridge

By

Mary F. Leonard

AUTHOR OF

"THE BIG FRONT DOOR"

Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill

W. A. WILDE COMPANY

BOSTON AND CHICAGO

TO THE ONE

Whose Love has been from Childhood

An Unfailing Inspiration

Whose Friendship has made Dark Paths Light

This Little Book is Dedicated

In Memory of "Remembered Hours"

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The Spectacle Man.

CHAPTER FIRST.

FRANCES MEETS THE SPECTACLE MAN.

"The bridge is broke, and I have to mend it,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do—"

sang the Spectacle Man, leaning his elbows on the show-case, with his hands outspread, and the glasses between a thumb and finger, as he nodded merrily at Frances.

Such an odd-looking person as he was! Instead of an ordinary coat he wore a velvet smoking-

jacket; the top of his bald head was protected by a Scotch cap, and his fringe of hair, white like his pointed beard, was parted behind and brushed into a tuft over each ear, the ribbon ends of his cap hanging down between in the jauntiest way. It was really difficult to decide whether the back or front view of him was most cheerful. [Pg 12]

"Will it take long?" Frances asked, with dignity, although a certain dimple refused to be repressed.

"Well, at least half an hour, if I am not interrupted; but as my clerk is out, I may have to stop to wait on a customer. Perhaps if you have other shopping to do you might call for them on your way home." If there was a twinkle in the eye of the Spectacle Man, nobody saw it except the gray cat who sat near by on the directory.

"Thank you, I think I'd better wait," replied Frances, politely, much pleased to have it supposed she was out shopping.

At this the optician hastened to give her a chair at the window, motioning her to it with a wave of the hand and a funny little bow; then he trotted into the next room and returned with a *St. Nicholas*, which he presented with another bow, and retired to his table in the corner. As he set to work he hummed his tune, glancing now and then over his shoulder in the direction of his small customer. [Pg 13]

Perched on the high-backed chair, in her scarlet coat and cap, her hands clasped over the book, her bright eyes fixed on the busy street, it was as if a stray red bird had fluttered in, bringing a touch of color to the gray-tinted room. From her waving brown locks to the tips of her toes she was a dainty little maid, and carried herself with the air of a person of some importance.

If the Spectacle Man was interested in Frances, she was no less interested in him; neither the street nor the magazine attracted her half so much as the queer shop and its proprietor. It had once been the front parlor of the old dwelling which, with its veranda and grass-plat, still held its own in the midst of the tall business houses that closed it in on either side. Here were the show-cases, queer instruments, and cabalistic looking charts for trying the sight; over the high mantel hung a large clock, and in the grate below a coal fire nickered and purred in a lazy fashion; and through the half-open folding doors Francis had a glimpse into what seemed to be a study or library. [Pg 14]

At least a dozen questions were on the tip of her tongue, but didn't get any further. For instance, she longed to ask if those cunning little spectacles on the doll's head in the case near her, were for sale, and if the Spectacle Man had any children who read the *St. Nicholas* and what the gray cat's name was, for that he had a name she didn't doubt, he was so evidently an important part of the establishment.

He had descended from the directory, which was rather circumscribed for one of his size, and curled himself comfortably on the counter; but instead of going to sleep he gently fanned his nose with the tip of his tail, and kept his yellow eyes fixed on Frances as if he too felt some curiosity about her. She was thinking how much she would like to have him in her lap when the Spectacle Man looked around and said, "The next time your grandmother breaks these frames she will have to have some new ones." [Pg 15]

"They aren't my grandmother's, they are Mrs. Gray's. I haven't any grandmother," she answered.

"You haven't? Why, that's a coincidence; neither have I!"

Frances laughed but didn't think of anything else to say, so the conversation dropped, and the optician fell to humming:—

"The bridge is broke."

They might never have become really acquainted if, just as he was giving a final polish to the glasses, it had not begun to rain. [Pg 16]

"What shall I do?" Frances exclaimed, rising hurriedly. "I haven't any umbrella."

The Spectacle Man walked to the window, the glasses in one hand, a piece of chamois in the other. "It may be only a shower," he said, peering out; "but it is time for the equinoctial." Then, seeing the little girl was worried, he asked how far she had to go.

"Only two blocks; we are staying at the Wentworth, but mother and father were out when I left and won't know where I am."

"Well, now, don't you worry; Dick will be in presently and I'll send him right over to the hotel to let them know where you are, and get a waterproof for you."

This made Frances feel more comfortable; and when, after putting the glasses in their case and giving her the change from Mrs. Gray's dollar, he lit the gas in the back parlor and invited her in, she almost forgot the storm. [Pg 17]

The room was quite different from any she had ever been in, and she at once decided she liked it. Around the walls were low cases, some filled with books and papers, others with china and pottery; from the top of an ancient looking chest in one corner a large stuffed owl gazed solemnly at her; the mantel-shelf was full of books, and above it hung a portrait of Washington. There were

some plaster casts and a few engravings, and beside the study table in the middle of the room was an arm-chair which, judging from its worn cover, was a favorite resting-place of the Spectacle Man.

"I have a little writing to do before Dick comes in; can't I give you a book while I am busy? I have a number of story-books," her host asked.

Frances thanked him, but thought she'd rather look about. "You seem to have so many interesting things," she said.

While she walked slowly around the room the optician sat down at the table and wrote rapidly. [Pg 18]
"How does this sound," he presently asked.

"'WANTED: Occupants for a small, partially furnished flat. All conveniences; rent reasonable. Apply 432 Walnut Street.' You don't happen to know any one who wants a flat, I suppose?"

Frances said she did not.

"The lady who had my second story rooms was called away by her mother's death, and now she is not coming back. With Mark away at school it is really very important to have them rented." The Spectacle Man tapped the end of his nose with his pen and began to hum absent-mindedly:—

"The bridge is broke and I have to mend it."

At this moment a boy with a dripping umbrella appeared at the door. He proved to be Dick, and was at once despatched to the Wentworth with instructions to ask for Mr. John Morrison, and let [Pg 19]
him know his daughter was safe and only waiting till the storm was over; and on his way back to stop at the newspaper office and leave the advertisement.

"Dear me!" said Frances, after he had gone, "we might have sent Mrs. Gray's glasses; I am afraid she will be tired waiting for them. She can't see to do anything without them, and she is lame too."

"Well, she is fortunate in having a friend to get them mended for her. And now I wonder if you wouldn't like to see old Toby," said the optician, taking down a funny looking jug in the shape of a very fat old gentleman. "When my grandfather died he left me this jug and the song about the bridge. Did you ever hear it before?"

Frances said she never had.

"Grandfather used to sing it to me when I was a little boy, and I find it still a very good song. [Pg 20]
When I get into a tight place and can't see how I am to get through, why—" here he waved his hands and nodded his head—

"'The bridge is broke, and I have to mend it,'

"and I go to work and try. Sometimes it is for other people, sometimes for myself. Bridges are always getting broken,—'tisn't only spectacles."

Frances smiled, for though she did not quite understand, it sounded interesting; but before she had time to ask any questions a tall young man entered. "Why, Wink! what in the world are you doing here?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, daddy dear, I hope you haven't worried!" she cried, running to him; "Mrs. Gray broke her glasses and couldn't read or sew, and I thought I ought to have them mended for her,—it wasn't far you know—and then it began to rain so I couldn't get back." [Pg 21]

"And this is Mr. Clark, I suppose," said Mr. Morrison; "let me thank you for taking care of my little daughter. And now, Wink, put on this coat and your rubbers, and let us hurry before mother quite loses her mind."

When she was enveloped in the waterproof, Frances held out her hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Clark," she said; "I hope you will find some nice person to rent your flat. Good-by."

The Spectacle Man stood in his door and watched the two figures till they disappeared in the misty twilight, then he returned to the shop. "Peterkin," he said, addressing the cat, "I like that little girl, and I suppose I'll never see her again."

Peterkin uncurled himself, stood up on the counter, arched his back, and yawned three times. [Pg 22]

CHAPTER SECOND.

A CERTAIN PERSON.

A day or two after her visit to the optician's, Frances lay curled up on the broad window-sill, a thoughtful little pucker between her eyes. About fifteen minutes earlier she had entered the room

where her father and mother were talking, just as the former said, "As a certain person is abroad I see no objection to your spending the winter here if you wish."

Before she could ask a single question a caller was announced, and she had taken refuge behind the curtains.

It was quite by accident that they happened to be staying for a few weeks in this pleasant town where the Spectacle Man lived. They were returning from North Carolina, where they had spent [Pg 23] the summer, when a slight illness of Mrs. Morrison's made it seem wise to stop for a while on the way; and before she was quite well, Mr. Morrison was summoned to New York on business, so his wife and daughter stayed where they were, waiting for him, and enjoying the lovely fall weather.

They liked it so well they were beginning to think with regret of the time when they must leave, for though really a city in size, the place had many of the attractions of a village. The gardens around the houses, the flowers and vines, the wide shady streets, combined to make an atmosphere of homelikeness; but to Frances' mind its greatest charm lay in the fact that once, long ago, her father had lived here. At least she felt sure it must have been long ago, for it was in that strange time before there was any Frances Morrison.

She had never heard as much as she wanted to hear about these years, although she had heard a [Pg 24] good deal. There were some things her father evidently did not care to talk about, and one of these was a mysterious individual known as a Certain Person. The first time she had heard this Certain Person mentioned she had questioned her mother, who had replied, "It is some one who was once a friend of father's, but is not now. I think he does not care to mention the name, dear."

After this Frances asked no more questions, but she thought a great deal, and her imagination began to picture a tall, fierce looking man who lurked in dark corners ready to spring out at her. Sometimes when she was on the street at night she would see him skulking along in the shadows, and would clasp her father's hand more closely. Altogether this person had grown and flourished in her mind in a wonderful way. [Pg 25]

And, she couldn't tell how, a Certain Person was connected in her thoughts with "The Girl in the Golden Doorway." This was a story in her very own story-book, a collection of tales known only to her father and herself, which had all been told in the firelight on winter evenings and afterward written out in Mr. Morrison's clear hand in a book bought for the purpose, so that not even a printer knew anything about them.

This particular story, which she had heard many times, was of a boy who lived in a great old-fashioned house in the country, where there were beautiful things all about, both indoors and out. The only other child in the house was a little girl who looked down from a heavy gilt frame above the library mantel. The boy, who was just six years old, used to lie on the hearth rug, gazing up at her, and sometimes she would smile and beckon to him as if she wanted to be friends. [Pg 26]

This happened only at nightfall when the shadows lay dark in the corners of the room and the fire blazed brightly; at such times things that had before been a puzzle to him became quite clear. For instance, he discovered one evening that what looked like the frame of a picture was really a doorway belonging to the house where the little girl lived, and it was plain that if he could only get up there he could find out all about her. Once there, he felt sure she would take him by the hand and together they would go away—away—somewhere! But the mantel was very high, and polished like glass.

One afternoon when he had come in from a long drive, and feeling tired was lying very still in his usual place, looking up at the little girl and the long passage that seemed to stretch away behind her, a strange thing happened. So unexpectedly it sent his heart into his mouth, the girl stepped [Pg 27] out of the doorway; and then, wonder of wonders! he saw a stairway at one side of the chimney-piece where he had never noticed one before.

Daintily holding up her silken skirt, the little maid descended and stood beside him. Astonished and bewildered, he put out his hand to touch her, but with a laugh she flitted across the room.

Seized with the fear that she would escape him altogether, the boy started in pursuit. In and out among the massive chairs and tables they ran, the girl always just out of reach, the boy breathless with anxiety. His heart quite failed him when she darted toward the mantel. Then he remembered he could follow; and indeed she seemed to expect it, for she stood still at the top of what had grown to be a very long flight of steps, and beckoned. He hurried on, but the steps were very steep and slippery, and try as he would he could not reach the top. [Pg 28]

Suddenly some one opened the library door, there was a crash and a clatter, the girl disappeared, and the boy heard his mother's voice asking, "Jack, what in the world are you doing?"

"I fell down the steps," he replied, picking himself up from among the fire irons that had tumbled in a heap on the hearth.

"What steps?" asked his mother.

He rubbed his eyes: they were not to be seen, and the little girl—yes, there she was, looking out of the golden doorway, and he was sure she shook her finger and laughed. He gave up trying to explain—grown people are hopelessly stupid at times—but he always felt certain that if the library door had not opened just when it did, he could have caught the little girl.

"Wasn't it a pity!" Frances always exclaimed at this point.

"Yes," her father would reply, "the little boy lost the chance of a lifetime, for there is no knowing what he might not have discovered in the house of the golden doorway." [Pg 29]

"And she never came down again?"

"No, for the boy went away to live not long after this, and everything was changed."

"And is the little girl still over the library mantel?"

"No, Wink, she was taken away long ago."

When the caller left, Frances came out of her hiding-place behind the curtains. "Are we going to stay here all winter?" she asked.

Mrs. Morrison drew her daughter down beside her on the couch where she sat. It was hard to believe such a small person the mother of this great girl. "You shall hear all about it, dearie, and then help us to decide," she said. "Father has had an offer from the *Eastern Review*. They want him to go to Hawaii, and besides paying him well it will be an advantage to him in other ways." [Pg 30]

"But can't we go with you, father?"

"No, Wink, I am afraid not, for several reasons."

"Of course it will be hard for us all, but if it seems to be the best thing I am sure you and I will be brave and let him go;" Mrs. Morrison's voice trembled a little, and for a moment she hid her face on Frances' shoulder.

"Will you be gone very long?" asked the little girl.

"Several months, if I go. The matter is not decided by any means. I do not see how I can leave you," answered Mr. Morrison.

"You must go, Jack; it will be the very thing for you. It isn't only the money, dear, or even the opportunity for getting on in your work, but you need a change, for you haven't been yourself lately. Frances and I will stay here and be very comfortable, and when you come home we'll have a jubilee." [Pg 31]

"And not go back to Chicago?" Frances asked.

"The winters there are too cold for you. No, I think we'd better stay here, but not in this house," said her mother.

"It will be difficult to find the kind of place I shall be willing to leave you in," replied Mr. Morrison. "What is it you are always singing, Frances?" he added, for as she turned the leaves of a magazine she was humming softly to herself.

"I don't know," she answered laughing, then—"Why, yes, I do—it is the song of the Spectacle Man,

"'The bridge is broke, and I have to mend it,'

"that is all I know of it. He was telling me about it when you came for me. I wish I could go to see him again." [Pg 32]

CHAPTER THIRD.

GLADYS.

While they were still talking matters over, Gladys Bowen, a little girl who lived in the house, came to ask if Frances might play with her; and Frances, who had not had a playmate of her own age for some time, was very ready to go. They had once or twice spoken rather shyly to each other, and she thought Gladys's golden curls perfectly beautiful.

"Would you like to come upstairs and see my dolls, or shall we go down to the reception room?" Gladys asked, adding, "My Uncle Jo owns this house, and he lets me go where I please."

"I'd like to see the dolls," Frances said, much impressed by the uncle who owned a hotel. [Pg 33]

Her companion led the way to a room where a lady in an elaborate house-gown sat in an arm-chair reading. "Mamma, I have brought Frances to see my dolls," she announced.

"How do you do, Frances.— Very well, Gladys, but I don't want you to worry me. You must play in the other room." Mrs. Bowen spoke in a languid tone, and returned to her book, but she looked up again to say, "That is a pretty dress you have on, Frances."

The child looked down at the red challis she wore, not knowing what reply to make.

"But you are stylish, as Gladys is, I am thankful to say," the lady continued. "You look well

together, you are dark and she so fair."

"Come on," Gladys called impatiently from the door, and Frances followed, feeling that she ought to have said something to Mrs. Bowen. [Pg 34]

"I'll show you Marguerite first; she's my handsomest doll. Uncle Jo gave her to me, and she cost twenty-five dollars."

Frances caught her breath at the idea of such a doll, but was a little disappointed when her hostess took from a drawer a fine lady, whose hair was done up in a French twist, and whose silk gown was made with a train. She was certainly very elegant, however, and her muff and collar were *sure enough* sealskin, as Gladys explained.

"She is beautiful, but I believe I like little girl dolls best," Frances said.

Gladys brought out others of all varieties and sizes, and while her visitor examined them, she herself talked on without a pause.

"Where did you get your name?" she asked.

Frances, who was adjusting a baby's cap, replied that she was named for her great-grandmother.

"Are you? How funny! Mamma named me for a lady in a book—Gladys Isabel. She doesn't like common names." [Pg 35]

Frances wondered if Gladys thought her name common, and for a moment she wished she had been called something more romantic.

"There is a girl who lives here in the winter," continued the chatterbox, "whose name is Mathilde. Isn't that funny? It's French—and she has the loveliest clothes! I wish you could see her—she hasn't come yet. And just think! she has diamond earrings. Have you any diamonds?"

Frances shook her head, feeling very insignificant beside a girl with a French name and diamond earrings.

"I have a diamond ring, but mamma won't let me wear it all the time for fear I'll lose it," said Gladys. "Haven't you any rings?" and she glanced at the plump little hands of her guest.

"I have one, but it is too small for me now. I don't care very much for rings," was the reply. [Pg 36]

"Don't you? I do. Mamma has ever so many. If you won't tell I'll tell you something," Gladys went on; "Uncle Jo is going to give me a party at Christmas, and if you are here I'll invite you. It is to be just like a grown-up party."

"Do you go to school?" Frances asked.

"Everyday school? Yes; but I don't like it. I haven't started yet."

"I think I'll have to go now," said Frances, rising; "I hope you will come to see me, Gladys. I have only one doll with me, but I have some games and books."

"I don't care for books, but I'll come; and if Mathilde is here maybe I'll bring her."

Frances went downstairs with a sober face. She had intended to tell Gladys the story of The Golden Doorway, and about the Spectacle Man, but she had not had a chance, and now she felt that these things would probably seem tame and uninteresting to a young person of such varied experience. [Pg 37]

"Has my little girl had a good time?" Mrs. Morrison asked.

"Y-es, mother, Gladys has some of the prettiest dolls you ever saw, but they are too dressed up to have much fun with, and she didn't seem to want to play."

"Perhaps she doesn't know how to have a really good time, Wink; some persons don't."

"I know one thing; she hasn't a darling mother like you!" and Frances emphasized her words with an ardent hug.

"Very few have, Wink," remarked her father, coming in with his hands full of papers.

"Thank you both for your kind appreciation," said Mrs. Morrison, laughing. "What do you expect to find in those papers, Jack?" [Pg 38]

"I am going to look up advertisements."

"What for, daddy?" Frances asked, dancing about on tiptoe.

"A place for you and mother while I run off and leave you. Listen to this: 'Wanted: Occupants for a small, partially furnished flat. All conveniences, terms reasonable. Apply at 432 Walnut Street.'"

"The Spectacle Man's! the Spectacle Man's!" cried Frances, clapping her hands. "Let's go there, it's lovely!"

"How do you know?" asked her father and mother in the same breath, and then she explained how he had written the advertisement while she was waiting for the storm to be over.

"Partially furnished—it might do. I mean, of course, if it is nice," said Mrs. Morrison.

"It is too far down town," objected her husband.

"Oh, father, no, it isn't! It is just a beautiful place, and the Spectacle Man will show me his Toby jugs and things, and there's the cat,—please let's go!" [Pg 39]

"Of course if there is a Toby jug and a cat, there's nothing else to be desired," said Mr. Morrison, gravely, pinching the cheek of his enthusiastic daughter. However, he promised that bright and early next day they would go to look at this flat. [Pg 40]

CHAPTER FOURTH

THEY LOOK AT A FLAT.

The house occupied by Mr. Clark the optician was old-fashioned and roomy; built in the days when ground was cheap and space need not be economized. It belonged to his nephew, whose guardian he was, and some day, when the hard times were over, it was likely to be a valuable piece of property. At present it could be rented for little or nothing as a residence, and for this reason he had decided to live in it himself, taking the first floor and turning the second and third into flats.

The dignified old mansion had the air of having stepped back in disdain from the hurry and bustle of the street, preserving in its seclusion between the tall buildings on either side something of the leisurely atmosphere of other days. [Pg 41]

The optician himself was quite in keeping with the house. He loved old things and old ways; his business methods were those of thirty years ago, and so perhaps were most of his patrons. There were still many persons who could remember the time when he had been joint proprietor of the largest jewellery store in the city, but times had changed. In some way he had been crowded out and half forgotten, much as the old house had been.

He kept the place in the best of order; the bit of lawn that lay between the house and the street was as thrifty and green as care could make it, and was a pleasant surprise when one came upon it unexpectedly, an oasis in the desert of brick pavement.

Frances' bright eyes had noticed, in passing, the mammoth pair of spectacles swinging above the veranda, and so when she found Mrs. Gray, an old lady who had a room near theirs in the hotel, lamenting over her broken glasses, she had known where to take them. [Pg 42]

The clock struck eleven as the Morrisons entered the shop next morning. The sun shone cheerily in on the Spectacle Man, who was waiting upon a customer; and Peterkin, who had selected the brightest spot to be found, was making his toilet in an absorbed manner.

