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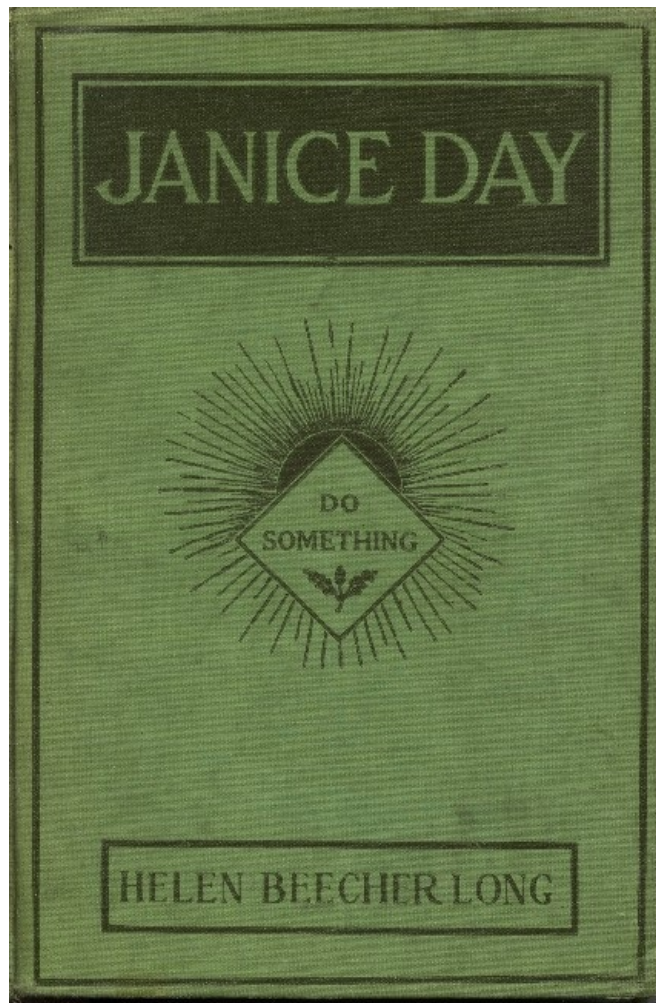
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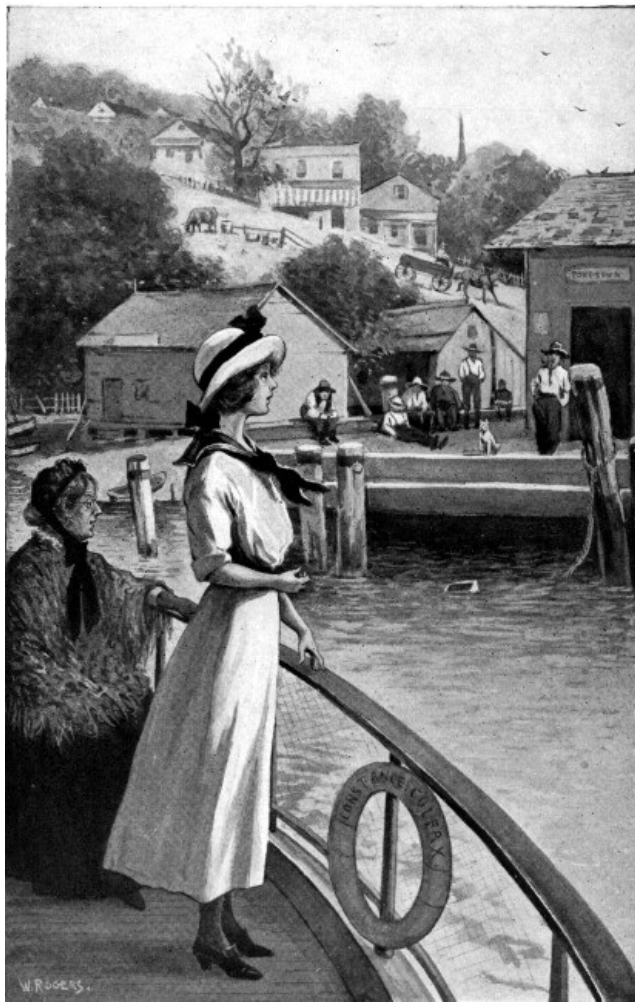
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The quick eye of Janice Day caught sight of this row of nondescripts. (See page 15.)

JANICE DAY
BY
HELEN BEECHER LONG
ILLUSTRATED BY
WALTER S. ROGERS



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The old violin wailed out the tune haltingly [72](#)

God's world *did* look bigger and greater from The Overlook. (See page 155.)

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She just *had* to raise her eyes and look into his earnest ones. (See page 307.)

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JANICE DAY

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CHAPTER I

A NEW-FASHIONED GIRL

"Well! this is certainly a relief from the stuffy old cars," said Janice Day, as she reached the upper deck of the lake steamer, dropped her suitcase, and drew in her first full breath of the pure air.

"What a beautiful lake!" she went on. "And how big! Why—I had no idea! I wonder how far Poketown is from here?"

The ancient sidewheel steamer was small and there were few passengers on the upper deck, forward. Janice secured a campstool and sat down near the rail to look off over the water.

The officious man in the blue cap on the dock had shouted "All aboard!" the moment the passengers left the cars of the little narrow-gauge railroad, on which the girl had been riding for more than two hours; but it was some minutes before the wheezy old steamer got under way.

Janice was interested in everything she saw—even in the clumsy warping off of the *Constance Colfax*, when her hawsers were finally released.

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"Goodness me!" thought the girl, chuckling, "what a ridiculous old tub it is! How different everything East here is from Greensboro. There! we're really off!"

The water hissed and splashed, as the wheels of the steamer began to turn rheumatically. The walking-beam heaved up and down with many a painful creak.

"Why! *that* place is real pretty—when you look at it from the lake," murmured Janice, looking back at the little landing. "I wonder if Poketown will be like it?"

She looked about her, half tempted to ask a question of somebody. There was but a single passenger near her—a little, old lady in an old-fashioned black mantilla with jet trimming, and wearing black lace half-mitts and a little bonnet that had been so long out of date that it was almost in the mode again.

She was seated with her back against the cabin house, and when the steamer rolled a little the ball of knitting-cotton, which she had taken out of her deep, bead-bespangled bag, bounced out of her lap and rolled across the deck almost to the feet of Janice.

Up the girl jumped and secured the runaway ball, winding the cotton as she approached the old lady, who peered up at her, her head on one side and her eyes sparkling, like an inquisitive bird.

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"Thank ye, child," she said, briskly. "I ain't as spry as I use ter be, an' ye done me a favor. I guess I don't know ye, do I?"

"I don't believe you do, Ma'am," agreed Janice, smiling, and although she could not be called "pretty" in the sense in which the term is usually written, when Janice smiled her determined, and rather intellectual face became very attractive.

"You don't belong in these parts?" pursued the old lady.

"Oh, no, Ma'am. I come from Greensboro," and the girl named the middle western state in which her home was situated.

"Do tell! You come a long distance, don't ye?" exclaimed her fellow-passenger. "You're one of these new-fashioned gals that travel alone, an' all that sort o' thing, ain't ye? I reckon your folks has got plenty of confidence in ye."

Janice laughed again, and drew her campstool to the old lady's side.

"I was never fifty miles away from home before," she confessed, "and I never was away from my father over night until I started East two days ago."

"Then ye ain't got no mother, child?"

"Mother died when I was a very little girl. Father has been everything to me—just everything!" and for a moment the bright, young face clouded and the hazel eyes swam in unshed tears. But she turned quickly so that her new acquaintance might not see them.

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"Where are you goin', my dear?" asked the old lady, more softly.

"To Poketown. And oh! I *do* hope it will be a nice, lively place, for maybe I'll have to remain there a long time—months and months!"

"For the land's sake!" exclaimed the old lady, nodding her head briskly over the knitting needles. "So be I goin' to Poketown."

"Are you, really?" ejaculated Janice Day, clasping her hands eagerly, and turning to her new acquaintance. "Isn't that nice! Then you can tell me just what Poketown is like. I've got to stay there with my uncle while father is in Mexico——"

"Who's your uncle, child?" demanded the old lady, quickly. "And who's your father?"

Janice naturally answered the last question first, for her heart was full of her father and her separation from him. "Mr. Broxton Day is my father, and he used to live in Poketown. But he came away from there a long, long time ago."

"Yes? I knowed there was Days in Poketown; but I ain't been there myself for goin' on twelve year. I lived there a year, or so, arter my man died, with my darter. She's teachd the Poketown school for twenty year."

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"Oh!" cried Janice. "Then you can't really tell me what Poketown is like—now?"

"Why, it's quite a town, I b'lieve," said the old lady. "'Rill writes me thet the *ho*-tel's jest been painted, and there's a new blacksmith shop built. You goin' to school there—What did you say your name was?"