Mr. Clark bowed and smiled and asked them to be seated for a few minutes; but Frances, all impatience, could not think of keeping still, and, seeing the cat, was presently down on the floor beside him.

"Do you know, puss," she whispered, stroking him gently, "that maybe we are coming here to live?"

The news evidently tickled him, so much so that he sneezed and shook his head vigorously; then, as if fearing to be misunderstood, he began to purr softly. [Pg 43]

"Come, Frances, Mr. Clark is ready to show us the rooms," her father called; and it is to be hoped Peterkin was not hurt by the sudden manner in which he was dropped.

"This is a nice old place, Jack," whispered Mrs. Morrison as they followed Frances and the Spectacle Man up the stairs. The former was explaining with great animation how they had seen the advertisement in the paper and she had recognized it. "You see, father is going away and can't take us, and mother and I think we'd like to come here, perhaps," she said.

"Well, I had a presentiment I was going to find a good tenant, but I did not think it would be you," was his reply.

The rooms proved to be large and light; the paper and paint were fresh and clean, and what furniture there was was simple and new. [Pg 44]

"I believe it is the very place for us," Mrs. Morrison said, her housewifely eyes taking in all the possibilities of cosey comfort. "It will be a new and charming experience; and as for the Spectacle Man, he is simply delightful!"

After showing them through, Mr. Clark had left them, and they could hear him singing as he went,

"The bridge is broke, and I have to mend it."

"Yes, this will be a nice sitting room, with its windows where,—to quote Frances—'The little sun

comes peeping in at morn!'" said Mr. Morrison.

"And this bedchamber is lovely, and the little kitchen—"

"We can make candy sometimes, can't we, mother?" Frances interrupted, dancing wildly about. [Pg 45]

"O Jack! if only you were going to be here;" Mrs. Morrison turned suddenly to the sunny window.

"You know I'll not go one step unless you are willing, Kate," her husband said, coming to her side.

"Don't be a goose, dear, of course you are going." Her face was hidden against his shoulder for a moment, then she turned brightly to Frances, who was anxiously inquiring where she was to sleep.

"And mother," she exclaimed, "such a pretty young lady passed through the hall just now."

"That is something we must ask about,—what other persons are in the house," said her father.

Frances was not a little surprised and indignant when, after carrying on what seemed to her a long conversation with Mr. Clark upon various unimportant subjects, her father left with nothing more definite than that they were pleased with the rooms and would let him know their decision next day. [Pg 46]

"Aren't we going to take them? I thought it was all settled; I don't understand," she said when they were on the street.

"Now, Wink, let me ask you something. Don't you honestly think that two persons who have lived more than thirty years ought to have a little better judgment about some things than one who has lived only ten?"

"But I'll be eleven in February, and—well, father, I suppose so, but grown people do take so long to think!"

"It is an interesting old house, and do you know, I think that is a Gilbert Stuart over the mantel in the back room," remarked Mr. Morrison.

"Why, father, it is a George Washington! I'm sure it is," cried Frances, and couldn't understand why they laughed, till her mother explained that they were probably both right, as Gilbert Stuart had painted a number of portraits of Washington. [Pg 47]

It spoke well for the Spectacle Man's flat that they looked no farther that day, but there were many things to be taken into consideration that Frances did not dream of. After she was snugly tucked in bed that night, her father and mother sat long talking over their plans.

"I do not like the idea of leaving you here without looking up any of my old friends," said Mr. Morrison.

"But that is just what we want to avoid. I don't care to meet your friends till you are with me. We shall be perfectly comfortable, and shall enjoy the experience, and Mr. Clark, I know, will be kindness itself," replied his wife.

"You are as infatuated as Frances; you are just two little girls with a new playhouse. But if anything should happen—I don't know what—it might be awkward." [Pg 48]

"I suppose I know what you mean, Jack; but we could not be suspected of any motive in coming here, a certain person being abroad, and nothing is going to happen. Who is likely to find us out? Morrison is a sufficiently common name, and the Spectacle Man's apartment house is, to say the least, not conspicuous. You forget we are not so important to other people as we are to you. The months will soon pass, and we shall be together again in some delightful place, and you will write your novel and become famous, and then—"

Her husband lifted to his lips the hand he held, just as he used to do when he was her gallant young lover, a dozen years ago. "For your sake I wish I might. If only I had half your cheerful courage," he said, adding, "I hope Frances will grow up to be exactly like you."

"She is exactly like you, Jack, I am happy to say." [Pg 49]

As they sat in silence the song of the Spectacle Man kept repeating itself in Mrs. Morrison's mind, and it suggested to her the broken bridge which separated Jack from so much that might have been his. Would it ever be mended? [Pg 50]

CHAPTER FIFTH.

SOME NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

"I am as sorry as I can be that you are going away, I shall miss you so much;" said Mrs. Gray to Frances and her mother when they came in to tell her about their plans for the winter.

Their rooms were across the hall from hers, and the acquaintance had begun in the elevator,

where they often met on the way to the dining room. The old lady was somewhat crippled with rheumatism and moved about with difficulty, so her life was rather a lonely one; and it had given her a great deal of pleasure to have Mrs. Morrison and her little girl drop in every now and then to chat with her and bring her books and papers. Then she could never sufficiently express her [Pg 51] gratitude to Frances for taking her glasses to be mended.

"If I hadn't, I might never have known the Spectacle Man, and we shouldn't have found our flat, so I am much obliged to *you*," Frances said, laughing, when Mrs. Gray went over it all for the tenth time, more or less.

"Then perhaps you would have stayed here for the winter. I am sorry I let you go," was her answer.

"We'll often run in to see you, Mrs. Gray, and sometime you may be able to come to see us," said Mrs. Morrison; adding, "we haven't many friends, you know."

Mrs. Gray shook her head. "I can't get out any more; but as for friends, you'll find them wherever you go."

Gladys did not approve of the move, and frankly expressed her opinion. "It is such a funny old house, in between the stores. I shouldn't think you would want to live there," she said. [Pg 52]

"But you don't know how nice it is inside," Frances urged. "It is going to be such fun; and Mr. Clark has some lovely things and the dearest cat!"

"It seems to me you like very funny things," Gladys remarked. She announced, however, that she intended to call.

What with getting the traveller ready to start and moving into their new quarters, those were busy days. They were all three very cheerful indeed, making a great many jokes and talking about next summer, when they should be together again, saying nothing of the long winter that stretched between.

It was a mistake to think of Hawaii as so far away. Had it not been annexed? Two thousand miles from California was simply no distance at all in these days. When it came to saying good-by it was [Pg 53] hard indeed to remember all this, but it was gone through with somehow, and one bright October day Frances and her mother found themselves alone in their new sitting room.

"Oh, mother, I wish you wouldn't cry!" sobbed Frances.

"But you are crying yourself," said Mrs. Morrison, half laughing. At this tearful moment there came a knock at the door, and a long heavy package was handed in.

"There must be some mistake," Mrs. Morrison said, drying her eyes and reading the address, which was, however, unmistakable.

They made haste to cut the twine, and behold, a beautiful rug! "Isn't this like that dear, extravagant Jack?" she cried. "Isn't it pretty, Wink? He thought we'd need cheering up!"

Chairs and tables must be pushed aside at once and the rug put in place. Frances had just sat down in the middle of it with great satisfaction, when through the half-open door walked the [Pg 54] fattest, rosiest baby imaginable, wearing a very clean blue check apron and an affable smile.

"Why, where did you come from?" they both exclaimed.

This was evidently something he did not care to reveal, for, although he continued to smile and gaze about him with interest, he made no reply.

"What is your name, baby?" Frances asked, holding out her hands. "Dennyleebon,"—or so it sounded.

"Do you suppose that is intended for English?" said Mrs. Morrison.

"I don't know. Make him say something else. Baby, can you talk?"

"Tock," repeated the infant, pointing to the mantel.

"Yes," cried Frances, delighted, "it is a clock. You see, mother, he thought I said clock. That is English." [Pg 55]

"You don't mean it! But let him alone, Wink, and see what he will do."

The visitor showed plainly that he had a mind of his own. He did not wish to be petted and kissed, but preferred to walk around the room on a tour of investigation. Presently he paused before a table and remarked earnestly, "Book."

"Can't you find a picture-book for him?" asked Mrs. Morrison.

There happened to be an old animal book in the box they were unpacking, and, getting it out, Frances and the baby sat together on the new rug and turned the leaves, the latter never failing to say, "ion," "effunt," "tiger," as the case might be, with unvarying correctness and great enthusiasm.

In the midst of this there came a modest little tap at the

door, and when Mrs. Morrison opened it, there stood a girl of about Frances' age. Her red calico dress was very fresh, her cheeks as rosy as the infant's, and her flaxen hair was drawn tightly back and braided in a long tail.

"'What is your name, baby?'"

"Is the baby here?" she asked.

"No, no," came in decided tones from the visitor.

This made them all laugh, even the baby himself seeming to think it a good joke.

"Can't he stay for a while? He is good, and we like to have him," said Mrs. Morrison.

The girl hesitated; plainly the baby had no thought of leaving. "The lady who used to have these rooms made a pet of him, and he is always running off up here," she explained.

"I am glad he came, for my daughter and I were feeling lonely. Won't you come in and sit down? Do you live in the house?"

The newcomer accepted Mrs. Morrison's invitation rather shyly, looking as if she had a mind to carry the baby off by main force. Her name, she said, was Emma Bond, and she and her two-year-old brother lived in the back part of the house with their mother, who took care of Mr. Clark's rooms. The baby's name was Robert Lee, but he was commonly known as the General, a nickname given him by the Spectacle Man, and evidently well bestowed.

After the picture-book had been examined from beginning to end twice over, the General was, with the aid of some candy and much diplomacy, induced to accompany his sister downstairs, calling "By-by," and kissing his hand with great affability to Frances.

"Aren't they the cleanest looking children you ever saw?" said the latter, coming back from the hall, where she had gone with their guests.

"Aren't they! I think I shall like Emma, she is a nice, sensible, old-fashioned little girl, and the General is great fun. I hope they will come again," replied Mrs. Morrison.

In the course of the next few days they began to feel at home in their new quarters, and they also made the acquaintance of Mrs. Bond, a small woman with a pleasant but firm face, and such an air of energy that no lazy person could exist comfortably in her presence.

She was never known to waste any time. With the assistance of a colored boy,—a theological student,—who came in twice a day and in the time he could spare from his Latin and Greek cleaned for her, she kept Mr. Clark's rooms and the halls in beautiful order. Her children were always as neat as wax, and her busy fingers found time for a little fine sewing occasionally, which, as a girl, she had learned in the convent school where she was educated.

Mrs. Bond was trying to train her daughter in the same industrious ways, and one Saturday morning Frances discovered Emma dusting the show-cases in the shop. Stopping to speak to her, she learned that this was her daily task, and that on Saturdays she dusted the study also. It must be very interesting work, Frances thought, and the two children found so much to talk about that Mrs. Bond presently came in search of Emma and reproved her for idling. She did not positively object to play after lessons were learned and other duties attended to, but she conveyed the impression to Frances that in her opinion a really exemplary little girl would care more for her tasks than for amusement.

"I am so sorry, but I have to go," Emma whispered, as her mother left the room.

"Won't your mother let you come to see me some time?" Frances asked.

"I guess so, when I haven't anything to do," answered Emma, who thought Frances the most charming little girl she had ever seen.

CHAPTER SIXTH.

AN INFORMAL AFFAIR.

It was not long before the Morrisons' apartment blossomed into a charmingly homelike place. Even Mrs. Bond, who on one of her tours of inspection in the wake of Wilson Barnes, the student, had been enticed in for a moment, agreed that the rooms were very fine, though she herself would not care to have so many things to keep clean.

Their sitting room was the greatest achievement. There was the new rug, which really was a beauty, and the couch, with its plump cushions all covered in a marvellous fifteen-cent stuff that looked like a costly Oriental fabric, together with the books and pictures, which had been left packed and ready to be sent to them whenever they should settle down, and last of all, in the sunniest corner was a beautiful sword fern, a rubber plant, and a jar of ivy. [Pg 62]

"Transients can't afford many plants, but a little greenness is essential to happiness," Mrs. Morrison declared.

The cosey kitchen was presided over by Zenobia Jackson, who exactly suited her surroundings, being small and neat and quick, combining in a most satisfactory way the duties of a parlor maid and cook.

She was a friend of Wilson's, to whom Mrs. Morrison had applied. When asked if he knew any one she could get to do the work of their small flat, he replied, "Yes, ma'm; I know a young girl who would suit you, but she is going to school at present."

"If that is the case, she wouldn't suit at all," said Mrs. Morrison.

"Well, she's thinking of leaving school. Her ma she's sick, and her pa's out of work, and their insurance is getting in the rear, so Zenobia 'lows she'll have to get a place." [Pg 63]

"Can she cook?" asked Mrs. Morrison.

"Yes, ma'm; her ma's one of the best cooks in town."

"Her mother has taught her, then, I suppose."

"No, ma'm; the best ones ain't taught. It comes by nature, and Zenobia is a naturalist." Wilson spoke with ministerial gravity.

Mrs. Morrison smiled. "I'd like to have her come to see me," she said.

Wilson promised to let her know, and added, "If you take her, Mrs. Morrison, she'll do her best, and angels can't do any better."

The result was that a few days later Zenobia was installed and proved herself worthy of her recommendation. [Pg 64]

"She does beautifully," Mrs. Morrison wrote to her husband, "and while I am not in a position to assert that angels couldn't do better, I am inclined to believe it."

"Frances, I wish we knew those girls upstairs. I meet them so often in the hall. One of them—Miss Moore, I think she is—is exceedingly pretty." Mrs. Morrison was washing the glossy leaves of the rubber plant.

"I know them," her daughter replied, as she carefully measured the long bud that was about to open. "The pretty one is Miss Sherwin," she added. "I know, because when Emma and I went up to their room with a package that had been left downstairs by mistake, Miss Moore opened the door, and I heard her say, 'Here is your dress, Lillian.'"

"I can't see how that proves anything. How did you know that the one who opened the door was Miss Moore?" [Pg 65]

Frances thought for a moment, "I know now! The package had Miss Sherwin's name on it. Doesn't that prove it?"

"Perhaps it does, Wink, though it seems something of a puzzle," replied her mother. "At any rate, I wish I knew them. I must remember to ask Mr. Clark about them; they look lonely."

"Let's go to see them," Frances suggested.

"They were here before we came; they may not wish to know us."

"I should think they would," Frances exclaimed, so earnestly her mother laughed.

"So should I, Winkie, but we don't know. Perhaps something will happen to make us acquainted."

Something did happen, and it was the General who brought it to pass.

Mrs. Bond often remarked that Emma's head never saved her heels, and it was quite true; for, although she went about her tasks willingly enough, her thoughts had a way of travelling off into a world of their own. She had long ago discovered this way of escape from the rather dull routine of her daily life, but her mother declared since the Morrisons came she had been worse than ever. And, indeed, the life upstairs in those bright rooms seemed very strange and delightful to Emma, so much so that in thinking about it she would forget the sugar bowl, or the tea-cups when she set the table, and do all sorts of absent-minded things. [Pg 66]

One afternoon, soon after Frances and her mother had the conversation about their neighbors overhead, the former went down to see Emma.

She found her in the kitchen that was as usual tidy to the last degree; the General, however, true to the influence of his environment, was busy with a tiny broom and dustpan. Emma sat in the window reading, and on the stove something simmered and bubbled gently. [Pg 67]

"This is a very nice kitchen," Frances remarked, as she walked in.

Emma closed her book. "Do you think so? I don't like kitchens, but your sitting room is beautiful. It reminds me of a house where I go sometimes for mother; oh, such a lovely place!"

"Don't get down; let me sit beside you," Frances begged, and quickly established herself in the other corner of the window-sill.

"Mother doesn't care for pretty things; she says she is thankful if she can be clean," Emma continued, with a sigh.

"I think you are very clean," said the visitor, looking around her; "but tell me about that beautiful house, won't you?"

Emma obediently began an animated description of it. It was just like a palace, she said, with a beautiful garden and conservatory, and rooms and rooms full of lovely things. "Mother sews [Pg 68] sometimes for the lady who lives there, and I take the work home. I wonder, Frances, if you couldn't go with me next time."

"Look at the General!" cried Frances, suddenly, jumping down.

All unnoticed by the girls he had contrived to set his broom on fire and was now waving it aloft in great delight. He had no mind to give it up either, and frightened by the excited manner in which they rushed upon him, he clung to it for dear life, filling the house with his shrieks. In the struggle a roller towel caught fire and some damage might have been done, but for the appearance of Miss Moore and Miss Sherwin.

The former seized the baby with a practised hand while her companion unfastened the roller and let the towel fall to the floor, where the fire was easily put out. It was all over when Mrs. [Pg 69] Morrison, who had heard the screams as she was dressing, came hurrying in, followed by Mr. Clark. The General sat quiet in Miss Moore's lap, a finger in his mouth, tears still on his cheek; Emma with a dazed expression was holding on to all that remained of the broom; and Frances danced around excitedly trying to explain how it happened.

When Mrs. Bond walked in, everything quieted down as if by magic. Explanations were needless, her quick eyes took it all in: "Emma wasn't minding what she was about," she said decidedly.

The Spectacle Man chuckled to himself as they all filed out, leaving her restoring order. "The General is too much for Emma," he remarked; "it is odd to see how like his mother that baby is already—as alert and determined in the pursuit of mischief as she is in her more important affairs."

"I have a dozen erratic infants not more than a year older than the General, at my table in [Pg 70] kindergarten, so I know something about it," said Miss Moore.

The excitement had broken the ice, and the Morrisons and their third-floor neighbors went upstairs together chatting sociably. Miss Sherwin, indeed, had not much to say; but her companion made up for her silence, and accepted without hesitation Mrs. Morrison's invitation to come in and make her and Frances a call.

"I have been wanting to come, but Lillian wouldn't let me," she said.

"It is not fair to say that without giving my reason," put in Miss Sherwin, coloring in a way that was most becoming.

"I believe she thought you wouldn't care to know us," said Miss Moore, laughing.

"That was a great mistake," answered Mrs. Morrison. "Frances and I are sociable persons, and besides, we are strangers here." [Pg 71]

"So are we, and we came here because Mr. Clark is an old friend of my father's." As she spoke, Miss Moore looked about her with frankly admiring eyes. "I am taking the kindergarten course; and my friend is keeping house and amusing herself, and keeping me from dying of home-sickness."

Mrs. Morrison thought Miss Sherwin, with her rather melancholy dark eyes, looked much more like a subject for home-sickness than her merry companion. In the course of the conversation she discovered that their home was in a Southern town, and that Miss Moore, who was the oldest daughter in a large family, was studying kindergarten in order to support herself. What Miss Sherwin was doing was not so clear. She had no home ties and was free to go where she pleased, and it was evident that her friend looked up to her with deep admiration. [Pg 72]

While Mrs. Morrison and Miss Moore were talking, Frances and Miss Sherwin were making friends over their favorite story-books, and before the call was over they all had the pleasant feeling of being old acquaintances; and the acquaintance was not allowed to languish.

The very next evening Frances and Emma in great glee knocked at the door of what Miss Moore called their sky parlor, with an invitation to a candy pulling. It was just the night for a little fun, being Friday and stormy, and the young ladies promptly accepted.

Delicious odors were finding their way into the sitting room when the guests entered, Miss Sherwin looking pretty and pensive in her big apron, Miss Moore as flyaway and merry as usual.

Mrs. Morrison met them at the door and led the way to the kitchen, where the children were watching the kettle that gave forth the pleasant fragrance. "Frances wanted something to do, and as Friday evening is a sort of holiday, I thought perhaps our neighbors would join us in pulling candy," she said. [Pg 73]

They made molasses candy first, and while this was being pulled Mrs. Morrison made some chocolate caramels; and even Miss Sherwin was unable to resist the laughing and nonsense that went on, and was presently taking part in it as merrily as anybody.

They were sitting around the fire in a sociable group enjoying the fruits of their labor, when the Spectacle Man knocked at the door. He had to come to see Mrs. Morrison on business, but when Frances invited him in to have some candy he did not decline.

"This looks very pleasant," he said, surveying the company, a piece of chocolate in his hand.

"Sit down, Mr. Clark; I want to ask you something," said Mrs. Morrison. "It is about the song Frances is always singing,— [Pg 74]

"'The bridge is broke—'"

"What is the rest of it?"

"I will tell you all I know, but that isn't much," he replied, crossing his legs and looking into the fire. "I used to like to hear it from my grandfather when I was a child, and I found it interested Mark, my nephew, when he was a little chap. This is the way it goes.

"A man was once taking a long journey on foot. After walking several hours he came to a deep, swift stream over which there had once been a bridge, but now it was not to be seen. On the opposite side of the river a man was chopping wood, and the traveller called to him to know what had become of the bridge. The reply—and this is always sung—was:—

"'The bridge is broke and I have to mend it,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do,
The bridge is broke and I have to mend it,
Fol de rol de ri.'