"Janice Day. I don't know whether I shall go to school while I am in Poketown, or not. If there are a whole lot of nice girls—and a few nice boys—who go to your daughter's school, I shall certainly want to go, too," continued Janice, smiling again at the little old lady.

"Wal, 'Rill Scattergood's teachd long enough, *I* tell her," declared the other. "I'm goin' to Poketown now more'n half to git her to give up at the end o' this term. With what she's laid by, and what I've got left, we could live mighty comfertable together. Who's your uncle, child?" pursued Mrs. Scattergood, who had not lost sight of her main inquiry.

"Mr. Jason Day. He's my father's half brother."

"Ya-as. I didn't know them Days very well when I lived there. How long did you say you was goin' to stay in Poketown?"

"I don't know, Ma'am," said Janice, sadly. "Father didn't know how long he'd be in Mexico——"

"Good Land o' Goshen!" ejaculated Mrs. Scattergood, suddenly, "ain't that where there's fightin' goin' on right now?"

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"Yes'm. That's why he couldn't take me with him," confessed Janice, eager to talk with a sympathetic listener. "You see, I guess 'most all the money we've got is invested in some mine down there. The fighting came near the mine, and the superintendent ran away and left everything."

"Goodness! why wouldn't he?" exclaimed the old lady, knitting faster than ever in her excitement.

"But then that made it so my father had to go down there and 'tend to things," explained Janice.

"What! right in the middle of the war? Good Land o' Goshen!"

"There wasn't anybody else *to* go," said Janice, sadly. "The stockholders might lose all they put into it. And our money, too. Why! we had to rent our house furnished. That's why I am coming East to Uncle Jason's while father is away."

"Too bad! too bad!" returned the old lady, shaking her head.

"But you see," Janice hastened to say, with pride, "my father is that kind of a man. The other folks expected him to take hold of the business and straighten it out. He—he's always doing such things, you know."

"I see," agreed Mrs. Scattergood. "He's one o' these 'up an' comin' sort o' men. And you're his darter!" and she cackled a little, shrill laugh. "I kin see *that*. You're one o' these new-fashioned gals, all right."

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"I hope I'm like Daddy," said Janice, quietly. "Everybody loves Daddy—everybody depends on him to go ahead and *do* things. I hope Uncle Jason will be like him."

With the light breeze fluttering the little crinkles of hair between her hat and her brow, and an expression of bright expectancy upon her face, Janice was worth looking at a second time. So Mrs. Scattergood thought, as she glanced up now and again from her knitting.

"Poketown—Poketown," the girl murmured to herself, trying to spy out the land ahead as the *Constance Colfax* floundered on. "Oh! I hope Daddy's remembrance of it is all wrong now. I hope it will belie its name."

"What's that, child?" put in the sharp voice of her neighbor.

"Why—why—if it *is* poky I know I shall just die of homesickness for Greensboro," confessed

Janice. "How could the early settlers of these 'New Hampshire Grants' ever *dare* give such a homely name to a village?"

"Pshaw!" ejaculated Mrs. Scattergood. "What's a name? Prob'bly some man named Poke settled there fust. Or pokeberries grew mighty common there. People weren't so fanciful about names in them days. Why! my son-in-law lives right now in a place in York State called 'Skunk's Hollow' and the city folks that's movin' in there is tryin' to git the post office to change the name to 'Posy Bloom.' No 'countin' for tastes in names. My poor mother called *me* Mahala Ann—an' me too leetle to fight back. But I made up my mind when I was a mighty leetle gal that if ever I had a baby I'd call it sumthin' pretty. An' I done the right thing by all my children.

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"Now here's 'Rill," pursued Mrs. Scattergood, waxing communicative. "Her full name's Amarilla—Amarilla Scattergood. Don't you think that's purty yourself, now?"

Janice politely agreed. But she quickly swung the conversation back to Poketown.

"I suppose, if mills had been built there, or the summer boarders had discovered Poketown, its name would have been changed, too. And you haven't been up there for twelve years?"

"No, child. But that ain't long. Ain't much happens in twelve years back East here."

Janice sighed again; but suddenly she jumped from her stool excitedly, crying: "Oh! what place is *that*?"

She pointed far ahead. Around a rocky headland the view of a pleasant cove had just opened. The green and blue-ribbed hills rose behind the cove; the water lay sparkling in it. There was a vividly white church with a heaven-pointing spire right among the big green trees.

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A brown ribbon of main thoroughfare wound up from the wharf, but was soon lost under the shade of the great trees that interlaced their branches above it—branches which were now lush with the late spring growth of leaves. Here and there a cottage, or larger dwelling, appeared, most of them originally white like the church, but many shabby from the action of wind and weather.

Over all, the warm sun spread a mantle. In the distance this bright mantle softened the rigid lines of the old-fashioned houses, and of the ledges and buttresses of the hills themselves.

Old Mrs. Scattergood stood up, too, looking through her steel-bowed glasses.

"I declare for't!" she said, "that's Poketown itself! That's the spire of the Union Church you see. We'll git there in an hour."

Janice did not sit down again just then, nor did she reply. She rested both trimly-gloved hands on the rail and gazed upon the scene.

"Why, it's beautiful!" she breathed at last "And *that* is Poketown!"

CHAPTER II

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POKETOWN

Some ancient dwellings have the dignity of "homestead" resting upon them like a benediction; others are aureoled by the name of "manor." The original Day in Poketown had built a shingled, gable-ended cottage upon the side-hill which had now, for numberless years, been called "the old Day house"—nothing more.

"Jason! You Jase! I'd give a cent if you'd mend this pump," complained Mrs. Almira Day. "Go git me a pail of water from Mis' Dickerson's and ask how's her rhoumatism this mawnin'. Come on, now! I can't wash the breakfas' dishes till I hev some water."

The grizzled, lanky man who had been sitting comfortably on a bench in the sun, sucking on a corn cob pipe and gazing off across the lake, never even turned his head as he asked:

"Where's Marty?"

"The goodness only knows! Ye know he ain't never here when ye want him."

"Why didn't ye tell him about the water at breakfas' time?"

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"Would *that* have done any good?" demanded Mrs. Day, with some scorn. "Ye know Marty's got too big to take orders from his marm. He don't do nothin' but hang about Josiah Pringle's harness shop all day."

"I told him to hoe them 'taters," said Mr. Day, thoughtfully.

"Well, he don't seem ter take orders from his dad, neither. Don't know what that boy's comin' to," and a whine crept into Mrs. Day's voice. "He can't git along with 'Rill Scattergood, so he won't go to school. His fingers is gettin' all stained yaller from suthin'—d'you 'xpect it's them cigarettes, Jase?"

Her husband was rising slowly to his feet. "Gimme the pail," he grunted, without replying to her last question. "I'll git the water for ye this onc't. But that's Marty's job an' he's got to l'arn it, too!"

"Here, Jase! take two pails," urged Mrs. Day. "An' I wish you *would* git Pringle to cut ye a new pump-leather."

But Mr. Day ignored the second pail. "I don't feel right peart to-day," he said, shambling off down the path. "And there's a deal of heft to a pail of water—uphill, too. An' by-me-by I got ter go down to the dock, I s'pose, when the boat comes in, to meet Broxton's gal. I 'xpect *she'll* be a great nuisance, 'Mira."

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"I'll stand her bein' some nuisance if you give me the twenty dollars a month your brother wrote that he'd send for her board and keep," snapped Mrs. Day. "You understand, Jase. That money's comin' to *me*, or I don't scrub and slave for no relation of yourn. Remember that!"

Jason shuffled on as though he had not heard her. That was the most exasperating trait of this lazy man—so his wife thought; he was too lazy to quarrel.

He went out at the gate, which hung by one hinge to the gatepost, into the untidy back lane upon which one end of his rocky little farm abutted. Had he glanced back at the premises he would have seen a weed-grown, untidy yard surrounding the old house, with decrepit stables and other outbuildings in the rear, a garden which was almost a jungle now, although in the earlier spring it had given much promise of a summer harvest of vegetables. Poorly tilled fields behind the front premises terraced up the timber-capped hill.

Jason Day always "calkerlated ter farm it" each year, and he started in good season, too. The soil was rich and most of his small fields were warm and early; but somehow his plans always fell through before the season was far advanced. So neither the farm nor the immediate premises of the old Day house were attractive.

The house itself looked like a withered and gnarly apple left hanging upon the tree from the year before. In its forlorn nakedness it actually cried out for a coat of paint. Each individual shingle was curled and cracked. Only the superior workmanship of a former time kept the Day roof tight and defended the family from storms.

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Some hours later the *Constance Colfax* came into view around a distant point in the lake shore. Mr. Day had camped upon the identical bench again and was still sucking at the stem of his corncob pipe.

"Wal," he groaned, "I 'xpect I've got to go down to meet that gal of Broxton's. And the sun's mighty hot this mawnin'."

"You wouldn't feel it so, if ye hadn't been too 'tarnal lazy to change yer seat," sniffed his wife. "Now, you mind, Jase! That board money comes to me, or you can take Broxton's gal to the *ho-tel*."

Mr. Day shuffled out of the front gate without making reply.

"Drat the man!" muttered his wife. "If I could jes' git a rise out o' him onc't——"

It was not far to the dock. Indeed, Poketown was so compactly built on the steep hillside that there was scarcely a house within its borders from which a boy could not have tossed a pebble into the waters of the cove. Jason strolled along in the shade, passing the time of day with such neighbors as were equally disengaged, and spreading the news of his niece's expected arrival.

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As he passed along the lane which later debouched upon the main thoroughfare of Poketown, it was evident to the most casual glance that the old Day house was not the only dwelling far along in a state of decay. Poketown was full of such.

On the street leading directly to the dock there were several well-cared-for estates—some of them wedged in between blocks of two-story frame buildings, the first floors of which were occupied by stores of various kinds. The post office had a building to itself. The Lake View Inn was not unattractive, its side piazza overlooking the cove and the lake spread beyond.

But the ratty, dusty road showed that it had been ratty and muddy in the earlier spring. The flagstones of the sidewalks were broken, and the walks themselves ill kept. The gutters were overgrown with grass and weeds. Before the shops the undefended tree trunks were gnawed into grotesque patterns by the farmers' hungry beasts. Hardware was at a premium in Poketown, for a dozen gates along the line were hung with leather hinges, and bits of rope had taken the places of the original latches.

From the water, however, even on closer view, the hillside village made a pretty picture. Near the wharf it was not so romantic, as Janice Day realized, when the coughing, wheezy steamboat came close in.

There were decrepit boats drawn up on the narrow beach; there were several decaying shacks bordering on the dock itself; and along the stringpiece of the wharf roosted a row of "humans" that were the opposite of ornamental. The quick eye of Janice Day caught sight of this row of nondescripts.

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"Goodness me, Mrs. Scattergood!" she exclaimed, turning to the old lady who had been in receipt of her confidences. "Is the almshouse near Poketown?"

"There's a poorfarm, child; but there ain't nobody on it but a few old folks an' some orphans. We ain't poor here—not pauper poor. But, goodness me! you mean them men a-settin' there? Why, they ain't poor—no, no, child. I don't suppose there's a man there that don't own his own house. There's Mel Parraday, who owns the *ho*-tel; and Lem Pinney that owns stock in this very steamboat comp'ny; and Walkworthy Dexter—Walky's done expressin' and stage-drivin' since before my 'Rill come here to Poketown to teach."

"But—but they look so ragged and unshaven," gasped Janice.

"Pshaw! they ain't proud, I reckon," cackled the old lady, gathering up her knitting and dropping it into the beaded bag, which she shut with a snap.

"But isn't there anybody proud *of* them?" queried Janice. "Haven't they mothers—or wives—or sisters?"

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The old lady stared at her. Then she made a sudden clicking in her throat that might have been a chuckle. "I declare for't, child!" she ejaculated. "I dunno as many of us in these parts *air* proud of our men folks."

Just then the steamboat's bow bumped the wharf. The jar scarcely seemed to awaken the languid line of Poketownites ranged along the other side. The only busy person in sight was the employee of the steamboat company who caught the loop of the hawser thrown him, and dropped it over a pile. The rest of the men just raised their heads and stared, chewing reflectively on either tobacco or straws, until the plank was dropped and the deckhands began trundling the freight and baggage ashore.

There were two or three commercial drummers beside Mrs. Scattergood and Janice, who disembarked on this dock. Mrs. Scattergood bade the girl from the West a brisk good-bye and went directly up the dock, evidently expecting nobody to meet her at this time of day. A lanky man, with grizzled brows and untrimmed beard, got up slowly from the stringpiece of the wharf and slouched forward to meet Janice Day.

"I reckon you be Broxton's gal, eh?" he queried, his eyes twinkling not unkindly. "Ye sort er favor him—an' he favored his mother in more ways than one. You're Janice Day?"

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"Oh, yes indeed! And you're my Uncle Jason?" cried the girl, impulsively seizing Mr. Day's hand. There was nothing about this man that at all reminded Janice of her father; yet the thought of their really being so closely related to each other was comforting. "I'm so glad to see you," she continued. "I hope you'll like me, Uncle Jason—and I hope Aunt Almira will like me. And there is a cousin, too, isn't there—a boy? Dear me! I've been looking forward to meeting you all ever since I left Greensboro, and been wondering what sort of people you would be."

"Wal," drawled Uncle Jason, rather staggered by the way Janice "ran on," "we reckon on makin' ye comferble. Looks like we'd have ye with us some spell, too. Broxton writ me that he didn't know how long he'd be gone—down there in Mexico."

"No. Poor Daddy couldn't tell. The business must be 'tended to, I s'pose——"

"Right crazy of him to go there," grunted Uncle Jason. "May git shot any minute. Ain't *no* money wuth that, I don't believe."

This rather tactless speech made the girl suddenly look grave; but it did not quench her vivacity. She was staring about the dock, interested in everything she saw, when Uncle Jason drawled:

"I s'pose ye got a trunk, Janice?"

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"Oh, yes. Here is the check," and she began to skirmish in her purse.

"Wal! there ain't no hurry. Marty'll come down by-me-by with the wheelbarrer and git it for ye."

"But my goodness!" exclaimed the girl from Greensboro. "I haven't anything fit to put on in this bag; everything got rumped so aboard the train. I'll want to change just as soon as I get to the house, Uncle."

"Wal!" Uncle Jason was staggered. He had given up thinking quickly years before. This was an emergency that floored him.

"Why! isn't that the expressman there? And can't he take my trunk right up to the house?" continued the girl.

"Ya-as; that's Walky Dexter," admitted Mr. Day.

A stout, red-faced man was backing a raw-boned nag in front of a farm wagon, down upon the wharf and toward a little heap of baggage that had been run ashore from the lower deck of the *Constance Colfax*. Janice, still lugging her suitcase, shot up the dock toward the expressman, leaving Jason, slack-jawed and well-nigh breathless.

"Jefers-pelters! What a flyaway critter she is!" the man muttered. "I don't see whatever we're a-goin' to do with *her*."

Meanwhile Janice got Mr. Dexter's attention immediately. "There's my trunk right there, Mr. Dexter," she cried. "And here's the check. You see it—the brown trunk with the brass corners?"

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"I see it, Miss. All right. I'll git it up to Jason's some time this arternoon."

"Oh, Mr. Dexter!" she cried, shaking her head at him, but smiling, too. "That will not do at all! I want to unpack it at once. I need some of the things in it, for I've been traveling two days. Can't you take it on your first load?"

"Wa-al—I might," confessed Dexter, looking her over with a quizzical smile. "But us'ally the Days ain't in no hurry."

"Then this is one Day who *is* in a hurry," she said, briefly. "What is your charge for delivering the trunk, sir?"

"Oh—'bout a quarter, Miss. And gimme that suitcase, too. 'Twon't cost ye no more, and I'll git 'em there before Jason and you reach the house. Poketown is a purty slow old place, Miss," the man added, with a wink and a chuckle, "but I kin see the *days* are going to move faster, now you have arove in town. Don't you fear; your trunk'll be there—'nless Josephus, here, busts a leg!"

Quite stunned, Uncle Jason had not moved from his tracks. "Now we're all right, sir," said the girl, cheerily, taking his arm and by her very touch seeming to galvanize a little life into his scarecrow figure. "Shall we go home?"

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"Eh? Wal! Ef ye say so, Janice," replied Mr. Day, weakly.

They started up the main street of Poketown, Janice accommodating her step to that of her uncle. Mr. Day was not one given to idle chatter; but the girl did not notice his silence in her interest in all she saw.

It was a beautiful, shady way, with the hill not too steep for comfort. And some of the dwellings set in the midst of their terraced old lawns, were so beautiful! It was the beauty of age, however; there did not seem to be a single *new* thing in Poketown.

Even the scant display of goods in the shop windows had lain there until they were dust-covered, sun-burned, and flyspecked. The signs over the store doors were tarnished.

They came to the lane that led up the hill away from High Street, and on which Uncle Jason said he lived. An almost illegible sign at the corner announced it to be "Hillside Avenue." There were not two fences abutting upon the lane that were set in line, while the sidewalks were narrow or broad, according to the taste of the several owners of property along the way.

The beautiful old trees were everywhere, however; only some of them needed trimming badly, and many overhung the roofs, their dripping branches having rotted the shingles and given life to great patches of green moss. There was a sogginess to the grass-grown yards that seemed unhealthy. There were several, picturesque, old wells, with massive sweeps and oaken buckets—quaint breeders of typhoid germs—which showed that the physicians of Poketown had not properly educated their patients to modern sanitary ideas.