"'How deep is the river?' the traveller then asked. [Pg 75]

"'Throw in a stone, 'twill sink to the bottom,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri—' etc.

"'How can I get across?' was the next question.

"'The ducks and the geese they all swim over,
Fol de rol de ri do—' etc.

"And that is all."

"Doesn't the poor man ever get across?" asked Mrs. Morrison.

"I have told you all I know, madam," the Spectacle Man answered, with a little wave of his hand.

"I think there is a story hidden in it, and that is perhaps why children enjoy it; it is like having a picture to look at." It was Miss Sherwin who spoke.

"That is a bright idea," said Mr. Clark; "but who will find the hidden story for us?"

"I believe Miss Sherwin herself can find it," suggested Mrs. Morrison. "Suppose we give her two weeks to hunt for it, and then have a meeting to hear it." [Pg 76]

"Oh, please—" began Miss Sherwin.

"Don't say a word, Lil, you know you can," urged Miss Moore, as her friend tried to make herself heard above the chorus of approval.

"The meeting to be held in my study," added the Spectacle Man.

"But suppose I can't do it," cried Miss Sherwin.

"Father could, if he were here," put in Frances; "he is splendid for stories!"

"Is he the John Chauncey Morrison who writes so charmingly?" asked Miss Sherwin.

"Why, do you know him?" exclaimed Frances.

"No, but I have read his stories."

"I think he writes the nicest ones in the world," said the little girl.

"But we don't expect everybody else to think so, Wink," her mother added, laughing. [Pg 77]

CHAPTER SEVENTH.

A PORTRAIT.

One pleasant afternoon Emma came to ask if Frances might go with her to carry home some sewing her mother had finished.

Mrs. Morrison looked a little doubtful, but, before she could speak, Frances exclaimed: "Do please say yes, mother. It is a great lovely house, and I do so want to see it."

"What do you know about it?" asked her mother.

"Emma has told me. May I go? It is such a lovely day."

"I am not sure that it is quite the thing for two little girls to go so far alone."

"But we'll take care of each other, and—it seems to me that what you want to do is never the thing!" Frances said impatiently. [Pg 78]

Her mother laughed; "I have known other persons who thought that. Who lives in this wonderful house?" she asked.

"Mrs. Marvin, but she is not at home now; there is no one there but the housekeeper," replied Emma.

"If I let you go you must promise not to stay any longer than is necessary for Emma's errand."

They both agreed eagerly to this, and Emma ran down to get ready.

"You mustn't turn into a little Bohemian, Wink," Mrs. Morrison said, kissing the rosy face under the big hat.

"I don't know what it is, so I guess I couldn't turn into it," laughed Frances, as she followed Emma.

The two children were in a gale of delight over their expedition, and, although they meant to be very dignified, found it impossible to walk more than a few steps without breaking into a skip. [Pg 79]

"I wish my hair was like yours," Emma said, looking admiringly at her companion's waving brown locks.

"But braids aren't half so much bother. I have to wear mine this way because daddy likes it; and if you want to, you know, you can put your hair up on kids. That is what Gladys Bowen does; hers doesn't curl one bit."

"Gladys goes to our school, and I don't like her," remarked Emma.

"Why not? Don't you think she is pretty?"

"Yes; but she is so proud of herself. She doesn't like to go with me because my clothes aren't as nice as hers,—I know."

"She gets that from her mother," Frances said sagely. "Whenever I go there Mrs. Bowen asks me who made my dress or something."

"I know I don't have very pretty dresses, but my mother hasn't time," said Emma, rather sorrowfully. [Pg 80]

"I think you always look nice, Emma, and I like you better than I do Gladys."

"Oh, Frances! do you really? Then I shan't mind," cried Emma.

She was supremely happy at having Frances for a companion on her walk, and at the prospect of showing her this wonderful house; but when at length they paused before the tall iron gate, she was seized with the fear that it might not seem very grand to one who had seen so much of the world.

Frances' critical eye was pleased, however; "I really think it does look like a palace," she said, with the air of having lived among palaces.

It was a somewhat imposing mansion, with a row of graceful columns across the front, and a broad flight of steps leading to the entrance. It stood in the midst of a beautiful green lawn on which were a few fine old trees and shrubs.

"Just wait till you see the inside," said Emma, delightedly, as they stood before the stately door; [Pg 81] but alas! when it was opened the hall was seen all dismantled; evidently house-cleaning was going on.

After some hesitation the servant showed them into a room which was, like the hall, in disorder. It seemed to be a library, but the furniture was all covered, the floor was bare, and the sun streamed in through uncurtained windows. The most prominent object in the room was a picture which hung over the mantel, and this at once caught Frances' attention.

It was the portrait of a girl apparently about her own age, whose sunny eyes smiled down in the

friendliest way. Her brown hair curled loosely over her shoulders; her dress, of some soft, silken brocade of warm, rich colors, was quaintly made and fell almost to her feet; her neck and arms were bare, and her dimpled hands clasped lightly before her. There was a grace and buoyancy in the pose which was very charming; Frances was enchanted. [Pg 82]

"Isn't she lovely! Who is she, do you suppose?" she asked; but Emma could tell her nothing about it, she had never been in this room before.

"I believe she is like you, Frances," she said, looking critically at the picture.

"I am sure I am not half so pretty as that! She makes me think of something— I don't know exactly what," and Frances wrinkled her brow in a puzzled way. She was completely fascinated, and continued to gaze at the portrait all the while Emma was talking to the woman who came to see her about the work, hearing nothing till her own name caught her ear.

"It is some relative of Miss Frances," was what she heard, evidently in reply to a question from Emma.

As soon as they were on the street she inquired who Miss Frances was, and Emma said she thought she was Mrs. Marvin, the lady who owned the house. "She is coming home before long, and they are getting ready for her," she added. [Pg 83]

"I should like to have that picture," said Frances, with a sigh. "Emma, do you know what a Bohemian is?"

"I know what the 'Bohemian Girl' is; it is music."

"It can't be that, for mother said father wouldn't like it if I turned into one."

As Frances was unbuttoning her shoes that night she suddenly exclaimed, "Why, it is the little girl in the golden doorway!

"What is?" her mother asked.

"I mean that is what the portrait reminded me of. It has just come into my head. Isn't it funny?"

"Almost any portrait of a little girl might suggest it, I should think," said Mrs. Morrison. [Pg 84]

"I wish you could see her, mother. Do you think I can go again with Emma sometime? I do want to see her once more."

"I don't know, dear."

"Mother, is it being a Bohemian to want to go?"

Mrs. Morrison laughed. "Not exactly, Wink. It is difficult to explain, but a Bohemian is perhaps a person who habitually does what is not 'the thing.'"

"That must be fun," said Frances.

There was silence for a long time, then she asked, "Mother, aren't you glad a certain person is abroad?"

Mrs. Morrison looked at her in surprise. "What do you mean?" she said.

"Oh, I was just thinking!"

"But what put it into your head to think of a certain person?"

"Well, the girl in the golden doorway always makes me think of him; and you know, mother, father said he didn't mind leaving us here because he was abroad." [Pg 85]

"You have been drawing on your imagination, Wink, you can't have understood father; but now you must go to bed and not talk any more." [Pg 86]

CHAPTER EIGHTH.

THE STORY OF THE BRIDGE.

An atmosphere of great sociability pervaded the quaint room that the Spectacle Man called his study, when on Friday evening, two weeks after the candy pulling, his expected guests arrived.

He had closed his shop an hour earlier than usual, and spent the time in getting out certain treasures of china and silver, and placing them where they could be seen to the best advantage. When the lamps were lighted, the hearth brushed, and the big Japanese bowl heaped up with apples and grapes, he paused and looked around him with satisfaction.

He was reflecting how pleasant it was to be giving a party, when the hall door opened to let in Peterkin and closed again in what might have seemed a mysterious manner but for the sound of stifled laughter on the outside. On the inside Peterkin stood looking cross-eyed in a vain endeavor to see the frill that adorned his neck. [Pg 87]

"So they have dressed you for the occasion, my friend," remarked his master; "it must recall the days when Mark was at home."

A few minutes later Emma and Frances appeared, looking very demure and bringing with them Gladys, who, happening in in the afternoon, had been invited to stay and hear the story. The rest of the party soon followed, and Mr. Clark's face beamed with pleasure as he stepped briskly about getting every one seated. The children chose the sofa at the side of the fireplace, where they sat, three in a row with Frances in the middle, until Miss Moore begged to know if there was not room for her, and of course there was. [Pg 88]

"I am afraid you are trying to excite our envy, Mr. Clark," Mrs. Morrison said, touching a little dish of old Wedgwood.

"I have a few odds and ends of things," was his reply; "but most of what you see belongs to my nephew, Mark Osborne. A great-aunt left him her property when she died, this house, and a good deal of what Mark himself disrespectfully calls plunder."

"You have never told us about the Toby jug," put in Frances. "Does that belong to Mark?"

"No, that is my own, and sometime I'll tell you all I know about it; but now we want to hear Miss Sherwin's story. That is the first business of the evening;" and, his guests being seated to his satisfaction, the Spectacle Man crossed his knees and prepared to listen.

"I am not sure that it is at all interesting," said the young lady, as all eyes turned toward her. "Shall I read it or tell it?" [Pg 89]

"Tell it, please," cried the children in a chorus.

So she began, at first a little timidly, and with a glance now and then at her paper, but gaining courage as she went on.

"I have called it," she said, "'The Story of the Missing Bridge.'

"Once upon a time a young man set out on a journey. The tender beauty of the springtime was upon the grass and trees, the wheat fields were turning from gold to rose, and the sky was a soft, deep blue.

"He was a sturdy young fellow and carried a light heart, as one could tell from the smile in his eyes and the merry tune he whistled as he strode along. And he had reason to be happy, for on the next day at sunset he was to be married to the fairest girl in all the country round.

"After a time the path he followed left the open fields and entered the cool, dim forest, where all was so still and peaceful that involuntarily he changed his tune to one more grave. [Pg 90]

"A truly happy heart is certain to be a kind one, and, eager though he was to reach his journey's end, he paused once and again to lend a helping hand. Now it was to a peddler who was vainly trying to piece together the broken strap that had held his pack, again to restore a young bird to its nest, and then to release a white rabbit which had caught its foot in a trap and was moaning piteously.

"These incidents delayed him somewhat, and it was late in the afternoon when he reached the river several miles beyond which lay his destination. It was a wild and treacherous stream that rushed down from the hills, boiling and bubbling over rocks and between high, precipitous banks. Many years before a strong bridge had been thrown across it at the point where the path [Pg 91] emerged from the forest, but to-day, to his utter surprise and bewilderment, there was no bridge to be seen. His journey was brought to a sudden stop.

"He looked about him; could he have missed his way? This was impossible, he had travelled it too often. On the other side of the river he saw a man chopping wood, and presently called to him to know what had become of the bridge.

"'The bridge is broke and I have to mend it,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do,
The bridge is broke and I have to mend it,
Fol de rol de ri.'

"This was the man's reply, sung in a merry rollicking tune as he continued his work.

"'How deep is the stream?' asked the traveller.

"'Throw in a stone, 'twill sink to the bottom,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do—'

"'How can I get across?'

"'The ducks and the geese they all swim over,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do—'

"came across the stream in the same mocking tune. [Pg 92]

"Angry and almost in despair, the young farmer sat down beneath a tree to consider what was to be done.

"The secret of all his trouble was this. In an old red stone castle, the turrets of which were just visible above the trees on the other side of the stream, there lived a magician who had long had his eye upon the beautiful maiden who was the young man's promised bride. To win her he appeared as a wealthy middle-aged suitor, ready to lay all his riches at her feet, his real character being carefully concealed; but all his arts had been plied in vain; no gold or gems or promises of future splendor could turn her heart from her young lover. Her parents, however, were inclined to look with favor upon the magician's suit, and their daughter was made most unhappy by their reproaches. [Pg 93]

"The last resort of the magician was to insinuate doubts of her lover's faithfulness; and after long and careful scheming, with her father and mother as allies, a promise was wrung from the maiden that, if the bridegroom failed by so much as an hour to appear at the appointed time, she would wed his rival. So sure was she of her lover, so ignorant of the magician's power.

"It now only remained to hinder the coming of the bridegroom. This the magician wished to contrive in such a way that the young farmer should arrive upon the scene just too late, and that he himself might have the exquisite pleasure of witnessing his despair. This was not without its difficulties, for the forest that extended almost to the water's edge was inhabited by fairies who were well disposed toward mortals, and took frequent delight in frustrating the schemes of the evil-minded magician. [Pg 94]

"He therefore set himself to work to win their good will, and after establishing friendly relations went to the queen with what seemed an innocent request. An enemy of his was about to pass through the wood, and it was all-important that he should be hindered from crossing the river until after a certain hour. All he asked of the fairies was the promise that they would not reveal the plan by which he meant to accomplish this. The promise was readily given, for what possible harm could come to any one through being detained on the bank of the river for a few hours?

"The fairies often amused themselves by trying the temper of those who passed through the forest, and the peddler, the bird, and the rabbit had all been contrived to test the kindliness of the chance traveller; and by his quick response to these calls for help the young farmer had won [Pg 95] their favor. So now, as he sat at the foot of the oak tree almost ready to weep in his despair, he heard a tiny voice singing:—

"'The bridge is broke and you'll have to mend it,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do.'

"'If some kind friend would only tell me how!' he exclaimed.

"'Is it then so necessary to your happiness?' asked the voice; and looking all about, he at length discovered a little creature sitting on a toadstool just at his feet. In her hand she held a large leaf which till now had served to hide her from his view.

"Having heard that the wood was the abode of fairies, he was not surprised; and in the hope that they would be able and willing to help him, he told his story. The fairy listened intently, marvelling at the magician's craftiness.

"'And when must you be there?' she asked. [Pg 96]

"'Not one minute later than sunset to-morrow. I set out a day sooner than needful because of a mysteriously worded message I received, warning me to make all haste lest I lose my bride,' was the reply.

"'You have an enemy,' said the fairy, 'but we may be able to help you. You must wait the hour of audience, which is on the stroke of midnight;' with this she disappeared.

"The young man, left alone, seemed to hear all about him mocking voices singing:—

"'The ducks and the geese they all swim over—'

"and again and again he went to the water's edge, resolved to attempt to cross on the rocks, but the sight of the wild torrent told him it would be certain death.

"As night came on he at length fell into a troubled sleep with his head against the trunk of the oak tree. He was aroused by soft music and twinkling lights, and beheld before him, ranged in a [Pg 97] semicircle, the fairy queen and her attendants. The queen addressed him:—

"'Mortal, we have heard your story from Sadonia, one of our ladies, and, as you have proved yourself kind and true-hearted, we would help you; but we are bound by a sacred vow not to reveal the secret of the bridge until sunset to-morrow.'

"'Ah, then it will be too late!' cried the young man.

"One of the attendant fairies now stepped out and knelt before the queen. It was the one called Sadonia, with whom he had spoken.

"'Your Majesty remembers,' she said, 'that for a certain fault I was condemned to take the form of a white rabbit, and with my foot in a trap wait to be released by some kind traveller. When I was in despair, this mortal freed me, and I ask that I may show my gratitude now by aiding him.' [Pg 98]

"'Can this be done without breaking the vow which binds us all?' asked the queen.

"'Your Majesty, I promise neither by word or sign to reveal the secret of the bridge. I shall only ask him to obey me in a single command. The result rests with himself.'

"The queen was silent for a moment, then she said, 'Is this mortal courageous enough, is his love deep enough, to keep him unfaltering in the face of death?'

"'Death met in trying to reach the one I love will be far better than life without her!' cried the young man.

"'Then,' said the queen, 'Sadonia is permitted to use all her powers to aid you, but without revealing by word or sign the secret of the bridge.' She waved her wand, and in a breath lights and fairies disappeared and he was left alone. Not alone, for he heard Sadonia singing:— [Pg 99]

"'The ducks and the geese they all swim over—'

"and there, dimly seen in the moonlight, she sat on a toadstool, wrapped in a mantle of green.

"'It is time, mortal, for you to be up and away. In yonder red castle lives a magician; it was he you saw cutting wood—this is the hour when he sleeps. Is your courage strong? Are you ready to do the impossible?' While she spoke the young man sprang to his feet.

"'Do you see the star straight before us in the heavens?' she asked. 'Keep your eyes fixed upon it, and think of her who is now dreaming of you; then if you obey me, all will be well.'

"She led him to the edge of the cliff, below him was the rushing stream; 'Look at the star and go on,' she cried. [Pg 100]

"For one instant he hesitated. Go on? Where would the next step take him? Beneath were the rocks and the foaming torrent, but above him was the glowing star. He stepped bravely out. Louder and louder roared the torrent, brighter and brighter burned the star, firm and solid was the mysterious path. Confidence grew as he went on, his heart full of a great joy, and presently he felt the turf under his feet; the stream was crossed!

"As he paused to look back the truth flashed upon him: the bridge was where it had always been, but some strange spell had made it invisible!

"He went on his way, and all around him he seemed to hear fairy voices singing:—

"'The ducks and the geese they all swim over,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de ri do—'

"He stopped and, lifting his hat, said softly, 'Thank you, Sadonia!' and hoped she heard. [Pg 101]

"On the next day the maiden and her lover had a joyous wedding, and the evil-minded magician slunk away in a rage to his castle, having discovered that love is stronger than magic; for no evil power can destroy the bridge between true and loving hearts, and faith and courage can always find the way."

"Well!" exclaimed Mr. Clark, as Miss Sherwin paused, with a very becoming color in her cheeks, "who would have thought there was such a story hidden away in my old song."

"I am so pleased that we asked her to do it," said Mrs. Morrison, smiling across the table at the story-teller. "I had my suspicions before, and now they are confirmed," she added.

"I am just proud of you, Lil," said Miss Moore, beaming on her friend.

"I think it is a lovely story, but couldn't you have more about the fairies, Miss Sherwin?" Frances asked. [Pg 102]

"And about the wedding and what the bride had on," suggested Gladys.

"But did you really make it all up?" inquired Emma.

The young lady laughed. "No, I only found it between the lines of the song, and I certainly think it can be improved."

"The moral is such a fine one," remarked Mrs. Morrison.

"That faith and courage can always find a way—yes, isn't it, if one could only live up to it," said Miss Moore.

"It has given me a great deal to think about," added the Spectacle Man. "The bridge is broke—but faith and courage will find the way; yes, I like it," and he nodded his head emphatically.

"I thought morals weren't interesting," said Frances, at which they all laughed, and Miss Sherwin said she hoped she had not made hers too prominent. "I feel very grateful to you for liking it," she added. [Pg 103]

"I want you to elaborate it a little and send it to *The Young People's Journal*," Mrs. Morrison said.

Miss Sherwin shook her head, but Miss Moore declared she would see that it was done.

Peterkin, who had been completely forgotten in the interest of the story, created a sensation just here by catching one of his sharp lower teeth in his frill, thereby causing temporary lockjaw. He was promptly released by Miss Moore, who declared he should not be dressed up again.

After he had gone into seclusion under the sofa, and the rest of the company were eating grapes and apples, Mr. Clark took down the Toby jug from the mantel shelf.

"It seems hardly right to tell another story to-night after the beautiful one we have listened to," he said, "but this is a very short one, and I promised Frances. This brown ware is called [Pg 104] Rockingham, and you see how the likeness of a very fat old gentleman is embossed upon it. It is said that there once lived a jolly toper named Toby Fillpot. In the course of time he died and was buried, and then, according to an old drinking song:—

"'His body when long in the ground it had lain,
And time into clay had resolved it again,
A potter found out in its covert so snug,
And from part of fat Toby he formed this brown jug.'

"In fact, I believe he made a number of them, and dedicated them to friendship, mirth, and mild ale."

"It seems to suggest Dickens; doesn't he somewhere mention a Toby jug?" asked Mrs. Morrison.

"I don't remember, but it is likely," answered Mr. Clark.

"Was your grandfather an Englishman?" Miss Sherwin asked. [Pg 105]

"Yes, he was English and my mother was French."

"I was sure there was French somewhere," said Mrs. Morrison.

The children thought the jug very funny and interesting, but Frances did not want to touch it after she had heard the story.

"It might really be true," she said, putting her hands behind her.

"Is this supposed to be one of the originals?" asked Miss Moore.

"Well, that is as you choose to believe. It is over one hundred years old, at any rate," was Mr. Clark's reply. [Pg 106]

CHAPTER NINTH.

FINDING A MORAL.

In spite of her disapproval of the place where the Morrisons had gone to live, Gladys was very often there. She liked Frances, and at the house of the Spectacle Man there seemed never to be any lack of something to do. There were glorious games of "I spy" in the halls when Emma was off duty, or visits to the studio where Miss Sherwin illustrated her stories and was delighted to have them pose for her, or if it were a rainy afternoon Mr. Clark did not object to their coming into the shop. He kept some glasses especially to lend to them on these occasions, and if business happened to be very dull he would entertain them with stories of his childhood, of which they never tired. Any chance customer must have been amused at the sight of three little girls in [Pg 107] spectacles, seated in a row listening to the old man.