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Altogether the village in which her father had been born and bred was a dead-and-alive, do-nothing place, and its beauty, for Janice Day, faded before she was halfway up the hill to her uncle's house.

CHAPTER III

[Pg 22]

"IT JEST RATTLES"

Almira Day was a good-hearted woman. It was not in her to treat her husband's niece otherwise than kindly, despite her threat to the contrary when Jason left the old Day house to meet Janice at the steamboat dock.

She stood smiling in the doorway—a large, pink, lymphatic woman, as shapeless as a half-filled meal-sack with a string tied around its middle, quite as untidy as her husband in dress, but with clean skin and a wholesome look.

Her calico dress was faded and, in places, strained to the bursting-point, showing that it was "store-bought" and had never been fitted to Mrs. Day's bulbous figure. She wore a pair of men's slippers very much down at the heel, and pink stockings with a gaping hole in the seam at the back of one, which Janice very plainly saw as her aunt preceded her upstairs to the room the visitor was to occupy.

"I hope ye won't mind how things look," drawled Aunt 'Mira. "We ain't as up-an'-comin' as some, I do suppose. But nothin' ain't gone well with Jason late years, an' he's got some mis'ry that he can't git rid of, so's he can't work stiddy. Look out for this nex' ter the top step. The tread's broke an' I been expectin' ter be thrown from top to bottom of these stairs for weeks."

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"Can't Uncle Jason fix it?" asked Janice, stepping over the broken tread.

"Wal, he ain't exactly got 'round to it yet," confessed her aunt. "There! I do hope you like your room, Niece Janice. There's a pretty outlook from the winder."

True enough, the window overlooked the hillside and the lake. Only, had the panes been washed one could have viewed the landscape and the water so much better!

The room itself was the shabbiest bedchamber Janice Day had ever seen. The carpet on the floor had, generations before, been one of those flowery axminsters that country people used to buy for their "poller." Then they would pull all the shades down and shut the room tightly, for otherwise the pink roses faded completely out of the design.

This old carpet had long since been through *that* stage of existence, however, and was now worn to the warp in spots, its design being visible only because of the ingrained grime which years of trampling had brought to it.

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The paper on the walls was faded and stained. Empty places where pictures had hung for years, showed in contrast to the more faded barren districts. A framed copy of the Declaration of Independence ornamented the space above the mantel. Hanging above the bed's head were those two famous chromos of "Good-Morning" and "Good-Night." A moth-eaten worsted motto and cross, "The Rock of Ages," hung above the little bureau glass. There was, too, a torn and faded slipper for matches, and a tall glass lamp that, for some reason, reminded Janice of a skeleton. She could never look at that lamp thereafter without expecting the oil tank to become a grinning skull with a tall fool's cap (the chimney) on it, and its thin body to sprout bony arms and legs.

The furniture was decrepit and ill matched. Janice could have overlooked the shaky chair, the toppling bureau, and the scratched washstand; but the bed with only three legs, and a soap-box under the fourth corner, *did* bring a question to the guest's lips:

"Where is the other leg, Aunty?"

"Now, I declare for't!" exclaimed Mrs. Day. "That *is* too bad! The leg's up on the closet shelf here. Jase was calkerlatin' to put it on again, but he ain't never got 'round to it. But the box'll hold yer. It only rattles," she added, as Janice tried the security of the bedstead.

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That expression, "it only rattles," the girl from Greensboro was destined to hear unnumbered times in her uncle's home. It was typical of the old Day house and its inmates. Unless a repair absolutely *must* be made, Uncle Jason would not take a tool in his hand.

As for her Cousin Martin ("Marty" everybody called the gangling, grinning, idle ne'er-do-well of fourteen), Janice was inclined to be utterly hopeless about him from the start. If he was a specimen of the Poketown boys, she told herself, she had no desire to meet any of them.

"What do you do with yourself all day long, Marty, if you don't go to school?" she asked her cousin, at the dinner table.

"Oh, I hang around—like everybody else. Ain't nothin' doin' in Poketown."

"I should think it would be more fun to go to school."

"Not ter 'Rill Scattergood," rejoined the boy, in haste. "That old maid dunno enough to teach a cow."

Janice might have thought a cow much more difficult to teach than a boy; only she looked again into Marty's face, which plainly advertised the vacancy of his mind, and thought better of the speech that had risen to her lips.

"Marty won't go to school no more," her aunt complained, whiningly. "'Rill Scattergood ain't got no way with him. Th' committee's been talkin' about gittin' another teacher for years; but 'Rill's sorter *sot* there, she's had the place so long."

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"There's more than a month of school yet—before the summer vacation—isn't there?" queried Janice.

"Oh, yes," sighed Mrs. Day.

"I'd love to go and get acquainted with the girls," the guest said, brightly. "Wouldn't you go with me some afternoon and introduce me to the teacher, Marty?"

"*Me?* Ter 'Rill Scattergood? Naw!" declared the amazed Marty. "I sh'd say not!"

"Why, Marty!" exclaimed his mother. "That ain't perlite."

"Who said 'twas?" returned her hopeful son, shortly. "I ain't tryin' ter be perlite ter no *girl*. And I ain't goin' ter 'Rill Scattergood's school—never, no more!"

"Young man," commanded his father, angrily, "you hold that tongue o' yourn. And you be perlite to your cousin, or I'll dance the dust out o' your jacket with a hick'ry sprout, big as ye be."

Janice hastened to change the subject and tune the conversation to a more pleasant key.

"It is so pretty all over this hillside," she said. "Around Greensboro the country is flat. I think the hills are much more beautiful. And the lake is just *dear*."

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"Ya-as," sighed her aunt. "Artis' folks come here an' paint this lake. I reckon it's purty; but ye sort er git used ter it after a while."

It was evidently hard for Aunt 'Mira to enthuse over anything. Marty volunteered:

"We got a waterfall on our place. Folks call it the Shower Bath. Guess a girl would think 'twas pretty."

"Oh! I'd love to see that," declared Janice, quickly.

"I'll show it to you after dinner," said Marty, of a sudden surprisingly friendly.

"You'll hoe them 'taters after dinner," cried his father, sharply. "That's what *you'll* do."

"Huh!" growled the sullen youth. "Yer said I was to be perlite, an' when I start in ter be, you spring them old pertaters on a feller. Huh!"

"Aw, now, Jason," interposed his mother. "Can't Marty show his cousin over the farm and hoe the 'taters afterward?"

"No, he can't!" denied Master Marty, quickly. "I ain't goin' ter work double for nobody. Now, that's flat!"

"Oh, we can go to the Shower Bath some other time," suggested Janice, apprehensive of starting another family squabble. "I don't know as I'd be able to hoe potatoes; but maybe there are other things I can do in the garden. I always had a big flower garden at home."

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"Huh!" grunted Marty. "Flowers are only a nuisance."

"I s'pose you could weed some," sighed Aunt 'Mira. "It hurts me so to stoop."

"She'd better pick 'tater bugs," said Marty, grinning. "They've begun to come, I reckon. Hard-shells, anyway."

Janice could not resist shivering at this suggestion. She did not love insects any better than do most girls. But she took Marty's suggestion in good part.

"You wait," she said. "Maybe I can do that, too. I'll weed a little, anyway. Have you a large farm, Uncle Jason?"

"It's big enough, Janice," grumbled Jason. "Does seem as though—most years—it's too big for us to manage. If Marty, here, warn't so triflin'—"

"I don't see no medals on *you* for workin' hard," whispered the boy, loud enough for Janice to hear.

"This was a right good farm, onc't," said Aunt 'Mira. "B'fore Jason got his mis'ry we use ter have good crops. That's when we was fust married."

"But that's what broke my health all down," interposed Uncle Jason. "Don't pay a man to work so hard when he's young. He has ter suffer for it in the end."

"Huh!" grunted Marty. "If it wasn't good for *you* to work so hard when you was young, what about *me*?"

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"You git along out o' here an' start on them 'taters!" commanded Mr. Day, angrily.

Marty slid out, muttering under his breath. Janice jumped up from the table, saying cheerfully: "I'll help you with the dishes, Aunty. Let's clear off."

Her uncle had risen and was feeling for his corncob pipe on the ledge above the door. Mrs. Day looked a bit startled when she saw Janice begin briskly to collect the soiled dishes.

"I dunno, Janice," she hesitated. "I gin'rally feel right po'ly after dinner, and I'm use ter takin' forty winks."

Janice did not wonder that her aunt felt "right po'ly." She had eaten more pork, potatoes, spring cabbage and fresh bread than would have served a hearty man.

"Let's get rid of the dishes first, Aunty," said Janice, cheerfully "You can get your nap afterward."

"Wa-al," agreed Mrs. Day, slowly rising. "I dunno's there's water enough to more'n give 'em a lick and a promise. Marty! Oh, you Marty! Come, go for a pail of water, will ye? That's a good boy."

"Now, ye know well enough," snarled Jason's voice just outside the door, "that that boy ain't in earshot now."

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"Oh, *I* can get a pail of water from the pump, Aunty," said Janice, briskly starting for the porch.

"But that pump ain't goin'," declared Mrs. Day. "An' no knowin' when 'twill be goin'. We have ter lug all our water from Dickerson's."

"Oh, gimme the bucket!" snapped Uncle Jason, putting his great, hairy hand inside the door and snatching the water-pail from the shelf. "Wimmen-folks is allus a-clatterin' about suthin'!"

Janice had never imagined people just like these relatives of hers. She was both ashamed and amused,—ashamed of their ill-breeding and amused by their useless bickering.

"Wa-al," said her aunt, yawning and lowering herself upon the kitchen couch, the springs of which squeaked complainingly under her weight, "Wa-al, 'tain't scurcely wuth doin' the dishes *now*. Jason'll stop and gab 'ith some one. It takes him ferever an' a day ter git a pail o' water. You

go on about your play, Niece Janice. I'll git 'em done erlone somehow, by-me-by."

Mrs. Day closed her eyes while she was still speaking. She was evidently glad to relax into her old custom again.

Janice took down her aunt's sunbonnet from the nail by the side door and went out. Amusement had given place in the girl's mind to something like actual shrinking from these relatives and their ways. The porch boards gave under even her weight. Some of them were broken. The steps were decrepit, too. The pump handle was tied down, she found, when she put a tentative hand upon it.

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"It jest rattles," quoted Janice; but no laugh followed the sigh which was likewise her involuntary comment upon the situation.

CHAPTER IV

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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

There was a long, well-shaded yard behind the house, bordered on the upper hand by the palings of the garden fence. Had this fence not been so overgrown by vines, wandering hens could have gone in and out of the garden at pleasure.

Robins were whisking in and out of the tops of the trees, quarreling over the first of the cherry crop. Janice heard Marty's hoe and she opened the garden gate. About half of this good-sized patch was given over to the "tater" crop; the remainder of the garden seemed—to the casual glance—merely a wilderness of weeds. There may have been rows of vegetable seeds planted there in the beginning; but now it was a perfect mat of green things that have no commercial value—to say the least.

Marty was about halfway down the first row of potatoes. He was cleaning the row pretty well, and the weeds were wilting in the sun; but the rows were as crooked as a snake's path.

"Hullo!" said the boy, willing to stop and lean on the hoe handle. "Don't you want to help?"

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"I don't believe I could hoe, Marty," said Janice, doubtfully.

"If you'd been a boy cousin, I wouldn't have minded," grunted Marty. "He and me could have had some fun."

"Don't you think *I* can be any fun?" demanded Janice, rather amused by the frankness of the youth.

"Never saw a gal that was," responded Marty. "Always in the way. Marm says I got to be perlite to 'em——"

"And is that such a cross?"

"Don't know anything about no cross," growled Marty; "but a boy cousin that I could lick would ha' been a whole lot more to my mind."

"Oh, Marty! we're not going to quarrel."

"I dunno whether we are or not," returned the pessimistic youth. "Wait till there's only one piece o' pie left at dinner some day. You'll have ter have it. Marm'll say so. But if you was a boy—an' I could lick ye—ye wouldn't dare take it. D'ye see?"

"I'm not so awfully fond of pie," admitted Janice. "And I wouldn't let a piece stand in the way of our being good friends."

"Oh, well; we'll see," said Marty, grudgingly. "But ye can't hoe, ye say?"

"I don't believe so. I'd cut off more potato plants than weeds, maybe. Can't you cultivate your potatoes with a horse cultivator? I see the farmers doing that around Greensboro. It's lots quicker."

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"Oh, we got a horse-hoe," said Marty, without interest. "But it got broke an' Dad ain't fixed it yet. B'sides, ye couldn't use it 'twixt these rows. They're too crooked. But then—as the feller said—there's more plants in a crooked row."

"What's all that?" demanded Janice, waving a hand toward the other half of the garden.

"Weeds—mostly. Right there's carrots. Marm always *will* plant carrots ev'ry spring; but they git lost so easy in the weeds."

"*I* know carrots," cried Janice, brightly. "Let me weed 'em," and she dropped on her knees at the beginning of the rows.

"Help yourself!" returned Marty, plying the hoe. "But it looks to me as though them carrots had just about fainted."

It looked so to Janice, too, when she managed to find the tender little plants which, coming up thickly enough in the row, now looked as livid as though grown in a cellar. The rank weeds were keeping all the sun and air from them.

"I can find them, just the same," she confided to Marty, when he came back up the next row. "And I'd better thin them, too, as I go along, hadn't I?"

"Help yourself," repeated the boy. "But pickin' 'tater bugs wouldn't be as bad as *that*, to my mind."

"Every one to his fancy,
And me to my Nancy."

as the old woman said when she kissed her cow," quoted Janice, laughing. "You can have the bugs, Marty."

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"Somebody'll have to git 'em pretty soon, or the bugs'll have the 'taters," declared her cousin. "Say! you'd ought to have somethin' besides your fingers ter scratch around them plants."

"Yes, and a pair of old gloves, Marty," agreed Janice, ruefully.

"Huh! Ain't that a girl all over? Allus have ter be waited on. I wisht you'd been a boy cousin—I jest *do*! Then we'd git these 'taters done 'fore night."

"And how about getting the carrots weeded, Marty?" she returned, laughing at him.

Marty grunted. But when he finished the second row he threw down his hoe and disappeared through the garden gate. Janice wondered if he had deserted her—and the potatoes—for the afternoon; but by and by he returned, bringing a little three-fingered hand-weeder, and tossed on the ground beside her a pair of old kid gloves—evidently his mother's.

"Oh, thank you, Marty!" cried Janice. "I don't mind working, but I hated to tear my fingers all to pieces."

"Huh!" grunted Marty. "Ain't that jest like a girl?"

Grudgingly, however, as his interest in Janice was shown, the girl appreciated the fact that Marty was warming toward her. Intermittently, as he plodded up and down the potato rows, they conversed and became better acquainted.

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"Daddy has a friend who owns a farm outside of Greensboro, and I loved to go out there," Janice ventured. "I always said I'd love to live on a farm."

"Huh!" came Marty's usual explosive grunt. "You'll git mighty tired of livin' on *this* one—I bet you!"

"Why should I? You've got horses, and cows, and chickens, and—and all that—haven't you?"

"Well, we've got a pair of nags that you can plow with. But they ain't fit for driving. Jim Courteval, who lives up the road a piece, now *he's* got some hossflesh wuth owning. But our old crowbait ain't nothing."

"Don't you love to take care of them—and brush them—and all that?" cried the girl, eagerly.

"Not much I don't! I reckon if old Sam and Lightfoot felt a currycomb once more they'd have a fit. And you ought to see our cow! Gee! Dad tried to trade her the other day for a stack of fodder, and the man wouldn't have her. He'll have ter trade her off 'sight unseen' if he ever gits rid of her. Ye see, we never *do* raise feed enough, an' she certainly come through the winter in bad shape; an' our paster fence is down in places so we can't let her get the grass."

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"Why, the poor creature!" murmured Janice. "Why don't you mend the fence, Marty, so the cow can feed in the pasture?"

"Me? Huh! I guess not," snarled Marty, starting down the potato row again. "Let the old man do it."

It was not long after this that Marty got tired of hoeing and threw down the implement altogether, to seek the shadow of the cherry tree in the fence corner.

"Why don't ye quit?" he asked Janice. "You're getting all hot and mucky. And for what? Them things will only have ter be weeded again."

Janice laughed. "I'll keep them clean as far as I can go. I won't let a lot of old weeds beat *me*."

"Huh! what's the odds?"

"Why, Marty!" she cried. "Don't you like to see 'a good task well done?'"

"Ya-as,—by somebody else," grinned that young hopeful. "Come on an' sit down, Janice."

"Haven't got time," laughed his cousin.

"Pshaw! 'Time was made for slaves'—that's what Walky Dexter says. Say! let's go up to see the Shower Bath."

"How about the potatoes?"

"Shucks! I've done a good stint, ain't I? Dad can't expect me to work all the time. An' I bet he ain't doin' a livin' thing himself but settin' down talkin' somewhere." [Pg 38]

Janice, though shaking her head silently, thought this was more than likely to be true. And Marty would not leave her in peace; so she was willing to desert the carrot patch. But she had cleaned up quite a piece of the bed and was proud of it.

Marty sauntered along by her side as they passed through the barnyard and paddock. It was plain that what Marty had said about currying the horses was quite true. The beasts' winter coats still clung to them in rags. And the poor cow!

A couple of lean shoats squealed in a pen.