Gladys tyrannized over Emma and patronized her by turns, the latter being too timid to resent it openly; and Frances enjoyed playing the part of protector and defender. Naturally this state of affairs sometimes led to war, for Frances was quick-tempered and impulsive, and Gladys very stubborn.

One afternoon Mrs. Morrison went out, leaving the three children deeply interested in a new game. Everything went smoothly until Emma, who was sometimes rather slow in understanding things, made a wrong play that resulted in Gladys's defeat. When this was discovered Gladys in the excitement of the moment accused her of cheating, whereupon Emma began to cry and Frances became very angry.

"She didn't cheat, Gladys Bowen, you know she didn't; and you haven't any right to say so!" she [Pg 108] exclaimed, with blazing eyes.

"She did," asserted Gladys, with a dogged conviction in her tone that infuriated Frances, and sweeping the dominoes from the table she cried:—

"I'll never play with you again, never!"

"No, you will never have a chance," was the cool reply. "I won't play with either of you; and I'd be ashamed of myself if I were you, Frances."

"Oh, never mind!" urged Emma, aghast at the scene.

"I will mind. She knows it is a story—and—" Frances could get no further, her tears choked her, and rushing from the room she shut the door behind her.

Mrs. Morrison, coming in, found Gladys putting on her things with an air of injured innocence quite impressive, while Emma stood helplessly looking at her. The dominoes lay scattered on the floor. [Pg 109]

"Where is Frances?" she asked.

"In the other room; she's mad," Gladys explained briefly.

Mrs. Morrison knew it would be useless to ask questions at this stage, so she only said she was sorry, and waited till Gladys left, then went to find her daughter.

Frances was lying on the bed crying convulsively.

"What is the matter?" her mother asked gently.

The child sat up, exclaiming between her sobs, "Gladys is so hateful. She said Emma cheated—and it's a story—and I'll never play with her again!"

"Oh, my little girl! I am so sorry," was all Mrs. Morrison said, as she left the room.

Sorry about what? Frances wondered as her anger cooled. Because Gladys had been so hateful? or was it because she had been in a passion?—but then she had a right to be angry. As she lay quiet for a while, feeling languid, now the storm had passed, a sense of shame stole over her. [Pg 110]

Presently she went softly into the sitting room. It was growing dark, and her mother sat alone among the cushions of the couch; Frances nestled down beside her, and there in the firelight and the stillness she couldn't help feeling sorry, even though she still felt sure she had a right to be angry.

She wished her mother would speak, but as she did not, Frances asked, "Don't you think Gladys was very unkind?"

"She ought to have been very certain of the truth of what she said, before she accused any one of cheating."

"I think so too; and I had a right to be angry." She began to feel quite certain of this.

"I have been talking it over with Emma," said Mrs. Morrison, "and I find she did not understand the game. She really played as Gladys said, but she did it by mistake." [Pg 111]

"Did she? But Gladys ought to have known Emma wouldn't cheat."

"And of course there was nothing for you to do, but throw down the dominoes and accuse Gladys of telling a story?"

"But, mother—" Frances hesitated.

"Suppose you had told Gladys that there must be some mistake, and then had tried to find out what it was."

"But I was so provoked."

"Yes, and you lost your self-control. You let yourself be ruled by your temper. It is sometimes right to be angry, but it is never right to be in a passion."

"Don't you think I am getting better of my temper?" Frances asked meekly.

"Yes, dear; I have thought so lately, and it was right for you to want to defend Emma; but to throw the dominoes on the floor, to be in such a fury—my darling, it makes me afraid for you! You might sometime do something that all your life would be a sorrow to you. God meant you to rule your feelings and passions, not be ruled by them. You are like a soldier who has surrendered to the enemy he might have conquered." [Pg 112]

"I'll ask him to forgive me," Frances whispered.

"You know father and I want our little girl to grow into a sweet, gracious woman—"

"Just like you," Frances interrupted, with her arms around her mother's neck.

"No, not just like me," answered Mrs. Morrison, smiling; "you must be your own self, Wink. I have tried not to spoil you, but of course I have made mistakes, and now you are getting old enough to share the responsibility with me."

"Do you think you ought to punish me, mother?" [Pg 113]

"Dear, I think the punishment will be the trying to set things right again."

Nothing more was said on the subject that evening, but the next day Frances came to her mother with a bright face; "I have found out what it means," she said.

"What what means?" Mrs. Morrison asked.

"The story of the bridge. You know Gladys is mad with me and won't come here any more—

Emma says she said she would never speak to me again—and that is a broken bridge and I have to mend it; but I don't know how," she added.

"Perhaps you can find a way if you try," replied her mother, thinking it best to let her solve her own problems.

All day Frances' thoughts kept going back to the unfortunate quarrel, and even when she was not thinking about it she was not happy. The storm clouds hung low and made the atmosphere heavy. [Pg 114]

At twilight she slipped downstairs and peeped into the study where Dick had just lit the lamp and Peterkin lay stretched at his ease before the bright fire. She stole in and sat beside him on the rug and stroked him softly. He purred gently, looking up in her face with so much wisdom in his yellow eyes she felt like telling him about the trouble.

Presently the Spectacle Man came with the evening paper, and was surprised and pleased to see her.

"Mr. Clark," she began, "I have a broken bridge to mend."

"Is that so? I hope it will not give you much trouble."

Frances sighed and put her face down on Peterkin's soft coat for a moment. "I am afraid it will," she said, and then she told the story.

The Spectacle Man listened gravely. "I don't believe the bridge is really broken," he said; "it is only invisible beneath the clouds of anger and unkindness." [Pg 115]

Frances drew a very deep breath. "Then what can I do?" she asked.

"How was it in the story?"

"But the young man had a fairy to help him.

"I don't think you need one; love and courage can find a way," said Mr. Clark.

Frances went upstairs very soberly. "Mother, I believe I'll write to Gladys," she said, going at once to her desk. It took a good deal of time and thought, but it was finished at last, and she felt a weight lifted from her heart as she put it in the envelope. This is what she wrote:—

> "Dear Gladys: I am sorry I behaved so the other day. I was mad because you said Emma cheated, and I thought I had a right to be; but I know now I ought not to have been in a passion. It was a mistake; Emma did play wrong, but she didn't know any better. Gladys, I have found the moral of the story. The bridge between you and me is invisible because of the clouds of anger. I want to find it again, don't you? [Pg 116]
>
> "Your friend,
> "Frances Morrison."

This note was despatched by Wilson, and bright and early next day Gladys answered it in person. She went to Frances and kissed her. "I am not mad with you any more," she said; "it was nice of you to write that note, and I am sorry I said Emma cheated."

After this, Frances was as merry as a cricket, and went about singing:—

"The bridge is broke and I have to mend it,"

till her mother was forced to beg for a little variety.

Meanwhile the story of "The Missing Bridge," with some changes and additions, and accompanied by two charming illustrations, had gone to seek its fortune in the office of *The Young People's Journal*, and it was no longer a secret that Miss Sherwin was in the habit of writing stories and had already met with considerable success. [Pg 117]

Frances thought this a strong bond between them, "For father writes stories too, you know," she would often say.

It was about this time that the first letters, so long waited for, arrived from Honolulu, giving such glowing accounts of the voyage and the climate, and written in such evident good spirits, and so full of love for the two left behind, that they had to be read at least once a day for a week. [Pg 118]

CHAPTER TENTH.

THE PORTRAIT AGAIN.

Frances wished very much to go to school, but for several reasons her mother did not think it wise, so she studied at home every morning, going upstairs at twelve o'clock to Miss Sherwin for a drawing lesson.

Emma thought this a delightful arrangement, but Frances looked with envy upon the children who passed, swinging their school bags. "It is because I wasn't strong last winter and mother thinks it wouldn't be good for me to be shut up in a schoolroom, but I shall go next year," she explained.

As the fall weather was beautiful they spent a great deal of time out of doors, and when Mrs. Morrison did not care to go herself she would send Frances with Zenobia for a walk or a ride on the cars, to the delight of the latter, who adored her young charge. [Pg 119]

These two were returning from a long walk one cold day, when they met Emma Bond, who said she was going to Mrs. Marvin's with some work, and asked them to go back with her.

"I don't know whether mother would like me to; do you think she would care, Zenobia?" Frances asked.

It was only a short distance, and Zenobia couldn't see any harm in stopping a moment; so they went in with Emma and sat in the hall while she ran upstairs to speak to the housekeeper.

Everything was in perfect order to-day, and Frances gave a little sigh of satisfaction as she looked about her; it was all so warm and beautiful, with a stately sort of beauty that was very impressive. She sat as still as a mouse, listening to the ticking of some unseen clock. [Pg 120]

Emma stayed a long time, and presently Frances whispered, "Zenobia, there is a picture I want to see, and I am just going to peep in that door; I'll be back in a minute;" and she stole softly across the hall as if afraid she might break the stillness.

The room she entered was a library, spacious and beautiful; but Frances thought of nothing but the portrait, which in the softened light that came from the curtained windows was more charming than ever.

"'Little girl, I wish I knew you'"

"Little girl, I wish I knew you," she said half aloud, standing before it, her eyes bright from her walk in the keen air, her cheeks the deepest rose.

On the hearth a wood fire smouldered, breaking into little gleams of flame now and then. [Pg 121]

"If you would only come down and talk to me, and tell me who you are," Frances continued under her breath, unconsciously taking the attitude of the picture girl who smiled down on her so brightly.

The fire purred softly, and there was added to this sound after a little a gentle rustle which, though she heard it, seemed so a part of the quiet that she gave it no thought. Then, suddenly, as if she had been awakened from a dream, she became conscious of the presence of some one near her.

Turning, her eyes met those of a very stately person who stood only a few feet away leaning on the back of a chair. She had silvery hair and a proud, handsome face, and for a second or two Frances continued to gaze at her, the two pairs of eyes holding each other as if by some magnetic power.

Then it flashed into Frances' mind that this must be Mrs. Marvin, and the spell was broken. She had come home—and what must she think of a girl who roamed about her house without leave! The child wanted to explain, but words were not easy to find, and the lady did not speak. [Pg 122]

"I did not know—" she began, then hesitated and tried again; "I thought—" her throat felt very dry, and she wondered if she had spoken at all. It was so strange and uncomfortable that tears rose to her eyes.

"I wish you would tell me who you are;" the lady spoke in a strange, cold voice.

The feeling that she was not being fairly treated, together with her determination not to cry, made Frances intensely dignified, and it was with a haughtiness almost equal to the lady's own that she replied, "My name is Frances Morrison," and with a movement of her head which seemed to add, "it is useless to try to explain," she turned away.

A singular expression came into the stranger's face; she sat down in the nearest chair. "I wish you would not go," she said; "I am afraid I startled you as much as you did me. Come and tell me how you happen to be here." Her tone was no longer cold, and she held out her hands [Pg 123]

appealingly.

The smile transformed her face, which was all sweetness and graciousness now, and impulsive little Frances was instantly won. She went quickly to the lady's side, saying in a breathless way she had when excited, "I thought perhaps you did not like it,—but I didn't know any one was here, and I wanted to see the picture again, so while Emma was upstairs I thought I'd just peep in, but I'm sorry—" she paused; evidently her words had not been heard. This strange person held her hands and gazed at her in the oddest way.

"And so you are a real little girl!" she said at length. [Pg 124]

The child smiled uneasily, and seeing it, the lady put her arm around her and drew her closer. "Forgive me, dear, for not listening," she said. "You came with—whom?"

Again Frances explained, but perhaps she did not make it very clear, for her companion still looked puzzled.

"Do you live here?" she asked.

"No, we are spending the winter here, mother and I."

"Your mother and you—" the questioner repeated.

"Yes, while father is away; he has gone to Honolulu. We stopped here because mother was ill, and then the *Eastern Review* wanted father to go to Hawaii, so we thought we'd just stay. We have a flat at the Spectacle Man's—I mean Mr. Clark's—and it is very nice."

"Is it?" The stranger's eyes travelled over the dainty figure. "You will think I am asking a great many questions, but where did you get your name?" she added. [Pg 125]

"It was my great-grandmother's. Mother wanted to put Chauncey in. That is father's name, John Chauncey Morrison. Perhaps you have read his stories." Again Frances saw that strange expression in the face before her.

"Do you know who I am?" the lady asked.

"I suppose you are Mrs. Marvin. Emma said you had not come home yet, but that you were coming very soon, and when I saw you I knew who it must be, and— I hope you'll excuse me," she added, remembering she had offered no apology.

Emma and Zenobia, who had been standing in the door for several minutes, now succeeded in catching Frances' eye. "I must go," she said, "they are waiting for me." [Pg 126]

Mrs. Marvin glanced in their direction. "Will you come to see me again?" she asked.

"I don't know whether mother will let me," Frances replied doubtfully.

The lady suddenly took the child's face in her hands and kissed her lips,—such a strange, passionate kiss it was; and then Frances felt herself almost pushed away.

She had hardly any answer for Emma's excited questions, which began as soon as they were outside the door, but walked along with an absent expression that was rather provoking.

"I can't see what makes you so funny, Frances," said her friend.

"Why, Wink, how late you are!" Mrs. Morrison exclaimed, meeting them at the head of the steps, having spent the last half hour at the window.

Frances put her arms around her mother's neck. "Oh, mother, I have seen such a beautiful lady, and she kissed me, and it made me feel like crying!" [Pg 127]

By degrees Mrs. Morrison had the whole story, and looked rather grave over it. "I am sorry you went in at all, dear, and it was very wrong to go wandering about the house, even though you thought the owner was away."

"But I don't think she minded; at least she asked me to come again, so I think she must have liked me."

Mrs. Morrison smiled as she kissed her little daughter; she saw nothing improbable in this.

"I think I won't tell Jack about it," she said to herself, "For it would only worry him; but I'll be careful to have it understood that Frances is not to go into any house unless I am with her or have given my permission. It can't happen again. Marvin is not a name I ever heard Jack mention, I am quite sure of that." [Pg 128]

CHAPTER ELEVENTH

MRS. MARVIN IS PERPLEXED.

"Jack's little girl! can it be? It is the strangest thing that ever happened to me. I do not

understand it." Mrs. Marvin paced restlessly back and forth, an expression of pain and perplexity on her handsome face.

"Why should I care?" she thought; "what is it to me? I gave it all up long ago.— And yet—that dear little girl—those eyes—a Morrison every inch of her! There can be no mistake, but it is all a mystery how she happened to come here. How weak I am! why should it torture me so? Oh, Jack, Jack!" She hid her face in her hands.

It showed, however, no trace of emotion when half an hour later she encountered her housekeeper in the upper hall. [Pg 129]

"Caroline, who is the little girl who came to see you this afternoon?" she asked.

"I suppose it was Emma Bond, Miss Frances; her mother has been hemstitching some pillow cases."

"Do you know anything about the child who was with her? I think she said she lived in the same house."

"I don't know who she is, Miss Frances. She is a pretty child, but I don't remember her name if I ever heard it."

"I saw her and was rather attracted to her. She seemed not quite the sort of child you would expect to find in a tenement house. There was a very respectable looking maid with her."

Caroline smiled. She was a bright-faced Swiss woman who had lived with her mistress for nearly thirty years, knew her thoroughly, and loved her devotedly. She was not deceived by the air of indifference with which the lady moved away; she understood that for some reason her mistress wished to find out all she knew about this little girl. [Pg 130]

"It isn't what you'd call a tenement house," she said; "the man who owns it has made it into flats. He lives there himself, and has his shop, and Mrs. Bond keeps house for him. It is a real nice place."

"I fail to see the difference," was the reply; "but, Caroline, why did she think I was Mrs. Marvin? She called me so."

"I don't know, Miss Frances, unless it was Emma Bond's mistake. Her mother did some sewing for Mrs. Marvin when she was staying here."

"Well, Caroline, if you see Mrs. Bond you need not say anything about the mistake. You understand? I have a reason for wishing them to think I am Mrs. Marvin, as in fact I am." [Pg 131]

"I should like to know what it means," Caroline said to herself as her mistress walked away.

"This is all very melodramatic and absurd, but I must have time to consider," the lady was thinking as she entered her own room, and closed the door behind her. "I must contrive to see her again."

Going to a cabinet, she took from an inner compartment a box, then she had a long search for the key, and after it was found she sat with the box on her lap gazing absently before her.

It was thirteen—almost fourteen years since she had lifted that lid. She had thought never to open it, unless—well, unless the impossible happened, and now a pair of brown eyes had aroused an irresistible longing to look once more on something that lay hidden there. In vain she told herself it was foolish, idle, worse than childish. She recalled the burning anger and resentment with which she had put the box away so long ago. Yes, and had she not just cause? But the touch of those young lips was still fresh upon her own, and whether she would or not, was carrying her back, back to the dear old days. [Pg 132]

There was really very little in it, she reflected, as she began to look over the contents; but a few trifles can mean so much sometimes. There was a light brown curl, some photographs that showed how a certain chubby, dimpled baby had developed into a manly boy of sixteen, a bundle of letters in a schoolboy hand, and down at the very bottom, the thing she was so anxious to see again, a lovely miniature of a boy of seven.

She gazed at it long and earnestly. Such a dear little face! and this afternoon she had seen the same smile, had looked into the same eyes! Jack's daughter! was it possible? [Pg 133]

He had called her Frances, too; he had not quite forgotten. It was, of course, a family name, and with all his independence Jack had a great deal of family pride. And the air with which she had said, "Perhaps you have read his stories,"—she could have laughed, but for the pain of the thought that she who had once been first had now no part in his life. Others had the right to be proud of him, but not she.

She closed the lid and put the box away: the past could not be recalled, she must try to forget, as she had tried all these years; but even as she made the resolve her heart was saying, "I must see that child again,—I must, must!" [Pg 134]

CHAPTER TWELFTH.

AT CHRISTMAS TIME.

"Hurrah!" said the Spectacle Man, "Mark's coming home for Christmas." He waved a letter above his head as he spoke, and looked as if he might be going to dance a jig.

"Is he? I am very glad," replied Frances, who had run down to speak to the postman, and now paused in the open door of the shop.

"I was really afraid we couldn't manage it, travelling costs so much, but one of his friends has given him a pass. Mark is a great fellow for such things!" Mr. Clark's face beamed with pleasure.

Frances wished she might bring her books and study her lessons in the shop, it was so sunny and cheerful, with Peterkin stretched out in lazy comfort before the fire, his master busy at his work- [Pg 135] table over some lenses.

"Mother, do you know it will be Christmas in two weeks?" she asked, as she entered the sitting room; "and Mark is coming home," she added. "Do you think he will be nice?"

"We may as well give him the benefit of any doubt," said Mrs. Morrison, answering the last question. "What do you want to do for Christmas, Wink?"

"What can we do without father?" the little girl exclaimed, thinking of the merrymakings of other years in which he had always been prime mover.

"We are so glad to know how well and strong he is getting that we can manage to have some sort of a happy time without him, I think," her mother replied. "Suppose you ask Miss Sherwin if she and Miss Moore will be here through the holidays." [Pg 136]

The air was full of Christmas plans, the streets were full of Christmas shoppers, and the dwellers in the house of the Spectacle Man could not escape the contagion. The girls on the third floor were not going home, and were very willing to unite with their neighbors in a little festivity.

Miss Moore proposed a tree, which, in kindergarten fashion, they should all unite in trimming. Emma and Frances immediately offered to string pop-corn and cranberries, and went to work with great ardor, having at the same time to bribe the General to attend to his own affairs, with wonderful stories of Santa Claus, and the toys he had in store for good boys.

Emma was as happy as a lark. In past years the Sunday-school tree had been all she had to look forward to, and the thought of having one in the house was almost too much. Gladys also condescended to help with the pop-corn, although she was rather scornful of such home-made [Pg 137] decorations.

"I suppose I may invite Gladys to our tree, mayn't I?" Frances asked one evening of the busy circle gathered around the table in Miss Sherwin's studio.

"I should think so," her mother replied.

"I know a girl I'd like to ask. She is in my class, and she lives in Texas, and I do not believe she has a single friend in the city." As she spoke, Miss Moore carefully smoothed out the photograph she was mounting.

"You do it beautifully," said Mrs. Morrison, looking over her shoulder.

"It is the 'Holy Night' by Plockhorst, as you see; we are going to give one to each of our infants, and I offered to mount them. I like to paste; it is my one talent."

"For a Christmas picture, this is my favorite," and Miss Sherwin took from a portfolio a [Pg 138] photograph of the Magi on the way to Bethlehem.

Emma and Frances left their cranberries to look at it.

"How wonderfully simple and dignified it is! The wide sweep of the desert, and the stately figures of the Wise Men, as they follow the star," remarked Mrs. Morrison.

"But no one has answered Miss Moore. Wouldn't it be nice to invite her girl?" said Frances, going back to her work again.