"What makes them so noisy, Marty?" asked his cousin.

"I guess they're thirsty. Always squealin' about sumthin'—hogs is. More nuisance than they're worth."

"But—I s'pose if *you* wanted water, you'd squeal?" suggested Janice.

"Huh! smart, ain't ye?" growled Marty. "I'd go down ter Dickerson's an' git a drink. So'll them shoats if Dad don't mend that pen pretty soon."

It was no use to suggest that Marty might make the needed repairs; so Janice made no further comment. The trail of shiftlessness was over everything. Fences were down, doors flapped on single hinges, roofs were caved in, heaps of rubbish lay in corners, here and there broken and rusted farm implements stood where they had last been used. Neglect and Decay had marked the Day farm for their own. [Pg 39]

The fields were plowed for corn and partly worked up with the harrow. But nothing further had been done for several days past, and already the weeds were sprouting.

Most of the fences were of stone; but the pasture fence was of three strands of wire, and with a hammer and staples a good deal might have been done for it in a few brisk hours.

"Aw, what's the use?" demanded Marty. "It'd only be down again in a little while."

"But the poor cow——"

"Shucks! She's gone dry long ago. An' I'm glad of it, for Dad made me milk her."

The climb through the pasture and the woodlot above it, however, was pleasant, and when Janice heard the falling water she was delighted. This was so different from the prairie country to which she was used that she must needs express her appreciation of its loveliness again and again.

"Oh, yes," grunted Marty. "But these rocky old farms are mighty hard to work. I bet I picked up a million dornicks out o' that upper cornfield las' month. An' ye plow jest as many out o' the ground ev'ry year. Mebbe the scenery's pretty upon these here hills; but ye can't *eat* scenery, and the crops are mighty poor." [Pg 40]

Over the lip of a smoothly-worn ledge the water sprayed into a granite basin. The dimpling pool might have been knee-deep, and was as cold as ice.

"It's like that the hottest day in August," said Marty. "But it's lots more fun to go swimmin' in the lake."

It was late afternoon when they came down the hillside to the old Day house once more. Mr. Day was puttering around the stables.

"Ye didn't finish them 'taters, Marty," he complained.

"Oh, I'll do 'em to-morrer," said the boy. "It most broke my back a'ready. And did ye see all the carrots we got weeded?"

"Uh-huh," observed his father. "Lots *you* had to do with weedin' the carrots, Marty," he added, sarcastically.

When Janice went into the house the dinner dishes were still piled in the sink; yet Aunt 'Mira was already getting supper. She was still shuffling around the kitchen in her list slippers and the old calico dress.

"I declare for't!" she complained. "Seems ter me I never find time to clean myself up for an afternoon like other women folks does. There's allus so much ter do in this house. Does seem the beatenes'! An' there ain't nobody nowheres likes nice clo'es better than I do, Niece Janice. I use ter dress pretty nifty, if I do say it. But that was a long time ago, a long time ago." [Pg 41]

"No. Never mind 'em now. I'll wash the hull kit an' bilin' of 'em up after supper. No use in takin' two bites to a cherry," she added, referring to the dishes in the sink.

Janice climbed the stairs to her room, carefully stepping over the broken tread. There was water in her pitcher, and she made her simple toilet, putting on a fresh frock. Then she sat down in the rocker by the window. Every time she swung to and fro the loose rocker clicked and rattled.

The red light that heralded the departure of the sun behind the wooded hills across the lake seemed to make the room and its mismatched furnishings uglier than before. The girl turned her back upon it with almost a sob, and gazed out upon the terraced hillside and the lake, the latter already darkening. The shadows on the farther shore were heavy, but here and there a point of sudden light showed a farmhouse.

A belated bird, winging its way homeward, called shrilly. The breeze sobbed in the nearby treetops, and then died suddenly.

Such a lonely, homesick feeling possessed Janice Day as she had never imagined before! She was away off here in the East, while Daddy's train was still flying westward with him, down towards that war-ruffled Mexico. And she was obliged to stay here—in this ugly old house—with these shiftless people—

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"Oh, dear Daddy! I wish you could be here right now," the girl half sobbed. "I wish you could see this place—and the folks here! I know what *you'd* say, Daddy; I know just what you'd say about it all!"

CHAPTER V.

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'RILL SCATTERGOOD AND HER SCHOOL.

With the elasticity of Youth, however, Janice opened her eyes the following morning on a new world. Certainly the outlook from her window was glorious; therefore her faith in life itself—and in Poketown and her relatives—was renewed as she gazed out upon the beautiful picture fresh-painted by the fingers of Dawn.

All out-of-doors beckoned Janice. She hurriedly made her toilet, crept down the squeaking stairs, and softly let herself out, for nobody else was astir about the old Day house.

The promise of the morning from the window was kept in full. Janice could not walk sedately—she fairly skipped. Out of the sagging gate and up the winding lane she went, her feet twinkling over the dew-wet sod, a song on her lips, her eyes as bright as the stars which Dawn had smothered when she tiptoed over the eastern hills.

And then at a corner of a cross-lane above her uncle's house, Janice came upon the only other person in Poketown astir as early as herself—Walkworthy Dexter, who led Josephus, the heavy harness clanking about the horse's ribs.

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"Ah-ha! I see there's a new *day*," chuckled Mr. Dexter, his pale blue eyes twinkling. "And how do you find your Uncle Jase? Not what you'd call a fidgety man, eh? He ain't never stirred up about nothing, Jase Day ain't. What d'ye think?"

Janice didn't know just what *to* think—or, to say, either.

"Find Jase jest a mite leisurely, don't ye?" pursued the gossipy Dexter. "I bet a cooky he ain't much like the folks where you come from?"

"I couldn't give an opinion so soon," said Janice, shyly, not sure that she liked this fat man any more for the scorn in which he held his neighbors.

"There speaks the true Day—slow but sure," laughed Dexter, and went his way without further comment, leading the bony Josephus.

But the morning was quite spoiled for Janice. She wondered if her uncle's townfolks all held Walkworthy Dexter's opinion of the Day family? It hurt her pride to be classed with people who were so shiftless that they were a byword in the community.

She went back to the house when she saw the smoke curling out of the chimney below her. Aunt 'Mira was shuffling around the kitchen in slow preparation for the morning meal. Mr. Day was pounding on the stairs with a stick of stove-wood, in an endeavor to awaken Marty.

"That boy sleeps like the dead," he complained. "Marty! Marty!" he shouted up the stairs, "your marm is waitin' for you to git her a pail of water."

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Then he started for the stable to feed the stock, without waiting to see if his young hopeful was coming down, or not.

"I declare for't!" Aunt 'Mira sighed; "I'm allus bein' put back for water. I *do* wish Jason would mend that pump."

Janice took the empty pail quietly and departed for the neighbor's premises. It was an old-fashioned sweep-and-bucket well at the Dickerson's, but Janice managed it. The pail of water was heavy, however, and she had to change hands several times on her way up the hill. Marty came yawning to the door just as his cousin appeared.

He grinned. "You kin git up an' do that ev'ry morning, if ye want to, Janice," he said. "I won't be jealous if ye do."

"Ye'd oughter be ashamed, Marty," whined his mother, from the kitchen, "seein' a gal do yer work for ye."

"Who made it my work any more'n it's Dad's work?" growled Marty. "And she didn't have ter do it if she didn't want to."

Janice did her best to keep to a cheerful tone. "I didn't mind going, Aunty," she said. "And we'll get breakfast so much quicker. I'm hungry."

She endeavored to be cheerful and chatty at the breakfast table. But the very air her relatives breathed seemed to feed their spleen. Mr. Day insisted upon Marty's finishing the hoeing of the potatoes, and it took almost a pitched battle to get the boy started.

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Mrs. Day was inclined, after all, to "take sides" with her son against his father, so the smoke of battle was not entirely dissipated when Marty had flung himself out of the house to attack the weeds.

"Ef you'd do a few things yourself when they'd oughter be done, p'r'aps the boy'd take example of ye," said Mrs. Day, bitterly.

Her husband reached for his pipe—that never-failing comforter—and made no reply.

"Ev'rythin' about the house is goin' to rack an' ruin," pursued the lady, slopping a little water into the dishpan. "No woman never had to put up with all I hafter put up with—not even Job's wife! There! all the water's gone ag'in. I do wish you'd mend that pump, Jason."

But Jason had departed, and only a faint smell of tobacco smoke trailed him across the yard.

Janice tried to help her aunt—and that was not difficult. Almira Day was no rigid disciplinarian when it came to housekeeping. By her own confession she frequently satisfied her housewifely conscience by giving things "a lick and a promise." And anybody who would help her could make beds and "rid up" as best pleased themselves. Aunt 'Mira was no housekeeping tyrant—by no means! Consequently she did not interfere with anything her niece did about the house.

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The upstairs work was done and the sitting room brushed and set to rights much earlier than was the Day custom. When Janice had done this she came back to the kitchen, to find her aunt sitting in a creaky rocker in the middle of the unswept floor and with the dishes only half washed, deep in a cheap weekly story paper.

"Why! how smart you be, child! All done? Wa-al, ye see, I gotter wait for Jason, or Marty, to git me a pail o' water. They ain't neither of 'em been down to the house yit—an' I might's well rest now as any time."

It was this way all day long. Aunt Almira was never properly through her work. Things were always "in a clutter." She did not find time from morning till night (to hear her tell it) to "clean herself up like other wimmen."

Janice helped in the garden again; but Marty was grumpy, and as soon as the last row of potatoes was hoed he disappeared until supper time. Uncle Jason was marking a field for corn planting. A harness strap broke and he was an hour fixing it, while old Lightfoot dragged the rickety marker into the fence corner and patiently cropped the weeds. Later a neighbor leaned on the fence, and Uncle Jason gossiped for another hour.

The girl saw that none of the neighboring housewives came to call on Aunt 'Mira. In the afternoon she saw several of them exchanging calls up and down the lane; but they were in fresh print dresses and carried their needlework, or the like, in their hands, while Aunt 'Mira was still "down at the heel" and in her faded calico.

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Janice was getting very lonely and homesick. Every hour made the separation from her father seem harder to bear. And she had scarcely spoken to a soul save the Days and Walky Dexter since her arrival in Poketown. Friday noon came, and at dinner Janice desperately broached the subject of 'Rill Scattergood's school again.

"I'd love to visit it," she said. "Maybe I'd get acquainted with some of the girls. I might even attend for the remainder of the term."

"Huh!" scoffed Marty. "That old maid can't teach ye nothin'."

"But it would be something to *do*," exclaimed Janice, with vigor.

"My goodness me, child!" drawled Aunt Almira. "Can't you be content to jest let things go along easy?"

"Yer must want sumthin' ter do mighty bad, ter want ter go ter 'Rill Scattergood's school," was again Marty's scornful comment.

"Just the same I'm going," declared Janice. "It's not far, is it?"

"Right up at the edge of town," said her uncle. "They built it there ter git the young'uns out o' the way. Hard on some of 'em in bad weather, it's sech a long walk. Some o' these here flighty folks has been talkin' up a new buildin' an' a new teacher; but taxes is high enough as they be, I tell 'em!"

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"Rill Scattergood ain't no sort er teacher," said Mrs. Day. "She didn't have no sort er control over Marty."

"Huh!" grunted that young man, "she couldn't teach nothin' ter nobody—that ol' maid."

"But 'most of the girls and boys of Poketown go to school to her, don't they?" asked Janice.

"Them whose folks can't send 'em to the Middleboro Academy," admitted her aunt.

"Then I'm going up to get acquainted after dinner," announced Janice. "I—I had so many friends in Greensboro—so many, many girls at school—and some of the boys were real nice—and the teachers—and other folks. Oh, dear! I expect it's Daddy I miss most of all, and if I don't pretty soon find something to *do*—something to take a real interest in—I'll never be able to stand having him 'way down there in Mexico and me up here, not knowing what's happening to him!"

The girl's voice broke and the tears stood in her eyes. Her earnestness made even Marty silent for the moment. Aunt Almira leaned over and patted her hand.

"You go on to the school, if ye think ye got to. I'd go with ye an' introduce ye ter 'Rill Scattergood if I didn't have so much to do. It does seem as though I allus was behindhand with my work." [Pg 50]

A little later, when Janice, in her neat summer frock and beribboned shade-hat, passed down Hillside Avenue, she was conscious of a good many people staring at her—more now than when she had come up the hill with her uncle several days before.

Here and there some attempts had been made to grow flowers in the yards, or to keep neat borders and rake the walks. But for the most part Hillside Avenue displayed a forlorn nakedness to the eye that made Janice more than ever homesick for Greensboro.

The schoolbell had ceased ringing before she turned into High Street and began to ascend the hill again, so there were no young folks in sight.

Higher up the main street of Poketown there were few stores, but the dwellings were no more attractive. Nobody seemed to take any pride in this naturally beautiful old town.

Janice realized that she was a mark for all idle eyes. Strangers were not plentiful in Poketown.

She came at length in sight of the school. It was set in the middle of a square, ugly, unfenced yard, without a tree before it or a blooming bush or vine against its dull red walls. The sun beat upon it hotly, and it did seem as though the builders must have intended to make school as hateful as possible to the girls and boys who attended. [Pg 51]

The windows and doors were open, and a hum came from within like that of a swarming hive of bees. Janice went quietly to the nearest door, mounted the steps, and looked in.

She had by chance come to the girls' entrance. The scholars' backs were toward her and Janice could look her fill without being observed.

There was a small class reciting before the teacher's desk—droning away in a sleepy fashion. The older scholars, sitting in the rear of the room, were mainly busy about their own private affairs; few seemed to be conning their lessons.

Several girls were busily braiding the plaits of the girls in front of them. Two, with very red faces and sparkling eyes, were undeniably quarreling, and whispering bitter denunciations of each other, to the amusement of their immediate neighbors. One girl had a bag of candy which she was circulating among her particular friends. Another had raised the covers of her geography like a screen, and was busily engaged in writing a letter behind it, on robin's-egg-blue paper.

At the far end of the room the teacher, Miss Scattergood, sat at her flat-topped desk. "That old maid," as Marty had called her, was not at all the sort of a person—in appearance, at least—that Janice expected her to be. Somehow, a spinster lady who had taught school—and such a school as Poketown's—for twenty years, should have fitted the well-known specifications of the old-time "New England schoolmarm." But Amarilla Scattergood did not. [Pg 52]

She was a little, light-haired, pink-cheeked lady, with more than a few claims to personal attractiveness yet left. She had her mother's birdlike tilt to her head when she spoke, her eyes were still bright, and her complexion good.

These facts were visible to Janice even from the doorway.

When she knocked lightly upon the door-frame, Miss Scattergood looked up and saw her. A little hush fell upon the school, too, and Janice was aware that both girls and boys were turning about in their seats to look at her.

"Come in," said Miss Scattergood. "Scholars, attention! Eyes forward!"

She might as well have spoken to the wind that breathed at the open window and fluttered the papers upon her desk. The older scholars paid the little school-mistress no attention whatsoever.

Janice felt some little confusion in passing down the aisle, knowing herself to be the center of all eyes. Miss Scattergood dismissed the class before her briefly, and offered Janice a chair on the platform.

"I guess you're Jason Day's niece," said the teacher, pleasantly, taking her visitor's hand. "Mother was telling me about you." [Pg 53]

"Yes, Miss Scattergood," Janice replied. "I am Janice Day, and when you have time I'd love to have you examine me and see where I belong in your school."

"You—you are too far advanced for our school," said the little teacher, with some hesitation and a flush that was almost painful. "Especially if you came from a place where the schools are graded as in the city."

"Greensboro has good schools," Janice said. "I was in my junior year at high."

"Oh, dear me!" Miss Scattergood cried, hastily. "We don't have any such system here, of course. The committee doesn't demand it of me. I have to teach the little folks as well as the big. We go as far as our books go—that is all."

She placed several text-books before Janice. It was plain that she was not a little afraid of her visitor, for Janice was much different from the staring, "pig-tailed" misses occupying the back seats of the Poketown school.

Janice was hungry for young companionship, and she liked little Miss Scattergood, despite the uncontradicted fact that "she didn't have no way with her."

While she conned the text-books the school-mistress had placed before her, Janice watched proceedings with interest. She had never even heard of an ungraded country school before, much less seen one. The older pupils, both girls and boys, seemed to be a law unto themselves; Miss Scattergood had little control over them. [Pg 54]

The teacher called another class of younger scholars. This class practically took all of her attention and she did not observe the four boys who carried on a warfare with "snappers" and "spitballs" in the back seats; of the predatory campaign of the lanky, white-haired youth who slid from seat to seat of the smaller boys, capturing tops, marbles, and other small possessions dear to childish hearts, threatening by gesture and writhing lips a "slaughter of the innocents" if one of them dared "tell teacher."

Few of the older boys were studying, and none of the bigger girls. The latter were too much interested in Janice. Looking them over, there was not one of these Poketown girls to whom Janice felt herself attracted. Some of them giggled as they caught her eye; others whispered together with the visitor as the evident subject of their secret observations; and one girl, seeing that Janice was looking at her, actually stuck out her tongue—a pink flag of scorn and defiance!

Janice believed that in English, history and mathematics she might improve by reciting with Miss Scattergood's classes, and she told the little teacher so. [Pg 55]

"You'll be welcome, I'm sure," said the school-mistress, nervously. "Are you coming Monday? That's nice," and she shook hands with her as the visitor arose.