"Why, of course, and perhaps we'll find some one else who is not likely to have a happy day," her mother answered.

"There's Mrs. Gray," said Frances meditatively; "I wonder if she likes Christmas trees?"

So it began, and before they knew it the original plan was quite outgrown.

When Mark arrived he proved to be a tall, bright-faced boy of sixteen, overflowing with good [Pg 139] spirits, who contrived to get acquainted with all the inmates of the house before twenty-four hours had passed.

He took a lively interest in the tree, and suggested having it in his uncle's study. Then on Christmas Eve the cases could be moved out of the way in the shop, and both rooms be given up to the frolic.

As the Spectacle Man was more than willing, this was decided upon; and as it would give them so much more room, Miss Moore thought she'd like to ask two other young women, who were studying in a business college, and boarded in the same house with her Texas friend. Mark knew two fellows he'd like to have, and his uncle wished to invite a young man who had come once or twice to his Bible class, and who was a stranger in town.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Morrison, when they were discussing it, "we had better limit our invitations to those who are not likely to have a merry Christmas." [Pg 140]

"My young man doesn't look as if he knew the meaning of merry," said Mr. Clark.

"My girls may know its meaning, but they haven't much chance to practise it, in the dingy boarding house," added Miss Moore.

"I am sure Mrs. Gray doesn't have any fun," said Frances, who clung to her idea of asking the old lady.

There couldn't have been found a merrier party in the whole city than that at work in the Spectacle Man's study on Christmas Eve. Mark had brought in a quantity of cedar and mistletoe, and while Mrs. Morrison and Miss Sherwin trimmed the tree, the children and Miss Moore turned the shop into a bower of fragrant green.

Mark was full of mischief, and romped with Frances, and teased Emma until she wished she could crawl under the bookcase as Peterkin did under the same circumstances. The General [Pg 141] trotted about in a gale of delight, getting in everybody's way, and was most unwilling to leave the scene of action when his mother came to take him to bed.

Mrs. Bond lifted her hands in dismay at so much work for nothing.

"But isn't it pretty?" asked Mrs. Morrison, from the top of the step-ladder.

"It is pretty enough, but it all has to come down, and then what a mess!" was the reply.

"Still, it is fun, and Christmas comes but once a year. Here, Mark, this is to decorate the immortal George. Can you reach?" and Miss Moore held out a beautiful branch of holly.

"You'll come to the party, won't you, Mrs. Bond?" Frances asked.

"Come? of course she will; no one in this house can be excused," said Mr. Clark, entering the room with some interesting packages under his arm. [Pg 142]

The little girls were extremely curious about some work Miss Sherwin and Mrs. Morrison had been doing, which they kept a secret from everybody, and now the sight of a number of flat parcels in tissue paper tied with red ribbon excited them afresh.

"Is that what you have been making?" asked Frances.

"Just part of it," Miss Sherwin replied, as she hung them on the tree.

"Emma, what do you suppose they are? Everybody is to have one, for I have counted," Frances whispered.

"I don't know, I am sure; but isn't it fun!" and Emma spun around like a top in her excitement.

"And she says it is only part," continued Frances.

"I believe we have done all that can be done to-night," said Mrs. Morrison, crossing the room to get a better view of the tree.

"It will be a beauty when it is lighted. I think even Gladys will admire it," remarked Miss Moore. [Pg 143]

Wilson, who had come in to sweep up, looked at it critically. "We had a tree at the Institute last year that was lighted with inclandestine lights," he said.

Mark giggled, and Mrs. Morrison looked puzzled for a minute, then she smiled as she said, "Yes, I have heard of lighting them by electricity, but ours is a home-made affair."

"Isn't Wilson absurd?" laughed Miss Sherwin as they all went into the next room. "What do you think he said to me the other day? He complained that Mrs. Bond was too unscrupulous to live with, and when I asked him what he meant, he said she required him to wash off the front porch every morning before he went to school, and that made him late for his Greek lesson, and in his opinion it was very unscrupulous."

"If it wasn't for Zenobia I think he would try to find a place where more respect was shown to [Pg 144] Greek," said Mrs. Morrison.

Mrs. Marvin's housekeeper came in to see Mrs. Bond that evening, and on her way out she had full view of the study, where work was still going on. Seeing Frances and recognizing her, she asked her name, and seemed very much surprised at Mrs. Bond's reply.

"Frances Morrison!" she repeated, "why that is—" she checked herself, but stood watching the group as if deeply interested.

"Do you know her?" asked Mrs. Bond.

Caroline shook her head. "The name's familiar, that is all," she replied.

Christmas Day was gloomy as to weather, but that was a small matter with so much merriment going on indoors. After the excitement of examining stockings was over the party was the event of the day, and was looked forward to with eager anticipation by the children. [Pg 145]

It was to be an early party, the guests having been invited to come at six o'clock. Gladys was the first to arrive, and the three little girls sat on the big hall sofa and waited for the others to come. The shop was brilliantly lighted and looked quite unfamiliar with all the show-cases moved back against the wall, and its trimmings of cedar and holly. In the centre of the room on a table was the secret which had so excited Emma and Frances. A dozen or more cards were arranged around a central one, upon which was printed, "A Christmas Dinner"; on each of the other cards was a picture representing some part of the dinner. Miss Sherwin presided over this, and Frances presented each guest, as he or she arrived, with a pencil and a blank card on which the names of the various dishes were to be written as they were guessed. The one guessing the [Pg 146] largest number was to have a prize, and everybody was to try except Mrs. Morrison and Miss Sherwin, who had prepared the pictures, and of course knew what they meant.

This served to break the ice, and Miss Moore's girls, and Mark's friends, and the Spectacle Man's shy student, all became sociable directly, as they moved about the table.

To the delight of Frances, Mrs. Gray came. She was quite apologetic over it, saying it seemed ridiculous for her to be going anywhere, but she didn't know when she had seen a Christmas tree, and so at the last minute she had decided to come.

"We take it as a great compliment," Mrs. Morrison said, helping her with her wraps and leading her to Mr. Clark's arm-chair.

She was a sweet-looking old lady in her white cap and embroidered kerchief, and Miss Sherwin [Pg 147] said her presence gave just the grandmotherly touch their party needed. Miss Moore decorated her with a sprig of holly, and every one tried to make her have a good time. The guests were all brought to her corner and introduced, and then, while the rest were busy trying to guess the menu, Mr. Clark came and sat beside her and talked of old times, and the changes that had come to the city since they were young.

It may have been an odd sort of party, but it was a success; and the shy young man proved himself more clever than any one else, for he guessed all the dishes. Some of them were very easy, the first, for instance, which was simply some points cut out of blue paper and pasted on a card.

"I know what they are," said Mark, "but three wouldn't be enough for me."

Every one knew the map without a name must be *Turkey*, but the small strips of different shades [Pg 148] of green did not at first suggest *olives*; a cat on the back of a chair puzzled some, but meant *catsup* at once to others. An infant in a high chair yelling for dear life, was of course *ice cream*, but the medical student was the only one to guess the meaning of a calf reposing on the grass. He explained his cleverness by saying that his mother often made *veal loaf*, and he was very fond of it.

When he had received his prize, which was a box of candy, it was time for the tree. While they were all thinking of something else, Mr. Clark had slipped in and lighted it, and there it was, all in a blaze of glory!

The Spectacle Man was master of ceremonies, and it was worth something to see his face as he stepped about taking things from the tree and calling out names.

For each there was a photograph of the Magi on the way to Bethlehem, and, besides these, there [Pg 149] were other things both useful and amusing, that had been picked up at the ten-cent store, or manufactured at home.

No one enjoyed it more than Mrs. Gray, unless it was the General, whose enthusiasm knew no bounds, and who pranced about with a woolly lamb in one hand and a Japanese baby in the other. Even Mrs. Bond relaxed, and for at least an hour did nothing but look on and be amused.

When the tree was exhausted they had some light refreshments, and then played old-fashioned games in which all could join.

"I don't know when I have had such a good time," said Mrs. Gray, as she was getting ready to go; "and I don't see how you happened to think of me."

"We had made up our minds to be lonely and homesick, but we have laughed so much I don't see [Pg 150] how we can ever be doleful again," remarked Miss Moore's friend.

"It is the funniest party I ever went to," Gladys whispered to Frances, "but I have had the loveliest time!"

The shy student had enjoyed himself more than he could express in words, and his face spoke for him as he said good night.

"I am going to have a Christmas tree every year of my life till I die," the Spectacle Man declared; and if he had had the least encouragement, he would have gone to work on the spot to plan another party. [Pg 151]

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH.

ONE SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

In Frances' very own book there was a story of a boy who had a beautiful voice, and who with a great many other boys sang in the choir of Christ Church. The story was somewhat sad, for the boy, who loved dearly to sing, lost his sweet voice one day and never found it again; but the memory of the music as it floated up to the Gothic arches, and of the sunlight from the great stained window falling a shaft of crimson and gold across the chancel at vesper service, remained with him, and out of it grew the story.

And the story became very real indeed to Frances when one Sunday afternoon her father took her to the very church where the boy used to sing. It was such a pleasure to her that after this [Pg 152] she and her mother often went together, and Frances pretended that one of the choir boys, who happened to have dark eyes and a high clear voice, was little Jack, and there were certain hymns she loved to hear because he used to sing them.

It was the Sunday after Christmas, and Emma had just come up to know if she might go to church with Frances, when Gladys walked in, gorgeously arrayed in velvet and silk. Though rather over-dressed she looked very pretty, but as soon as she spoke it became evident that she was not in a very good humor.

"I don't like Sunday," she asserted, with the air of wishing to shock somebody.

Emma exclaimed, "Oh, Gladys!" and looked at Mrs. Morrison to see the effect of this remark upon her; but apparently it hadn't any, for the lady went on turning the leaves of the book she held, [Pg 153] half smiling.

"I do; why don't you like it, Gladys?" asked Frances.

"You can't do anything you want to do, and everybody is cross or taking a nap. Mamma has a headache, and she said I shouldn't come over here, but I just told her I was coming. I knew she wouldn't care if I didn't bother her."

"Your mother is pretty funny, Gladys," Frances observed.

"Suppose you go with us to service this afternoon and hear the Christmas music; we can stop and ask your mother on the way," Mrs. Morrison suggested.

"Do come, Gladys, it is lovely to hear the choir boys, and perhaps they will sing 'O little town of Bethlehem,'" said Frances, adding, with a nod to Emma, who knew the story, "That is one of them."

Gladys did not decline the invitation, but she did not seem enthusiastic, and presently announced, [Pg 154] "Emma says you ought to like to go to church better than to the circus, or anywhere, to any entertainment, but I don't."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frances, with a long-drawn breath, "I suppose you ought to, but— Mother, ought you to like church better than tableaux? Don't you remember those beautiful ones we saw in North Carolina?"

Emma again looked at Mrs. Morrison, confident in the strength of her position. "Oughtn't you?" she urged.

"Let me ask you a question. Which would you rather do, stay at home to-morrow afternoon, or go to see 'The Mistletoe Bough'?"

"'The Mistletoe Bough!'" cried three voices.

"Does that mean that you care more for tableaux than you do for your homes?" [Pg 155]

"No, mother, of course not, only—" Frances hesitated.

"No, of course you do not, but for the time the tableaux are more amusing. It seems to me we must make a distinction between caring for things and finding them entertaining. You may care a great deal for church and yet not find it as amusing as some other places."

"I never thought of it in that way," said Mark, who had come in while they were talking.

"We ought not to care too much for amusement, but try to learn to take pleasure in other things," continued Mrs. Morrison. "We do not love persons or things because we ought to, but because they seem to us lovely; and yet when we think for how long people have gone on building churches—plain little chapels, grand cathedrals—and have worshipped God in them, and found help and blessing, surely we ought not to be willing to say, 'I don't like church,' but should try to [Pg 156] find out its beautiful meaning for ourselves."

"I am afraid I am a good deal like Gladys; I have found it rather a bore," said Mark.

"You remember our Christmas picture of the Wise Men," Mrs. Morrison went on. "They had learning and wealth and distinction, and yet they took that long, weary journey for what?"

"The star," said Gladys.

"To find Jesus," said Frances.

"Yes, with all their riches and learning they felt the need of something else, and the star was sent to guide them. And to-day each one of us has some heavenly vision which he must obey and follow as the Wise Men followed the star."

Frances shook her head. "I never had a vision," she said.

"Yes, I think you have sometimes felt what a beautiful thing it would be to be good. Perhaps when you have listened to the Christmas story you have determined to let the Christ-Child into your heart. If you have, it is your vision; and if you obey it, it will grow stronger and clearer. In the midst of all our work and play, the vision often grows dim, but going to God's house and thinking of Him and what He wants us to do, helps to keep it bright." [Pg 157]

"I wish we had a real star to follow; it would be easier," said Gladys.'

"We'd probably forget to watch it," said Mark. "I know how it is at school. A fellow makes up his mind to grind away and do his very best, and then before he knows it, the edge of his resolution wears off, and he finds himself skinning along, taking it easy."

Mrs. Morrison smiled. "Yes, that is the way with most of us: we forget so easily. And now let's go to church and try to think what the Christmas star means for us." [Pg 158]

The Spectacle Man who happened to be at the shop window when the little party started out, smiled to himself at sight of Mark walking beside Mrs. Morrison. "That is just what my boy needs," he said. "It isn't much influence an old uncle can have."

The church was fragrant and beautiful in its Christmas dress, the light came softly through the stained windows, and above the festoons and wreaths of cedar shone the brilliant star. The children sat very still, with earnest faces, till the service began, then, to Frances' delight, the processional was "O little town of Bethlehem."

With their heads together over the book, she and Gladys sang too. At the last stanza Frances, who knew the words, gazed straight at the star, forgetful of everything but the music:— [Pg 159]

"We hear the Christmas Angels
The great glad tidings tell;
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel."

But at the Amen something drew her eyes to the other side of the aisle where, stately and handsome, stood Mrs. Marvin, watching her. She longed to call her mother's attention to this lady of whom she had thought and talked so much, but as Gladys sat between it was not possible.

All through the short service she kept stealing glances across the aisle, but Mrs. Marvin did not turn again. The sight of the bright child face had stirred the memory of an earnest little chorister who used sometimes to smile at her over his book as he passed, and she did not want to remember those old days; she wished she had not come.

Gladys, who did not often go to church, was interested and touched by the simple service. She slipped her hand into Mrs. Morrison's when it was over and whispered, "I am glad I came, and I mean to be good." [Pg 160]

Perhaps her ideas of goodness were somewhat vague, and certainly there was much in her surroundings to cloud the vision, but who can tell what fruit an earnest wish may bear.

Frances hoped Mrs. Marvin would speak to her, but the crowd separated them, and though she kept a careful watch she did not see her again.

As they walked home in the twilight Mark, who was still beside Mrs. Morrison, said, "I'm afraid I don't care enough for church and that sort of thing, and though I know of course there must be a great deal in it for some people, I never thought of trying to find out what it was, as you said. It seemed to me it was something that came of itself, if it came at all." He spoke with real earnestness. [Pg 161]

"Yet it doesn't seem quite logical to take care of our minds and bodies and never think of our souls, does it?" his companion asked. "I remember my own schooldays well enough to know how difficult it is not to be entirely absorbed in what are called secular things. But after all, it is the motive of a life that makes it fine; and if, in all you do, you follow the best you know, are faithful and true and kind, that is religion. The caring for church and things called sacred will come in time; you can't be grown up spiritually all at once, any more than you can physically."

"You make it seem reasonable and almost easy," Mark said; "but I thought one had to understand a lot of things. You see my mother died when I was a little chap, and there was only Aunt Emily. Uncle George is very kind, but you can't believe he knows how a boy feels; people forget." [Pg 162]

"Perhaps they remember more than impatient young persons give them credit for," answered Mrs. Morrison, smiling. "There is one thing, Mark: whatever you do, be in earnest."

In the city streets the electric lights had come out one by one, and overhead the stars were

shining. They walked the last block in silence, and when they separated at the door, Mark said, "Thank you, Mrs. Morrison."

"What was he thanking you for?" Frances asked.

"I don't know, Wink, unless it was for some advice."

"I think Mark is a nice boy; I am glad he came home," Frances remarked as she took off her hat.

At the same moment, down in the study, Mark was saying: "How did you ever happen to find them, Uncle George?— Mrs. Morrison and Frances, I mean. They are not like—everybody; they are the real thing. That Frances is a regular little princess! How did they happen to come here?" [Pg 163]

"I, too, have wondered at it, my boy, but I have learned to take the good things that come my way without asking many questions," was the old man's reply. [Pg 164]

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH.

THREE OF A NAME.

Frances stood thoughtfully looking out of the window. To-morrow would be New Year's Day and also her mother's birthday, and she had not remembered it till this morning. She wondered if she could not in some way get some flowers for her. She had her Christmas money from Uncle Allan in California, and there was nothing her mother enjoyed more than flowers, but who would go with her to get them? Zenobia was busy, and Emma was taking care of the General, who had had an attack of croup.

As she stood there Mark came up the walk and lifted his hat to her. "Perhaps he will take me," she said, and running into the hall she called from the head of the stairs: "Mark, are you very busy? Could you do something for me?" [Pg 165]

"I am at your ladyship's command," was the reply.

"Then I'll come down and tell you, for it is a secret."

"Is it? Well, I'm splendid at keeping secrets."

Descending, Frances stated the case, and Mark not only said he would be glad to go with her, but he knew a place where she could get flowers much cheaper than down town.

"I'm so much obliged to you, and now I must ask mother if I can go," Frances said. "I can say you *want* me to go, can't I? It will be true, won't it?" she stopped halfway up the steps to inquire.

"Nothing could be truer," said Mark, laughing.

It did not take long to get her mother's permission, and in a very few minutes she came flying down to join her escort at the door. [Pg 166]

As they walked up the street, talking merrily, more than one passer-by smiled at the pleasant sight, and turned to look again at the tall boy and the bright-eyed little girl.

In these two weeks they had come to be great friends. Frances rather enjoyed his teasing ways, which so alarmed Emma, and had always a saucy reply of some sort ready. She liked to be called your ladyship, and accepted his mock homage with a most regal air.

"What kind of flowers are you going to buy?" Mark asked.

"Violets, I think, because mother is specially fond of them."

"Aren't they rather expensive?"

"I don't know. I have two dollars; won't that be enough?" she asked anxiously. [Pg 167]

"Dear me, I had no idea you were so rich! Are you going to spend all that?"

"I don't think that is too much to spend on your mother," she replied with emphasis.

"Certainly not, I wasn't objecting in the least."

"No, it wouldn't do any good," she asserted with dignity.

Mark laughed, and inquired what flowers she liked best herself.

"Great big red roses," was the prompt answer.

"Commend me to a princess for extravagant tastes!" Mark exclaimed, laughing.

The greenhouse was an enchanting place, and after the violets were ordered Frances wandered up and down the fragrant aisles, quite unwilling to leave. Mark at length grew impatient. "I am afraid it is going to storm; we must go," he said.

Sure enough, before they had gone two blocks it began to rain. Mark glanced uneasily at the [Pg 168]

clouds and then at his companion. Neither of them had thought of bringing an umbrella.

"We can take the car at the next corner unless it begins to pour; in that case we shall have to go in somewhere," he said, taking her hand.

They were hurrying down the avenue when they heard some one call, "Frances! Frances!" and there was Mrs. Marvin just leaving her carriage at the gate. "You must come in and wait till the storm is over," she said, and almost before they knew what had happened they found themselves standing on the porch with her, while the rain swept down in torrents.

"I am grateful to the wind for blowing you in my direction," Mrs. Marvin said, looking at Frances with her intent gaze.

The little girl smiled, and then remembering that Mrs. Marvin did not know Mark, she introduced him. [Pg 169]

The lady was very gracious and asked him in to wait till the storm was over, but Mark said he had an engagement at home to meet a friend, and did not mind the rain for himself; so, being provided with an umbrella, he went off, promising to return for Frances when it cleared. This Mrs. Marvin assured him would not be necessary, as she would send her home.

"I am always getting caught in the rain," said Frances, as she went upstairs, her hand clasped in Mrs. Marvin's. "That was the way I happened to get acquainted with the Spectacle Man."

"I am glad something brought you to me; I have been wondering if I should ever see you again."

When her own room was reached the lady sat down and drew the child to her. "Have you forgotten me in all these weeks?" she asked.

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that," was the reply. [Pg 170]

"You couldn't? Why not?" and she was drawn closer.

Frances thought this was not the sort of person to be easily forgotten, but she only smiled.

"I'd better not take it off," she said, as Mrs. Marvin began to unfasten her coat. "Mark will be back."

"But you couldn't go out in such a storm, dear; you are going to take lunch with me."

Clearly there was nothing to do but submit, and Frances was not unwilling. Mrs. Marvin looked at her fondly; the slender little figure in the blue sailor suit quite satisfied her fastidious taste. It puzzled her, too, for such daintiness and grace seemed to her altogether incompatible with what she had heard of the child's surroundings. Her sympathies were narrowed by her sensitiveness to anything that fell below her own standard of taste. She had yet to learn that there was a broader [Pg 171] culture than hers. No wonder she was bewildered as she listened to Frances' frank chatter.

That this young person was very much of a chatterbox could not be denied. Her father often said it would not take a Philadelphia lawyer to find out all she knew, and on this occasion she had an interested hearer.

"Emma and I think this is a lovely house," she remarked, as they went down to lunch. "I like our flat," she added loyally, "only of course there isn't so much room in it."

This, to her, made the chief difference,—more room, more things. Her own home life had always been harmonious, had expressed grace and refinement in a simpler way, indeed, but as truly as Mrs. Marvin's; and so having always had the emphasis laid upon the best things, she felt no embarrassment, but only a frank enjoyment in this beautiful house. [Pg 172]

When lunch was over, Mrs. Marvin led the way to the library, where the wood fire burned, and the little girl smiled down from above the mantle, and a great bunch of American Beauties bent their stately heads over a tall vase. What a combination of delights! Frances hung over the flowers with such pleasure in her eyes that her hostess said: "Do you like roses? You must take those with you when you go."

Mrs. Marvin took out a portfolio of photographs she thought might be interesting, and they went over them together. She knew perfectly how to be entertaining, and Frances enjoyed it very much, but when they came to the last one she said: "Mrs. Marvin, won't you tell me now about that portrait? I like it better than any picture I ever saw."

"Why, certainly, dear; that is my mother when she was a child. It is one of my greatest treasures." [Pg 173]

Frances felt disappointed. "Then she is not a little girl now," she said.

"No; the picture was painted many years ago, in London, when my grandfather was Minister to England. My mother was an only child."

"I am an only child, too," Frances remarked, her eyes fixed on the portrait.

"Perhaps you will be interested to know that her name was the same as your own."

"Was it? And your name, too, is Frances, isn't it?"

"Yes, we are three of a name," was Mrs. Marvin's answer.

"I suppose—" Frances hesitated.

"What, dear?"

"I was going to ask if the little girl was alive now."

"No; she lived to grow up and marry, and died while she was still very young and beautiful, leaving three little children."

It was hard to realize that so much had happened to this bright-eyed girl; Frances wrinkled her brow in the effort, and sat very still. After a while she said, "I am glad her name was Frances; she always makes me think of the Girl in the Golden Doorway." [Pg 174]

"What is that?" Mrs. Marvin inquired.

"It is one of father's stories," was the answer, and without much urging she told it, and told it well, because she was so fond of it. "It makes me want to see him so," she added with a sigh, at the end.

Mrs. Marvin listened, her face almost hidden by the screen she held. "Did your father ever tell you anything more of his childhood?" she asked.

"Not very much. He went to live somewhere else, I think, and I don't know what became of the picture. There is something about it I don't understand, but some time I know he will tell me. I think a certain person has something to do with it." [Pg 175]

"Whom do you mean by a certain person?"

"It is some one who was once a friend of father's, but is not now. That is all I know, except that I heard him tell mother he did not mind our staying here, because a certain person was abroad; but I guess maybe I oughtn't to say anything about it," Frances concluded uneasily.

The conversation was interrupted by a servant who announced a young man to take the little girl home.

"It is Mark," Frances exclaimed, jumping up.

While they had been talking the wind had grown quiet, and the rain had turned to a wet snow. Mark had brought her waterproof and overshoes, but Mrs. Marvin insisted upon ordering the carriage. She held Frances in her arms and kissed her as if she could not bear to let her go.

"I have had a beautiful time, and I am so much obliged for the roses," the child said, when at last she was released. [Pg 176]

They drove home in state through the wet streets. "I tell you this is fine!" said Mark; "I mean to be rich some day."

"So do I," replied Frances from behind her roses, and neither of them dreamed what a lonely heart they had left behind them in that beautiful house. [Pg 177]

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH.

A CONFIDENCE.

This second encounter with Mrs. Marvin both annoyed and puzzled Mrs. Morrison. It had come about naturally enough, yet she could not help feeling that this lady's interest in a child she had not seen or heard of six weeks ago was extraordinary; and though she did not wish to spoil Frances' pleasure in her roses, she shook her head at the thought of what they must have cost.

The violets which arrived early on New Year's morning gave great satisfaction, although they were, after all, the cause of her disquietude. Half an hour later came an express package from Honolulu, containing some trifles of native manufacture in sandalwood and ivory, a number of photographs, and a long birthday letter. [Pg 178]

"I almost wish," Mr. Morrison wrote, "that our new home was to be on this enchanting island. The box is for Frances' jewels when she gets them, the other things to be divided as you see fit. If it were not for the thought of two small persons in the house of the Spectacle Man away off in the United States, I should be strongly tempted to run over to China, it seems so near. But never mind! when Frances is grown we'll make a journey around the world."

"I think father is so nice," Frances remarked, as if she had but recently made his acquaintance, locking and unlocking her box with as much pleasure as if it had been full of jewels.

Mrs. Morrison laughed happily; she knew what her daughter meant but could not express the charm of sympathetic companionship. "Oh, Frances!" she exclaimed quite gravely the next moment, "it has been good for us to do without him for a while. We are so happy together I am afraid it makes us selfish." [Pg 179]

Mark left for school the first of the next week. His parting words to Mrs. Morrison were: "You

have been awfully good to me, and I'll not forget some of the things you have said. The house has been a different place with you and the Princess here, and I hope I shall find you when I come back."

"I don't know about that," was the reply. "Just at present we are wanderers, but we must look out for a home before long; and wherever it is we'll be glad to see you."

After this, things quieted down into the old routine, only now Frances began to count the weeks that must pass before her father's return. By the first of April, if not sooner, he had promised.

She came down from her drawing lesson in great glee one morning. "Miss Sherwin's story has been taken, mother, and they are going to print it in March; aren't you glad? And they like the illustrations, too, and say they will be glad to hear from her again; I saw the letter." [Pg 180]

"It shows their good taste; I must go up and congratulate her," said Mrs. Morrison.

"She did not seem to care much about it, mother. I don't think she is quite happy," Frances remarked with an air of great penetration.

Mrs. Morrison had become very fond of Lillian. Over their Christmas work they had found each other out, and a real friendship had begun. Beneath the girl's somewhat cold and reserved manner there was a genuine sweetness and charm which had at once responded to the unaffected friendliness of the older woman.

Miss Moore professed to be extremely jealous, saying that already Lillian cared more for Mrs. Morrison than she did for her; and on the other hand, although she herself had been sociable to the last degree with her neighbors, they openly preferred her taciturn companion. "It is well that virtue is its own reward, for it certainly does not get any other, in my experience," she remarked whimsically. [Pg 181]

"Don't be such a goose, Mary; you know everybody likes you," replied Miss Sherwin.

"Oh, yes, they like me, and say I am good-natured, because there is nothing else to be said. It is my fate to be commonplace, and I must make up my mind to it," and Miss Moore hurried away to her afternoon class with her usual cheery face. Her moody friend was a puzzle to her, and she by no means begrudged her any companionship that would make her happier.

Miss Sherwin sat at her desk. Before her lay the envelope containing the check in payment for "The Story of the Missing Bridge," but she did not look like one whose efforts had been crowned with success. After a few ineffectual attempts to go to work, her head went down among the papers, and it was thus Mrs. Morrison found her. [Pg 182]

"I knocked and thought I heard you answer," she said, "but even if I did not, I can't go away now without trying to comfort you."

The pressure of the arm around her, the touch of the soft hand, was too grateful to be resisted; Lillian leaned her head against her friend as she sobbed, "It is only that I am such a goose!"

"I know all about that, dear, we so frequently are," Mrs. Morrison replied, smiling a little all to herself. "But," she added, "you ought to be happy to-day. I came up to congratulate you on your story." [Pg 183]

"I have had three taken this week, and instead of being happy I hate it all!" Lillian's head went down on the papers again.

By dint of much patient encouragement and real sympathetic interest the story came out by degrees; all the hidden sorrow of months found an outlet in the broken little confession. Not very clearly told, it was yet plain enough in a general way.

A boy and girl friendship had grown into something stronger. Only a year ago they had made happy plans for the future they meant to spend together. Then came the misunderstanding—a trifling thing in the beginning, but which grew until she was convinced she had made a mistake, that she had never really cared. She felt she needed freedom to go her own way and do her own work. She would be independent and try life for herself.

He had laughed at first, and this hurt her pride. She would show him she was not a weak dependent creature, and with some bitter words they had parted. [Pg 184]

"I thought I did not care—that I could be happy in my work. I meant to be famous and I did not mind being lonely," said Lillian; "but now that I am having a little success it means nothing because—" she hesitated, and Mrs. Morrison said softly—

"Success doesn't mean much unless there is some one to share it and be glad with us.

"Yes, that is it. Perhaps if I were a genius it would be different, but I have only a poor little talent, after all. And I see how I was most to blame. I was hateful and proud—and now there is no help for it. I don't know why I should tell it, except that you are so kind, for it cannot be undone, and I must learn to bear it."

"It is so much better for you to speak of it, dear. And do you know what I am thinking? That it is not easy to destroy the bridge between two hearts that really love; isn't that it? All you can do is to wait and be patient, going on with your work and making yourself worthy of the best that can [Pg 185]

happen to you."

"But when one makes a mistake one has to bear the consequences," said Lillian, sadly.

"The pain and self-accusation—yes, but how often we are given the opportunity of undoing our mistakes. It is a hard, hard lesson you have to learn, but isn't there a star of hope somewhere that you can fix your eyes upon. Forgive me for pressing your own moral upon you, but it has helped me and I want you to take comfort."

As Mrs. Morrison went slowly down stairs again, she said to herself, "Poor little girl! I wish I could help her; but if her lover is what he ought to be, he will come back, I am sure." [Pg 186]

CHAPTER SIXTEENTH.

HARD TIMES.

Bad weather was predicted by the almanac for the first week in February, and bad weather prevailed both indoors and out.

Frances had an attack of grip which came near being pneumonia, and caused her mother some anxious days. Miss Sherwin, going in one evening to ask Zenobia about the patient, found Mrs. Morrison herself in the kitchen, crying as if her heart would break, her face buried in one of her little daughter's white aprons that lay on the ironing-board.

"Is she worse?" Lillian exclaimed, much alarmed, for surely it must be something serious to unnerve this bright, hopeful person. [Pg 187]

"I don't know—the doctor didn't say so—but she is ill, and one can never tell. Oh, my darling baby!—if she should get worse, and Jack away—why did I let him go!" she began a trembling search for her handkerchief. "I left her with Zenobia— I couldn't stand it any longer, but I must go back now," she said, wiping her eyes. "I know I am foolish, but I can't help it."

"You are not foolish at all, but tired and anxious, poor child," said Lillian, with her arms around her. "Now listen to me; Frances is going to pull through, I am certain of it. The doctor would have said so, if he thought her very ill; but I am going to stay with you. I am a good nurse,— I took care of my little cousin only a year ago, in just such an attack, and you may lie on the sofa and watch me."

"Oh, thank you, but—"

"Please don't say a word, dear, for I know I can help. I am going to take Zenobia's place now, and you may come when you have bathed your face." [Pg 188]

There was strength in Lillian's quiet, confident tone; Mrs. Morrison smiled through her tears: "You will think me a great fraud, after all my good advice to you. Like the physician who gave up his profession to enter the ministry, I find it easier to preach than to practise."

"I am glad you are human," Lillian answered, and dropping a kiss on her forehead, she went to relieve Zenobia.

She was quite right in thinking she could help, and during the few days while Frances lingered on the brink of a serious illness she was a tower of comfort and strength. The experience drew them closer together; and when the worst was over, and the patient convalescing, Mrs. Morrison said she believed it was worth all the anxiety to have found out this side of Lillian.

"I do want you and Jack to know each other," she said, and this meant that her new friend had been taken into the inner circle. [Pg 189]

About this time the Spectacle Man sat at his desk in the room below with an anxious look on his usually cheery face. The storm cloud had settled upon him, too, and his trouble was a question of money.

The directors of a certain institution in which he owned a good deal of stock had thought it wise to pass their semi-yearly dividend, and with hard times affecting everything more or less, he could not see how Mark was to be kept at school. Sitting there, he tortured himself with the thought of what he might have done if he had only foreseen. He called himself an old fogy, and wished he might be twenty years younger.

"The bridge is broke and I have to mend it."

The song rose to his lips unconsciously, and he hummed it in a dreary fashion that caused Peterkin to open his eyes. At least he did open them, and there was something in the serenity of those yellow orbs that recalled the Spectacle Man to himself. [Pg 190]

"You are right, Peterkin, I am foolish, and I thank you for telling me so," he said, stooping to caress the smooth head. "There is always a way, and you'll find it if you'll keep your eyes open, and don't let the clouds of despair and distrust gather and hide it," he continued to himself, and

he began to sing again, this time in a cheery tone.

That same evening he went to see Mrs. Gray. It was a business call, for the old lady needed some stronger glasses, and could not get out in bad weather to attend to it herself; but after he had tried her eyes, they fell to talking about other matters.

Mrs. Gray was lonely and unhappy. Her only son was going to be married, and she knew she was a burden to him, and she wished she was dead. She had not meant to tell it, but the benevolent face of the Spectacle Man invited confidence. [Pg 191]

He confessed to being blue himself, and then he told her briefly the story of the bridge.

"You may say it is all made up, but some way I know it is true," he added earnestly. "There is always a way, if only we are patient and don't give up. You haven't begun to be a burden yet, and I haven't had to bring Mark home. We can't *see* the way, but if we go on a step at a time, we'll find it."

Emma was also having a taste of bad weather. In the first place, the General had an illness much like Frances', and this meant that he must be kept in bed and amused from morning till night. Then Emma's teacher decided to have her pupils give an entertainment on Washington's Birthday, and Emma was selected among others to take part. It was an event of great importance to the school children, and at recess nothing else was talked about. [Pg 192]

As Emma expressed it, she had never been *in* anything before in her life, and no prima donna was ever more excited over her début than she at the thought of this little recitation; but her pleasure met with a sudden check upon the discovery that a white dress would be necessary. She hadn't a white dress, and she knew it was hopeless to think of getting one in time, still she couldn't help mentioning it to her mother.

"A white dress! Will you tell me how on earth you could get one? Even if I had the money to buy it, where would I find time to make it? It is all nonsense anyway." Mrs. Bond was tired out and spoke with more emphasis than she would otherwise have used.

Her daughter turned away quite crushed by the pitiless logic. She should have to tell Miss Ellen and the girls that she couldn't be in it because she hadn't any dress. She couldn't help shedding some bitter tears, and that was how the Spectacle Man found out about it. [Pg 193]

Her mother sent her into the shop to get some change, and his supply being low Mr. Clark despatched Dick to get some; then noticing the red eyes, he asked what the trouble was, and something in his kind, sympathetic face drew forth the story.

As he listened an idea came to the Spectacle Man. "Now, Emma," he said, "don't worry any more about this till—well, till Monday morning. This is Friday, so you won't have to do anything about it till then, and in the meantime something may happen. Indeed, I'm almost sure something will."

All this may not have been very logical, but Emma carried away her change with a much lighter heart.

That evening when Mrs. Morrison went in to pay her rent, she stopped to chat with the optician. Frances was eating oyster soup upstairs with Miss Sherwin and Zenobia in attendance, and her mother was feeling very happy. [Pg 194]

"Mrs. Morrison," Mr. Clark began in a somewhat embarrassed manner as she was about to leave, "you know more of the value of such things than I do; do you think any of these old belongings of mine are worth anything? In money, I mean." By a wave of his hand he seemed to indicate all that was in the room.

"I should think so. The portrait, of course, is, and that cabinet looks very handsome to me. Are you thinking of selling?" she asked.

"I may have to, the times are so hard, and Mark must be kept at school. Some of my investments aren't paying anything now." He paused a moment, then added, "You wouldn't believe what a foolish old fellow I am, but I'd rather set my heart on giving that portrait to some collection. I have liked to think how it would look on the catalogue,—'Presented by George W. Clark'—all nonsense, of course. Some ladies were here to-day to ask if I would exhibit it. The Colonial Dames are to have a Loan Exhibit." [Pg 195]

"I hope you will not have to sell it, but if you should, that will be an excellent way of advertising it. Oughtn't you to let Mark know the state of affairs? Don't spoil him; he is such a fine fellow," answered Mrs. Morrison.

"There's time enough for that," said Mr. Clark, and then added, "I want to speak to you about something else," and he told the story of Emma's trouble. "I thought perhaps you could—"

"Yes, indeed, I'm sure I can. Thank you for telling me," she held out her hand. "How kind you are, Mr. Clark! Good night."

This makes it quite plain how Mrs. Morrison happened to walk into Mrs. Bond's domain the next day with a white dress over her arm. [Pg 196]

"I want you to look at this, Mrs. Bond," she said. "It is a dress I had made for Frances last spring, and by a mistake it was cut so short it had to be faced. Now she has outgrown it, and nothing can

be done. Do you think Emma could wear it? Frances is a good deal taller. I have thought of offering it to you before, and now it has occurred to me that Emma may not have a dress ready to wear to the school entertainment,—Gladys was telling us about it yesterday,—and if you will accept it, it will be doing me a great favor. I dislike so to have it wasted."

"It is a very pretty dress; it is too bad Frances can't wear it," Mrs. Bond remarked, examining it critically.

"Then you will let me give it to Emma?" [Pg 197]

Emma's mother was not hard hearted; she liked to see her children happy, but she had a stern feeling that hardship was likely to be their lot in this world, and the sooner they became used to it the better. However, when her pride was convinced that Mrs. Morrison could not use the dress, she accepted it gratefully.

Emma's joy was beyond words, and she very much wondered how the Spectacle Man could have known that something was going to happen.

When the eventful day came, Mrs. Morrison rolled her hair for her and tied her long braids with butterfly bows of red, white, and blue, and when she was dressed, Frances said, "Why, Emma, I believe you are as pretty as Gladys!"

Certainly no little girl waved her flag with more enthusiasm, or rejoiced more truly in the celebration of Washington's Birthday. [Pg 198]

CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH.

AT THE LOAN EXHIBIT.

Before the end of February there began to be hints of spring in the air; now and then there came a day so mild and fair it seemed to belong to April, and as the winter passed it carried with it some at least of the cares that had for a while rested upon the inmates of the optician's house.

Frances and her mother rejoiced because every day brought nearer their traveller's return; Miss Moore, busy with the Easter work in her kindergarten, was finding a new meaning in the season; and even Lillian Sherwin felt now and then a thrill of joy that was like a prophecy of days to come, to her sore heart. [Pg 199]

Mr. Clark was cheerful because he loved sunshine; and though he could not as yet see the way through his difficulties, he felt sure it was there, and that in good time he should find it.

The pleasure of Washington's Birthday lingered with Emma; the General, restored to health and amiability, was no longer such a care, and she found time once more to spend in that haven of delight upstairs with Frances.

George Washington was sent to the Loan Exhibit, together with the cabinet, some silver candlesticks, and the Wedgwood cream jug and sugar dish. With the blank space over the mantel the study looked deserted; and the owl, deprived of his resting-place on the cabinet, perched forlornly on a corner of the bookcase.

Frances took great interest in the Exhibit, and insisted upon going, chiefly it seemed for the purpose of seeing how Washington looked in his new surroundings. As Mrs. Morrison was housed with a cold, Miss Sherwin offered to take her. [Pg 200]

They found a beautiful display of valuable and interesting things arranged in a large, handsomely decorated hall; but not until Frances had viewed the portrait and made a diligent search for Mr. Clark's other possessions would she give any attention to less familiar things.

She and Lillian were bending with delight over a case of miniatures when she heard her name spoken, and turning, saw Mrs. Marvin.

"Do you like the miniatures?" the lady asked. "Then come over to the other side; there is one there I want you to see."

She pointed out a picture, set in diamonds, of a lovely young woman.

"How pretty! Is it you?" Frances asked, seeing a resemblance to the handsome face beside her. [Pg 201]

Mrs. Marvin smiled. "No, it is my mother,—the little girl you are so fond of, after she was grown. They wanted the portrait too," she added, "but I have decided not to trust it out of my hands again."

She pointed out several other miniatures in which she thought Frances would be interested, all the while keeping the child's hand clasped in her own. Miss Sherwin, seeing her charge had found an acquaintance, moved on down the aisle.

"Your friend seems to be interested in the manuscripts; suppose we rest a few minutes," and Mrs. Marvin drew Frances down beside her on a

settee that stood near a tall case of lace and embroidery.

"Who is the young lady with you?" she asked.

Frances' explained, and Mrs. Marvin remarked that she was a handsome girl.

"And she is clever, too, for she writes lovely stories and illustrates them," said Frances, impressively. [Pg 202]

"Does she, indeed?"

"Yes, she wrote one for us about a song the Spectacle Man—I mean Mr. Clark—sings. It is a fairy tale, and *The Young People's Journal* took it and are going to publish it next month. It has a beautiful moral to it."

"What do you know about morals?" laughed Mrs. Marvin.

"I found this one out when I had a quarrel with Gladys. Mr. Clark helped me to see it," was the reply; and then, as her companion looked interested, Frances continued:

"It is hard to explain it because you haven't read the story. It is called 'The Missing Bridge,' and is about a young man who couldn't get across the river that was between him and the girl he was going to marry, because there wasn't any bridge. That is he *thought* there wasn't, though it really was there all the time, and had just been made invisible by a magician. [Pg 203]

"She pointed out a picture, set in diamonds"

"Well, you know Gladys said she never would speak to me again, and that was like having the bridge broken between us; don't you think so? But Mr. Clark said he thought it was only hidden by the clouds of anger and unkindness. I think it is very uncomfortable to quarrel, don't you?" then, seeing an odd expression in her companion's face, Frances hastened to add: "Of course I know you wouldn't quarrel with any one *now*, but I thought maybe you had when you were a little girl. But don't you think it is a nice moral? and—oh, yes—the last of it is that love and courage can always find a way."

"And how about you and Gladys?"

"We made up. If you would like to read the story, Mrs. Marvin, it will be out next week. The March number of *The Young People's Journal*, and it's only twenty-five cents." [Pg 204]

Mrs. Marvin smiled. "I shall certainly get a copy," she said, adding, "I see your friend looking this way. Suppose we go to her; I should like to meet her."

Why she said this she couldn't have told, and she half repented it the next minute; but when Frances introduced Miss Sherwin she was all graciousness.

"Frances and I have an odd way of meeting every now and then, and have become great friends. I have been showing her a miniature of my mother, and she has been telling me about your story."

"Why, Frances!" said Miss Sherwin, a pretty color coming into her face.

This girl was extremely attractive, Mrs. Marvin decided, and found a good deal to say to her over the collection of ancient missals. After a while Frances wandered off to look at the portraits. [Pg 205]

Mrs. Marvin's eyes followed her as, with her hands clasped behind her, she stood gazing at an old pioneer.

"She is a very charming child," she remarked.

"She is, and she ought to be, for her mother is one of the sweetest women in the world," Miss Sherwin responded, in eager praise of her friend, but the next moment she had the feeling of having somehow said the wrong thing. Was it some change of expression in the handsome face, or simply the silence that followed her little outburst, which caused her discomfort? She could not tell. She had been wonderfully charmed by this stately person, but now the spell was broken; with one impulse they moved toward Frances.

"I don't believe I like her, after all," Lillian thought; and yet there was a marvellous sweetness in the smile that greeted the child, and brought her with instant response to Mrs. Marvin's side. [Pg 206]

As they were making their way to the door after taking leave of Mrs. Marvin, Miss Sherwin saw a lady step out from a group of people, and exclaim: "Why, Mrs. Richards! how do you do? It was

only the other day I heard of your unexpected return." And the person to whom this greeting was addressed was no other than Mrs. Marvin herself. It puzzled her, but she said nothing about it to Mrs. Morrison when they related their morning's adventures. [Pg 207]

CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH.

THE MARCH NUMBER OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S JOURNAL.

Mrs. Marvin was in a sadly restless state of mind. She wished again and again that chance had not brought this child in her way. Having seen her, she could not forget her, and each meeting cost her fresh pain.

And what was to be the outcome of it? Nothing? Frances had said they would soon be going away. Perhaps then she might be able to settle down again into the old life of resolutely putting aside the past.

She was not so strong as she used to be, yet she must endure it as she had done for so many years. There was nothing she could do. Her pride told her this with added emphasis each time [Pg 208] the half-formed question rose in her mind.

She actually fretted herself into a fever which the doctor pronounced malarial, advising change of air,—a prescription Mrs. Marvin had no thought of trying at present.

After several days in bed, she was lying on her couch weak and languid one morning, when she suddenly remembered the March number of *The Young People's Journal*. She would send for it and read the story.

When it was brought there came with it the swift recollection that Jack used to take it. She could see him now poring over the puzzle column, looking up with such a triumphant light in his brown eyes when he discovered an answer.

She held the paper for a long time without opening it, lying quite still with a desolate look on her face that was more than Caroline, her faithful nurse, could stand. [Pg 209]

"I declare, if Miss Frances doesn't cheer up, I don't know what I shall do," she said to the seamstress.

After a while Mrs. Marvin began to turn the pages, till she found the story of "The Missing Bridge," with the gay little tune for a heading.

It is doubtful if under ordinary circumstances she would have had patience to read the simple story through, but to-day she found something soothing in its very simplicity.

"No power can destroy the bridge between true and loving hearts." She lay thinking of what Frances had said about her quarrel with Gladys. Ah! many another bridge had been made invisible by clouds of anger and pride. The paper slipped from her grasp. "I *did* love him so dearly," she cried, clasping her hands; "and I thought he cared for me, but now he has probably forgotten." [Pg 210]

"Faith and courage can find the way—" so said the story.

"But I have neither," sighed Mrs. Marvin.

Her unquiet mind seized upon the words of the little song, and all through the day she said them over and over:—

"The bridge is broke and I have to mend it."

The clock ticked:—

"The bridge is broke and I have to mend it, mend it, mend it, mend it."

Even the horses' hoofs on the asphalt street rang out the same refrain.

Mrs. Marvin rose from her couch in some respects a changed woman. It seemed to her she had lived years in that illness of two weeks. In her soul a battle had been waged, and the struggle had left her passive and unresisting; she was waiting. The outward result was a strange, new gentleness of manner.

At the time of the Loan Exhibit she had been commissioned by a friend to purchase a wedding [Pg 211] gift, which was to be, if possible, something antique. The silver candlesticks belonging to Mr. Clark rather pleased her; and thinking he might have other interesting things, she had written his address in her note-book, intending to go and see for herself, but her illness had interfered. When she was once more able to be out this was her first thought.

In the meantime the March *Journal* was being read by a good many persons who ordinarily never looked at it. The household at the Spectacle Man's naturally took a deep interest in it; and Miss Sherwin said she felt she ought to divide the profits, for if it had not been for the song and Mrs.

Morrison's suggestion, the story would never have been written.

Frances laid emphatic commands upon her father to buy a copy the minute he landed in San Francisco; and Mr. Clark was also charged to remind Mark of the story, when he wrote. [Pg 212]

In the hurry of sending telegrams, attending to his baggage, and making arrangements for an early start eastward, Mr. Morrison forgot this important matter, and it did not occur to him till, halfway on his homeward journey, he one morning saw the paper among others the train boy was carrying through the cars. He promptly purchased it, for it would never do to meet his little daughter without having read the story which was, she said, almost as good as one of his own.

Soon after leaving San Francisco, Mr. Morrison had made the acquaintance of a young civil engineer who was on his way to his home in Tennessee for a visit. He had frank, gentlemanly manners, and the cheerful, self-reliant air of a trained worker who loves his work, and the travellers were at once attracted to each other. As so often happens, they discovered mutual [Pg 213] friends, and also that they had the same affection for Southern life and ways. Alexander Carter, as he gave his name, had recently accepted a position with a Western mining company,—a place of trust and responsibility of which he was justly proud in a modest way.

"You seem to have found something amusing," he remarked, seeing Mr. Morrison smiling over the magazine.

"Well, no, it happens to be a rather serious story, but something reminded me of my little daughter," was the reply. "By the way, Carter," he added, "it is odd, but the hero of this tale bears a remarkable resemblance to you—I mean in the illustration. See here!" Mr. Morrison held before him the picture of the young farmer as he knelt to release the white rabbit. "This is your profile exactly. Don't you see it yourself?" [Pg 214]

Mr. Carter laughed. "I believe there is a faint likeness, which only goes to show that I have a very ordinary countenance."

"That is just what you have not, which is the curious part of it," said Mr. Morrison.

"Who wrote the story?" his companion asked.

"It is unsigned, and I have forgotten the name. She is a young lady of whom my wife and daughter are very fond."

At St. Louis the travellers separated with cordial good-byes, feeling like old friends, and Mr. Morrison rushed off to catch the train that would take him to his destination some hours earlier than he had expected to arrive.

Mr. Carter, gathering up his things in a more leisurely way, noticed *The Young People's Journal* lying on the seat, and put it in his bag. [Pg 215]

CHAPTER NINETEENTH.

SURPRISES.

"Expect me Wednesday evening; will wire from St. Louis," so read the telegram from San Francisco; and on Wednesday morning Frances had just exclaimed over her oatmeal, "O dear, what a long day this will be!" when the door opened and there stood a familiar figure, looking, oh, so bright and well!

After some moments of rapturous hugs and incoherent remarks, the traveller was allowed to have some breakfast, while Mrs. Morrison and Frances looked on, too happy to eat.

"I had to surprise you, for a despatch sent after I left St. Louis would have aroused you in the night, or else not have reached you till about this time," Mr. Morrison explained as he helped himself to a muffin. [Pg 216]

"Jack, how brown you are, and how well you look! It is a delight to see you," said his wife.

"I never was better in my life; but I can't tell you how I have wished for you and Frances."

"Next time you'll take me, won't you, father?" Frances asked.

"Yes, indeed. Wink, I believe you have grown a foot! You'll soon be a young lady, and I don't like it; people will begin to think your mother and I are elderly, when we are really in the heyday of youth."

In this irrelevant fashion conversation went on through the day. There were all the winter experiences to be related, and Frances could not rest till each person in the house had been brought in to see her father. First of all Mr. Clark ran up to say how glad he was to see the traveller back again; and on her way to school Miss Moore looked in with a merry greeting; then Emma and the General were waylaid in the hall and introduced, the former in a dreadful fit of [Pg 217] shyness; and last, Miss Sherwin was pounced upon and dragged reluctantly into the sitting room.

To her Mr. Morrison's return meant the breaking up of the pleasant companionship of the winter, and she was not in the least glad to see him. Mrs. Morrison's exclamation as she entered was somewhat disconcerting.

"Jack, I want you to know Lillian, she has been so good to me!"

"Good! I?" Miss Sherwin cried in a tone that made them all laugh, and then her hand was given a cordial grasp by a tall man with a boyish face, who said, "We shall have to take each other on sufferance, Miss Sherwin, till we can find out for ourselves how much truth there is in what our friends say of us."

"I am very glad we came here; it has really been a delightful winter,—all but those two dreadful days when Frances was so ill,—but I don't think I can ever let you go again," Mrs. Morrison said. It was after lunch, and Frances had gone to get ready for a walk with her father. [Pg 218]

"Then, will you go to New York with me next week?" asked her husband.

"I may have to stand that. It will depend on how soon we must leave here permanently. Jack, there is one rather strange thing I must tell you—" but just here Frances danced in, and her mother did not finish her sentence.

When they returned from their walk late in the afternoon they stopped in the shop for a moment to speak to Mr. Clark. Peterkin was the only person to be seen, but the door into the study stood open, and, supposing the Spectacle Man was there, Frances and her father entered. Some one was standing before the mantel looking up at the portrait of Washington, and Frances gave an exclamation of surprise, for it was not the optician, but, of all persons, Mrs. Marvin! [Pg 219]

It was not very light, and for a second she thought she must be mistaken, then something very strange happened. Mrs. Marvin turned, and with a little cry stepped forward, holding out her hands appealingly. "Jack, O Jack!" she said.

The astonished child saw the light in her father's eyes as he exclaimed, "Auntie!" and then his arms were around her, her cheek pressed to his.

"Jack, I have wanted you so;" the words came with a sob.

"Dear auntie, I am so glad!"

Mrs. Marvin was not one to lose her self-control for long; she presently lifted her head, with one hand on his shoulder she looked at him. "You have not changed," she said, "but I have grown old." [Pg 220]

In truth, she was very white now the first flush of excitement was fading, and with gentle hands Jack put her into the shabby leather chair, and drew another to her side.

"I wonder if I shall wake and find it a dream," she said, smiling up at him.

"It is better than any dream," he answered, bending over her.

"I have been so lonely,—it has been so long. I thought perhaps you had forgotten, and— I am sorry— Jack." It was the proud woman's surrender, and John Morrison was touched to the heart. Tears rose to his eyes.

"It was more my fault than yours, dear,—the years have taught me that, and I have often wished I could tell you so," he said.

Frances had stood an amazed spectator of this scene. What did it mean? Ought she to stay? It was plain she was forgotten. After a little she touched her father's arm, saying softly, "Daddy, I'm here, you know." [Pg 221]

The plaintive tone recalled both her companions; her father drew her to his side, but before he could speak Mrs. Marvin took her hand.

"Frances darling, you will love me, won't you? You are my own little niece. The day when I first saw you in my library you reminded me of my dear Jack."

It was Mr. Morrison's turn to be surprised as his daughter impulsively threw her arms round the lady's neck, exclaiming, "I do love you, but I didn't know you knew father."

"And I didn't know you knew each other," he said.

"And I don't understand how you happened to come here," added his aunt.

"Why, we live here, Mrs. Marvin," Frances replied.

"Mrs. Marvin!" echoed Mr. Morrison.

"That is a mistake which I encouraged because I wanted to see more of her," his aunt said; adding, "Is this really the house of the Spectacle Man?" [Pg 222]

There was so much to be explained it seemed almost hopeless; Mr. Clark came in and went out again unobserved. It was not an opportune time for selling candlesticks, evidently.

"We will not try to unravel the tangle all at once," Mr. Morrison said, rising. "Auntie, will you come upstairs? I want you to meet Katherine."

This was hardest of all. It brought back one of her old disappointments; and without doubt Katherine Morrison was aware how Jack's aunt felt about his marriage, but she did not hesitate. It was not her custom to do things by halves.

Mrs. Morrison, sitting in the twilight lost in happy thoughts, was aroused by Frances' excited voice: "Mother, what do you think has happened?" [Pg 223]

Surprised at sight of the stranger, she rose; her husband met her and drew her forward: "Auntie, this is my wife, to whom I owe my greatest happiness."

His aunt understood. This fair, girlish looking little person filled the first place in his heart; whatever else was changed, this was not.

"You must try to love me for Jack's sake," she said, taking Katherine's hand with that new gentleness her nephew found so touching.

It won his wife. "I shall not have to try," she answered.

"Are you willing to forget and begin again?—that is what we are going to do, is it not, Jack?" his aunt looked from his wife to him. "It will make a great difference in my life," she continued; "I have been very lonely, and I want this little girl;" she put her arm around Frances.

"Then she will certainly have to take us, too; won't she, Katherine?" and Mr. Morrison laughed happily. [Pg 224]

Frances still seemed puzzled. "If this is my Aunt Frances—" she said slowly, "who is the little girl? Is she the Girl in the Golden Doorway, truly?—the portrait, I mean.

"I think she must be, and she is also your great-grandmother," her aunt replied.

"Then who is a Certain Person. You said he was abroad, father." Frances evidently thought it time all mysteries were solved.

"Why, yes, auntie, how does it happen you are not abroad? I heard last summer on the best authority that you would spend the winter in Egypt," said her nephew.

"I fully expected to be gone eighteen months when I left, but the death of the mother of my friend, Mrs. Roberts, changed our plans. I did not wish to go alone."

Frances was listening intently. "Father! you don't mean Aunt Frances is a Certain Person?" she cried. "I thought it was a man." [Pg 225]

"It is a character we are going to forget. I am your father's aunt and yours, dear, and I am not Mrs. Marvin, but Mrs. Richards. Mrs. Marvin is my cousin. You understand it all now, don't you?"

Frances was not quite certain of this, but there was no doubt about her pleasure in her new relative; and when her father went home with his aunt she was rather impatient at not being allowed to go too.

"Come sit beside me, Wink, and have a little talk," Mrs. Morrison suggested when they were alone.

Frances came and nestled down beside her mother; the day had been so full of excitement she found it hard work to keep still.

"You know, dear, that Aunt Frances and father have not seen each other for years,—not since before you were born,—and of course they have a great deal to say to each other. There was some trouble—a misunderstanding—but now it is over—" [Pg 226]

"They have found the bridge like Gladys and me," Frances put in.

"Yes; but what I was going to say is this: we mustn't be selfish. We must let Aunt Frances have father to herself sometimes. Don't you think so?"

As they sat quietly there in the twilight Mrs. Morrison saw opening before her a path she would not have chosen. She was a person of simple tastes and wide sympathies, and the world of wealth and convention to which her husband would return so naturally had few attractions for her. She would have need of love and courage, she told herself.

"What do you think, Kate; auntie wants me to take you to New York with me and leave Frances with her!" said Mr. Morrison, coming in. [Pg 227]

"She has never been away from me in her life. What do you say, Wink?" and her mother lifted the face that rested against her shoulder and kissed it.

"I don't know; I believe I'd like it, for then I could see the little girl every day," was the reply.

"I think her great-grandmother has cut out all the rest of her relations," her father remarked, laughing.

"I don't see how she *could* be my great-grandmother," Frances said meditatively.

Mrs. Richards remembered the candlesticks next day, and they gave her an excuse for an early visit to Mr. Clark. She felt in love and charity with all men, and, finding the optician at leisure, she entered into conversation with him in her most gracious manner. His old-fashioned

courtliness pleased her, and she recalled him as one of the proprietors of the large jewellery store of Mason and Clark, years ago. [Pg 228]

Mr. Clark remembered her father, Judge Morrison, and all together she spent an exceedingly pleasant hour looking over his valuables and talking of old times. She purchased the candlesticks, and also the two pieces of Wedgwood which exactly matched some her grandfather had brought from England.

"You have shown me all you care to sell?" she asked, rising.

"I believe there is nothing else, madam, except the house. I should like very much to sell it," was Mr. Clark's reply.

When Zenobia ushered her into the sitting room upstairs some minutes later, Mrs. Richards was struck with its cosey beauty. Truly, there were ways of living—pleasant ways—of which she had not dreamed.

Frances was washing the sword fern while she recited her history lesson to her mother, who was sewing.

"I have come to take you home with me to lunch; I can't do without you," Mrs. Richards announced. [Pg 229]

"Why don't you stay with us—auntie?" Frances spoke the new title hesitatingly.

"That will be much the better plan, and it will please Jack," added Mrs. Morrison, cordially, and Mrs. Richards stayed.

The next time she and her nephew were alone together she said to him: "Jack, there is something I want you to explain to Katherine. I do not think I could make any difference in my manner of living at my age, even if I wished to, and I do not; but I am beginning to see that there may be a charm about—other ways."

"Yes, auntie," as she paused, "the years I have spent knocking about without any money, having to work hard for Kate and the baby, have been the happiest and best of my life. There was only one drawback to it all—" he laid his hand on hers.

She smiled fondly at him. "I want you to say to Katherine that I know I must seem narrow to her; [Pg 230] I realize that she may perhaps fear my influence upon Frances—" her nephew began a protest, but she silenced him. "No, let me finish. I have come to see things differently; I want you to live your own lives in your own way; I want Frances to go on as she has begun—sweet, generous, unconscious, and I only ask to be near you."

When Mr. Morrison repeated this to his wife, tears rose to her eyes. "I haven't been fair to her," she said. "I have been afraid, but I shall not be any more. I shall love her dearly." [Pg 231]

CHAPTER TWENTIETH.

CAROLINE'S STORY.

"Well, I suppose you have heard the news?"

Caroline's pleasant face was more beaming than usual as Emma ushered her into the room where Mrs. Bond sat with her sewing, the General being safe in dreamland.

"No, I haven't heard any so far as I remember," was her reply.

Emma gave the visitor a chair, and retreated with her books to a corner behind her mother, in the hope that she might not be sent away. She knew something had happened.

"Then you don't know that Mr. Morrison has turned out to be our Mr. Jack, Miss Frances' nephew?" [Pg 232]

"Who is her nephew, did you say?" asked Mrs. Bond, going on with her work.

"Mr. Morrison, to be sure, the father of little Frances, bless her!"

"He is Mrs. Marvin's nephew?"

"Yes," said Caroline, laughing; "only she isn't Mrs. Marvin at all, but Mrs. Richards. It is as good as a play."

Mrs. Bond actually dropped her hands in her lap, as she asked, "Do you mean there isn't any such person as Mrs. Marvin?"

"Of course there is a Mrs. Marvin. She was staying at our house while Miss Frances was abroad,—she is her cousin,—and the first sewing you did was for her. I did not think of explaining, so you went on supposing it was all for Mrs. Marvin. Then when Miss Frances found out that Frances thought she was Mrs. Marvin, she asked me not to tell you any different. I couldn't understand [Pg 233]

why, then."

"Why should she care who I thought she was?" Mrs. Bond asked, taking up her sewing.

"It is plain enough now. You see, she and Mr. Jack had had a quarrel years ago, and she had not seen or heard of him since; then one day, you know, Frances came to our house with Emma, and Mrs. Richards saw her and knew right away who she was, and was mightily taken with her, but she didn't want Frances or her mother to know that she was Mr. Morrison's aunt; don't you see?

"You may say it happened," Caroline continued, "but I say the Lord brought it about. Why should that child walk into the library and stand before her great-grandmother's portrait, and Miss Frances come in and find her there, looking as much like Mr. Jack when he was little as two peas! Isn't he a splendid man! and just his old self. Why, when he came out yesterday, he ran upstairs [Pg 234] to my room calling out just as he used to do,—'Where's Caroline?' It made me too happy to sleep."

"Did Mr. Morrison live at your house once?" Emma ventured to ask.

"Of course he did. When his mother died Miss Frances adopted him. He was six years old, and it was the same year I went to live with her,—thirty years this spring. You see, Mr. Jack's father, who was Mrs. Richards' favorite brother, was thrown from his horse and killed when his little boy was only three. It was a dreadful blow to the whole family; his wife did not outlive him long, and his father, Judge Morrison, never recovered from the shock, for his only other son was an invalid.

"I used to think nobody had as much trouble as Miss Frances. She married very young and was left a widow before she was twenty-two, and it seemed as if Mr. Jack was her only comfort, for [Pg 235] her father's mind began to fail, and the old home was so changed she couldn't bear to go there; but she was wrapped up in the child.

"In those days he wasn't hard to manage, though he had a quick temper; you couldn't help loving him on account of his sweet ways. He was devoted to Miss Frances, and gave up to her wonderfully, so I suppose she got to thinking she would always have things her own way with him, as she had with every one else.

"There were gay times, I can tell you, when he came home for his holidays, after he began to go away to school. He might bring home as many friends as he pleased, and there wasn't anything he couldn't have for the asking. Yet he wasn't half as spoiled as you'd think.

"The trouble began about the time he left college, but I didn't know much about it then. Miss Frances had set her heart on his being a lawyer like his grandfather; but though he studied it to [Pg 236] please her, he did not take any interest in law. Then I think she wanted him to marry a niece of her husband's who used to be at the house a great deal. That is— I don't think she really wanted him to marry at all, but was just afraid he'd take to some one she did not like. He had always been fond of Miss Elsie, and it did look contrary in him to turn around and be so indifferent when he found how his aunt felt.

"Mr. Jack went abroad for a year, and it was soon after he came back that they had the trouble. I happened to pass the library door one evening when I heard Miss Frances say, 'If you have no regard for my wishes perhaps you had better provide for yourself in the future—' and he answered back as cool as you please, 'Thank you for suggesting it, Aunt Frances; I have been an idler on your bounty quite too long.' I never forgot those words. They didn't either of them mean [Pg 237] what they said, but were too proud to take it back. Miss Frances had never denied him anything, and had more than enough for both, yet it was natural for her to think he ought to go her way.

"I never knew any more about it, except that Mr. Jack came to my room to tell me he was going, with a face as white as a sheet. He had some property of his own, though not much, for his grandfather made way with almost everything before he died—no one knew how. He had softening of the brain, brought on by grief.

"The next I knew Mr. Jack sent me a paper with a notice of his marriage. Mrs. Morrison was the daughter of one of the professors in the college where he went. But—" Caroline concluded, with a sigh of content, "it is all right now, and maybe it has all been for the best." [Pg 238]

"I suppose they'll be going away soon?" said Mrs. Bond.

"Yes, Mr. Morrison and his wife are going to New York, and Frances is coming to stay with us."

Emma listened to this story with breathless interest. It seemed to her quite the most natural and suitable thing that such good fortune should come to Frances, but it made her feel sorrowful to think she was going away.

After their visitor had gone Mrs. Bond said, as she folded her work: "Now, Emma, I do not want you to be foolish. Make up your mind not to see anything of Frances after this, and you'll not be disappointed."

"Why, mother?"

"Because they are rich and we are poor, and it is not to be expected that they will care for your society. I never go where I am not wanted, and I do not choose to have you. Understand, I am not [Pg 239] saying anything against the Morrisons. Frances is a nice child, and her mother is very pleasant and kind, but you can't change the world; birds of a feather will flock together." [Pg 240]

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIRST.

OVERHEARD BY PETERKIN.

Peterkin was taking a nap in one corner of the big sofa in the hall. It was a delightful spring afternoon and everybody was out; he knew this, for he had seen them go. First Miss Moore hurried away with some books under her arm; next Frances danced downstairs, followed by her father and mother; a little later Emma and the General started out for a walk; and last of all came Miss Sherwin, and sat beside him while she put on her gloves.

She stroked him gently for a minute before she left, and, bending over him till her face touched his soft fur, said, "Oh, pussy, pussy! so many things are happening, and it's going to be so lonely. It must be nice to be a cat." [Pg 241]

Peterkin rubbed his head sympathetically against her hand, for her tone was sad. He had had confidences made to him before and knew how to receive them. He understood it all as well as if she had spent hours in the telling, an advantage a cat possesses over a human confidant.

He had been dozing undisturbed for a long time when he heard the door open again, and a man's voice he did not recognize say: "How fortunate that I met you! I seem to have had the wrong number."

It was Miss Sherwin who replied, "I am very much surprised; I did not know you were in this part of the country."

Then they came and sat on the sofa, and the stranger, who, Peterkin saw, was a pleasant looking young fellow, said he had been back only a short time. "I stopped in Maryville a day, and then at home for two more," he added.

"You have been to Maryville?" Miss Sherwin's voice showed surprise. Then she began to ask questions about the people there, and to talk of the delightful weather, in all of which her companion seemed to feel little interest. Presently there came a silence. [Pg 242]

The young man leaned forward, one elbow on his crossed knee that he might the better look into Miss Sherwin's face, the light in the hall being a little dim. "Lillian," he began, "in this past year I have had a good deal of time for thinking, and naturally our—disagreement has been often in my mind. When I last saw you I thought it was all over forever, and though I had come to look at it differently in these months—feeling that perhaps there had been a mistake—still I don't know that I ever—that is— I mean the possibility of undoing it never occurred to me till I was on my way home. I hope you don't mind listening to this; I'll try to be brief. [Pg 243]

"Perhaps you know I got my position in March,—the one I had been hoping and working for,—and with it the opportunity to come East for a month or two. I can't say I wanted very much to come. The thought of our old plans made it rather bitter, but I owed it to the people at home.

"Not to make the story too long, I picked up on the train a magazine belonging to one of my fellow travellers, and read a little story. It was called 'The Missing Bridge,' and was a sort of fairy story. It seems rather absurd, but there was something in it that impressed me strangely. It was the thought that even when people seem hopelessly separated from each other, if they are brave enough and true enough to try, they will find a way across all barriers.

"I may not be making this clear, for you have not read the story; but you will understand me when I say it made me feel unwilling to have anything I may have said or done in the past, stand between us now; I was to blame for much of the quarrel, and I am sorry for it all. I know how clever you are,—they were all talking about it in Maryville,—and it may seem only a foolish dream to you now, but I want to tell you—" he paused with his eyes on the floor, as if afraid to read his answer in the face beside him. [Pg 244]

It was very still in the hall, and, when he looked up after a moment, Lillian had bowed her head in her hands.

"I don't want to pain you," he began.

"O Aleck!" she cried, putting out one hand, "it was *my* story!"

At this point Peterkin, seeing matters were likely to be settled satisfactorily, and feeling no interest in details, dozed off again. The next thing he knew the gas was lit, and Mr. Morrison was saying, "Why, how are you, Carter? Delighted to see you. Where did you come from? Let me present you to Mrs. Morrison," and Miss Sherwin, with a becoming color in her face, was explaining that Mr. Carter was an old friend, and they were all talking and laughing at once in the absurd way people have sometimes, so that it was next to impossible to understand anything. [Pg 245]

When Mr. Carter left, after declining the Morrisons' invitation to spend the evening, Peterkin followed him out on the porch to get a little air. The Spectacle Man, coming in from a walk, found him sitting there, looking like some dignified old Quaker in his gray coat and white necktie.

Mrs. Morrison slipped her hand into Miss Sherwin's as they went upstairs. "Am I right in what I guess?" she whispered.

"How could you know it?" Lillian asked, with an answering clasp.

"My dear, if you could see your face!—but I felt certain he would come!" [Pg 246]

"O Miss Sherwin!" called Mr. Morrison, who, with Frances, had lingered at the door, "your acquaintance with Mr. Carter partly explains something that puzzled me. I was struck with the resemblance between him and the young farmer in the first illustration in your story. Did he sit for the portrait?"

"Jack, you must be dreaming!" his wife exclaimed.

"I don't understand at all," Lillian said, in great confusion.

"Could it possibly have been accidental?" A mischievous light shone in Mr. Morrison's eyes.

His wife shook her head at him, but Frances ran off to find the magazine. Miss Sherwin recovered herself, and explained with a great deal of dignity that, if it were so, it was quite accidental. That she had known Mr. Carter since they were children, and was, of course, very familiar with his face; then she said good evening, and left them. [Pg 247]

"Very well done," Mr. Morrison exclaimed.

"Why, where is Miss Lillian," asked Frances, coming back; "I want to show her the picture. It is like Mr. Carter."

"Not now, dear,—another time," said her mother; adding, "You were aching to tease her, Jack, and I am glad she did not give you an opportunity."

Mr. Morrison laughed. "I suppose congratulations are next in order. It is at least a natural inference when you find a young man's image so deeply graven upon the heart of a young woman that she unconsciously reproduces it in her drawing."

"I am sure he is to be congratulated," remarked Mrs. Morrison.

"Unless I am very much mistaken, so is she," her husband added.

Frances was listening with wide-open eyes. "Is Miss Sherwin going to be married to Mr. Carter?" [Pg 248]

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised, Wink, if she were," replied her father, "but you and I are supposed to know nothing about it." [Pg 249]

CHAPTER TWENTY-SECOND.

THE LITTLE GIRL IN THE GOLDEN DOORWAY.

It was evident, Mr. Morrison said, that he and his wife could not get away too soon to please his aunt, and this was true for two reasons. Mrs. Richards wished her nephew to meet his old friends under her roof—there would be less talk; and before their return the six months' lease on the flat would have expired and they would naturally come to her for a while at least. She also wanted Frances all to herself. The great house would be another place with the sound of a child's voice to charm away its loneliness.

She spent much time and thought in plans for her little niece's entertainment, which were quite unnecessary, for Frances was as happy as a lark, and found the hours brimful of amusement. To [Pg 250] hear Caroline tell of her father when he was little Jack; to go shopping or driving with Aunt Frances; to romp with the fox terrier in the garden which the crocuses and hyacinths were making beautiful; and then, when the day was almost over, to rest in the depths of some great chair and look up at the girl in the golden doorway,—this was unalloyed happiness.

One Friday they drove to the house of the Spectacle Man and carried Emma away to stay till Monday. How she ever came to let her go Mrs. Bond couldn't understand; she believed she was bewitched. Emma, however, had a blissful holiday, and before it was over she found courage to ask Frances a question.

"Do you like me as much as you used to, Frances?" she said.

"What makes you ask such a funny question? Of course I do." [Pg 251]

"I thought maybe you wouldn't care so much now."

"Why not?" insisted Frances, greatly puzzled.

Emma thought of quoting her mother's proverb about birds of a feather, the application of which she did not exactly understand; but she only said, "Oh, because you are rich, I suppose."

"But I'm not rich,—any richer than I ever was."

"Your aunt is."

"But why should that make me not like you? I don't like you to think such a thing about me," and

Frances looked aggrieved.

"I didn't really think it, only—sometimes it does make a difference, you know," Emma said.

"Well, it won't to me, for I shall always like you, Emma," was Frances' reassuring reply, and Emma was satisfied. [Pg 252]

Among other pleasant things, Frances and her aunt were arranging a little surprise for Mr. Morrison's birthday, which was to be celebrated by a dinner to which a number of cousins and old family friends were asked.

The travellers, who returned the night before, found a very happy little girl waiting for them in the carriage at the station.

"I have the loveliest secret, father, but you are not to know it till your birthday!" She couldn't help telling this much, but all his teasing could not extract any more; and, as it was not mentioned again, Mr. Morrison forgot it.

The next evening he dressed early, and went to the library to write a letter, and when it was finished he fell into a pleasant revery. He thought of his struggles and disappointments, and of the bright future that seemed to be opening before him. The little girl smiled down upon him in [Pg 253] the twilight, and he recalled his old dream.

It was surely a most living portrait. This little maiden, painted nearly seventy years ago, looked as if about to speak. Was she laughing at him still? would she presently come down? Surely he was dreaming, for there she stood on the rug beside him! He could see the pattern of the rich lace that fell from the neck of her quaint brocaded gown.

She came nearer, and he watched her, almost afraid to breathe; it was, he thought, a most interesting illusion. He put out his hand, expecting the vision to vanish, when, instead of thin air, his fingers closed upon a round arm of real flesh and blood, and a laughing voice exclaimed, "Why, father, I thought you were asleep!"

"Wink! is it really you?" he said, pulling her down on his knee. "I thought the girl in the golden doorway had come down once more. Where did you get this dress?" [Pg 254]

"This is the secret, father. Aunt Frances found it among my great-grandmother's things. It was made for the picture, and was copied from another portrait that the little girl's father liked. It almost fitted me. Do you really think I look like her?"

"Indeed you do, Wink; it is wonderful."

Frances leaned her head on his shoulder, and looked up at her great-grandmother in great content.

"Do you know, Wink," said her father, presently, "I believe my old dream has come true, and at last I have caught the girl in the golden doorway."

"How nice!" cried Frances, "for that puts me into the story. You will have to write a sequel to it, father. Jack never guessed the girl would turn out to be his own daughter, did he?" [Pg 255]

"He certainly did not," answered Mr. Morrison, laughing.

They were pleasing themselves with these fancies when lights and Mrs. Morrison, in her pretty evening gown, appearing together, put an end to them. Some minutes later Mrs. Richards walked in upon a charming family group. Life was becoming very full and sweet to her, and she looked very handsome and happy. She felt proud of her children, most of all of that graceful little person in the old brocade who ran to meet her.

"Auntie, what do you think? We have found the sequel to 'The Girl in the Golden Doorway.' The dream has come true: Jack has caught her, and she turns out to be me." Frances made a courtesy, laughing merrily.

"There is some more to it," she added. "Father, can't you tell it?"

"Tell it yourself, Wink," was the smiling reply, and three pairs of eyes watched her fondly as she [Pg 256] stood, a finger on her lips, an intent expression on her face.

"Oh, yes! I remember. And together they are going to explore the House of the Golden Doorway, and find out all its secrets."

Mrs. Richards took the rosy face between her hands. "You have opened the golden door to me, too, my darling," she said. [Pg 257]

CHAPTER TWENTY-THIRD.

"THE DUCKS AND THE GEESE THEY ALL SWIM OVER."

"Out of a song the story grew,

Just how it happened nobody knew,
But, song and story, it all came true.
"Out of sight till time of need
The story lay hid like a little seed;
And then it grew that all might read—
"Might read and learn—however gray
The clouds may hang, or how dark the day,
That love and courage can find the way."

No one suspected the Spectacle Man of poetical aspirations until Miss Moore one day picked up these verses from the hall floor. "Dear me, what are we all coming to!" she exclaimed. "Here is Lillian the strong-minded going to be married, the Morrisons have found a fairy godmother, and now Mr. Clark has taken to verse! If I were not so commonplace I'd expect something to happen to me." [Pg 258]

Things were happening; there was no doubt about that.

Soon after her nephew's return, Mrs. Richards made Mr. Clark an offer for his house which he thought it wise to accept, and by the time summer was fairly begun it was rapidly disappearing in a cloud of dust and mortar to make room for a five-story office building.

Frances could not be reconciled to this, nor was she the only one who felt sad at sight of yawning vacancy where the dignified old mansion had stood. The feelings of the optician were mixed; he was fond of the place, but its sale solved some of the difficulties that had weighed upon him, and when Mrs. Bond took a small house farther out, where there were trees and a garden for the General to play in, he furnished two rooms for himself, and, after the first wrench of leaving, he and Peterkin found it very comfortable. His show-cases and other fixtures were moved to a shop not far from the old one. [Pg 259]

Before this, however, something even more interesting had occurred.

As Mr. Carter had only six weeks' leave, he and Lillian decided to have a quiet wedding the last of April, making a short visit at his home on their way West.

"I am very much alone in the world, and there are no people I care more to have at my wedding than you and Mary," Lillian said to Mrs. Morrison; "and it is easier and simpler to have it here."

Miss Moore professed to be highly indignant at the whole affair. "Here I have been upholding her in her independence, taking her side, and she in the basest manner deserts and goes over to the enemy," she exclaimed. [Pg 260]

Lillian laughed shamelessly. "Never mind, dear, when you have finished your course you are coming out to me, and we'll start the most ideal of kindergartens in our wild Western town."

She went about her preparations with a light heart, growing prettier and brighter each day. As for Mr. Carter, he won golden opinions from everybody, even from the critical Wilson, who was one day moved to confide that he and Zenobia were contemplating the same step.

No one showed a more genuine interest in the wedding preparations than Mrs. Richards. She had taken a fancy to Lillian, and declared that her love affair was delightfully interesting and novel for these unromantic times. She lent her carriage to facilitate the shopping, and the evening before the wedding day entertained the bride and groom elect.

Just such a gathering had never before been seen in Mrs. Richards's beautiful home, for it was Frances who had the naming of the guests, and she chose to have their friends of the winter. There was the Spectacle Man, of course, and Emma and Gladys and Miss Moore,—it was too bad Mark couldn't get home in time,—and Mrs. Gray, because she was the beginning of it all, and Frances was fond of her. This was the party, with their own family and the bride and groom. [Pg 261]

Caroline said that if Mrs. Richards had been going to entertain the Queen and the President together, she couldn't have been more particular about everything, and indeed she spared no trouble or expense.

The table was exquisite in its bridal decorations of lilies of the valley, and the whole house was fragrant with flowers; the guests all looked their best, and it was throughout a most festive and happy occasion.

Frances fluttered about in her great-grandmother's dress, evidently considering it her party; the Spectacle Man beamed on everybody; and old Mrs. Gray, in a new silk gown, looked on in quiet enjoyment. Miss Moore was, if possible, merrier than usual, but this may have been because she was trying not to think how far away Lillian was going. [Pg 262]

When the supper was over and the healths of the bride and groom had been drank, "The Story of the Missing Bridge" was proposed, and the optician rose to respond.

"It has occurred to me as a somewhat strange thing," he began, "that seven or eight months ago we, who now feel like old friends, had not met. In this time we have learned to know one another, and a little story, which grew out of a foolish old song, has become a bond between us,—something we shall carry with us wherever we go. We have learned lessons of courage and cheer; some of us have found bridges over our difficulties and troubles where we had supposed there [Pg 263]

were none; and I can at least say for myself that hereafter, into whatever perplexities I may fall, I shall remember the lesson of the story, that there is always a way, and love and courage can find it."

He sat down amid applause, and Frances said, "I am going to remember it, too, for I did find a way when Gladys and I quarrelled."

"I can add my testimony that ways open in the most unpromising places," put in her father.

"Perhaps if I had heard the story sooner my broken bridge would have been mended long ago," said Mrs. Richards.

"It is wonderful," Mrs. Gray took courage to say, "how things turn out sometimes. I feel like telling everybody how sweet and kind my new daughter is. She really seems fond of me already, and I was so dreadful afraid of her." [Pg 264]

"When we look back we can't help seeing that we have been guided by a higher Power, who could see the path that was dark to us," Mrs. Morrison said softly; and the Spectacle Man added, "That's true."

"Every one knows how much I owe to the story," Mr. Carter began, but Lillian blushed and shook her head at him.

"I am too commonplace to have interesting experiences," Miss Moore announced, "so, as I haven't anything to relate, with Mr. Clark's permission I'll read a poem;" and thereupon she read the verses she had found in the hall.

The Spectacle Man was quite embarrassed, and insisted that he was not in the habit of dropping into verse, and that this had not been intended for the public.

"I want them, Mr. Clark, for the book I mean to write when I have time, about our winter at your house," Miss Sherwin said. [Pg 265]

"Are you really going to do that, Miss Sherwin? How lovely!" cried Frances. "And you must begin with Mrs. Gray's glasses, and put Emma and Gladys and me in,—and Peterkin."

Lillian laughed, and promised that when the story was written they should all be in.

The next morning was as beautiful as if it had been ordered for the occasion, and the small number of persons gathered in the church saw a charming bride, who seemed with her golden hair and her shimmering gown of soft green tones, to be herself a part of the springtime.

She walked up the aisle with her maid of honor, Miss Moore, preceded by Frances and Emma in a state of unutterable bliss, while Gladys looked on from a front pew. Mr. Clark gave the bride away, and nothing happened to mar the simple and beautiful ceremony. [Pg 266]

When Mr. and Mrs. Carter had driven off in a shower of rice the Spectacle Man returned to his shop and began that very afternoon to pack up. As he worked he sang cheerily:—

"The ducks and the geese they all swim over,
Fol de rol de ri do, fol de rol de ri do,
The ducks and the geese they all swim over,
Fol de rol de ri."

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