Janice passed down the girls' aisle again, trying to pick out at least one of the occupants of the old-fashioned benches who would look as though she might be chummy and nice; but there was not one.

"Dear me—dear me!" murmured Janice, when she was outside and stood a moment to look back at the ugly, red schoolhouse. "It—'it jest rattles'—*that's* what it does; like everything about Uncle Jason's, and like everything about the whole town. That school swings on one hinge like the gates on Hillside Avenue.

"Oh, dear me! Poketown is just dreadful—it's dreadful!"

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 56]

AN AFTERNOON OF ADVENTURE

The late spring air, however, was delicious. The trees rustled pleasantly. The bees hummed and the birds twittered, and altogether there were a hundred things to charm Janice into extending her walk. Down at the foot of a side street a bit of water gleamed like a huge turquoise. There seemed to be no dwellings at the foot of this street, and Janice, with the whole afternoon before her, felt the tingle of exploration in her blood.

Just off High Street was another store. It was in a low-roofed building shouldering upon the highway, with a two-story cottage attachment at the back. Two huge trees overshadowed the place and lent a deep, cool shade to the shaky porch; but the trees made the store appear very gloomy within.

Of all the shops Janice had observed in Poketown it seemed that this little store was the most neglected and woeful looking. Its two show windows were a lacework of dust and flyspecks. In the upper corners were ragged spider webs; and in one web lay a gorged spider, too well fed to pounce on the blue-bottle fly buzzing in the toils within easy pouncing distance! Only glimpses of [Pg 57]

a higgledy-piggledy of assorted wares were to be caught behind the panes. Across the front of the building was a faded sign reading:

HOPEWELL DRUGG
GROCERIES AND DRY GOODS

Nothing about the shop itself would have held Janice Day's attention even for a moment; but from within (the front door stood ajar) came the wailing notes of a violin, the uncertain bow of the performer seeking out the notes of "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

Yet, with all its uncertainty, the fiddler's touch groped for the beauty and pathos of the chords:

"Darling, I am growing old,
Silver threads among the gold."

Janice heard the haunting sweetness of the tune all the way down the shaded lane and she wondered who the player might be.

There was a deep, grass-grown ditch on one side—evidently an open drain to carry the overflow of water from High Street. As the drain deepened toward the bottom of the hill, posts had been set and rails laid on top of them to defend vehicles from pitching into the ditch in the dark. But many of the rails had now rotted and fallen to the sod, or the nails had rusted and drawn out, leaving the barrier "jest rattling."

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From a side road there suddenly trotted a piebald pony, drawing a low, basket phaeton, in which sat two prim, little, old ladies, a fat one and a lean one. Despite the difference in their avoirdupois the two old ladies showed themselves to be what they were—sisters.

The thin one was driving the piebald pony. "Gidap, Ginger!" she announced, flapping the reins.

She had better have refrained from waking up Ginger just at that moment. A fickle breath of wind pounced upon an outspread newspaper lying on the grass, fluttered it for a moment, and then, getting fairly under the printed sheet, heaved it into the air.

Ginger caught a glimpse of the fluttering paper. He halted suddenly, with all four feet braced and ears forward, fairly snorting his surprise. As the paper began flopping across the road, he began to back. The whites of his eyes showed plainly and he snorted again. The wind-shaken paper utterly dissipated the pony's corn-fed complacency.

"Oh! Oh! Gidap!" shrieked the thin old lady.

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"He—he's backin' us into the ditch, Pussy," cried her sister.

"I—I can't help it, Blossom," gasped the driver of the frightened pony.

The phaeton really was getting perilously near the edge of the undefended ditch, when Janice ran out beside the pony's head, clutched at his bridle, and halted him in his mad career. The paper dropped into the ditch and lay still, and the pony began to nuzzle Janice's hand.

"Isn't he just cunning!" gasped the girl, turning to look at the two little old ladies.

From a nearby house appeared a lath-like man, who strode out to the road, grinning broadly.

"Hi tunket! Ye did come purty nigh backin' into the ditch *that* time, gals," he cackled. "All right now, ain't ye? That there leetle gal is some s pry. Ginger ain't shown so much sperit since b'fore Adam!"

"Now, I tell ye, Mr. Cross Moore," declared the driver of the pony, sharply, "we came very near having a serious accident. And all because these rails aren't repaired. You're one of the *select*-men and you'd oughter have sense enough to repair that railin'. Wait till somebody drives plump into the ditch and the town has a big damage bill to pay."

"Aw, now, there ain't many folks drives this way," defended Mr. Cross Moore.

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"There's enough. And think o' Hopewell Drugg's Lottie. She's always running up and down this lane. Somebody's goin' to pitch head-fust inter that ditch yet, Cross Moore, an' then you'll be sorry."

She was a very vigorous-speaking old lady, that was sure. The sister by her side was of much milder temperament, and she was thanking Janice very sweetly while the other scolded Selectman Moore.

"We thank you very much, my dear. You are much braver than *I* am, for I'm free to confess I'm afraid of all cattle," said the plump old lady, in a somewhat shaken voice. "Who are you, my dear? I don't remember seeing you before."

"I am Janice Day, Ma'am."

"Day? You belong here in Poketown? There's Days live on Hillside Avenue."

"Yes, Ma'am," confessed Janice. "Mr. Jason Day is my uncle. But I am Broxton Day's daughter."

"Why, do tell!" cried the plump little old lady, who had pink cheeks and the very warmest of

warm smiles, as she looked into the girl's hazel eyes. "See here, Pussy," she cried to her sister. "Do you know who this little girl turns out to be? She's Brocky Day's girl. Surely you remember Brocky Day?"

But "Pussy" was still haranguing the town selectman upon his crimes of omission and could not give her attention to Janice. [Pg 61]

"Anyhow, dear, won't you come and see us? Pussy's disturbed a mite now; but she'll love to have you come, too. We live just a little way out o' town—anybody can tell you where the Hammett Twins live," said this full-blown "Blossom." "Yes. My sister an' I are twins. And we're fond of young folks and like to have 'em 'round us. There! Ginger's all right, Pussy. We can drive on."

"You'd oughter fix them rails, Cross Moore," repeated the lean sister, as the old pony started placidly up the hill again.

Mr. Moore languidly squinted along the staggering barrier. "Wa-al—I reckon I will—one o' these days," he said.

He grinned in a friendly way at Janice as she started on. "Them Hammett gals is reg'lar fuss-bugets," he observed. "But they're nice folks. So you're Broxton Day's gal? I heard you'd arove. How do you like Poketown?"

"I don't know it well enough to say yet, Mr. Moore," returned Janice, bashfully, as she went down the hill.

There were no more houses, but great, sweeping-limbed willow trees shaded the lower range of the hill. She came out, quite suddenly, upon a little open lawn which edged the lake itself. Here an old dock stuck its ugly length out into the water—a dock the timbers of which were blackened as though by a fire, and the floor-boards of which had mostly been removed. There was but a narrow path out to the end of the wharf. [Pg 62]

Between the wharf and the opposite side of this little bay was a piece of perfectly smooth water; the softly breathing wind did not ruffle the bay at all. The long arm of the shore that was thrust out into the lake was heavily wooded. Rows of dark, almost black, northern spruce stood shouldering each other on that farther shore, making a perfect wall of verdure. Their deep shadow was already beginning to creep across the water toward the old wharf.

"What a quiet spot!" exclaimed Janice, aloud.

"'Tet spot!'" breathed the echo from the opposite shore.

"Why! it's an echo!" cried the startled Janice.

"'An echo!'" repeated the sprite, in instant imitation of her tone.

It was then that Janice saw the little girl upon the old wharf. At first she seemed just a blotch of color upon the old burned timbers. Then the startled visitor realized that the gaily-hued frock, and sash, and bonnet, garbed a little girl of perhaps eight or nine years.

Janice could not see her face. When she rose up from where she had been sitting and went along the shaking stringpiece of the dock, her back was still toward the shore. [Pg 63]

Yet her gait—the groping of one hand before her—all the uncertainty and questioning of her attitude—shot the spectator through with alarm. The child was blind! More than this, her unguided feet were leading her directly to the abrupt end of the half ruined wharf!

CHAPTER VII

[Pg 64]

THE LITTLE GIRL WHO LOST THE ECHO

Shocked by the discovery of the child's misfortune, Janice scarcely appreciated at first the peril that menaced the blind girl. It was a mystery how her unguided feet had brought her so far along the wharf-beam without catastrophe. But there—just ahead—was the end of the half-ruined framework. A few more steps and the groping feet would be over the water.

With a sudden, stifled cry, Janice darted forward. At that moment the child halted; but she gave no sign that she was aware of Janice Day's presence. The child faced the not far-distant line of thickly-ranked spruce upon the opposite shore of the little inlet, and from her parted lips there issued a strange, wailing cry:

"He-a! he-a! he-a!" she repeated, three times; and back into her face was flung the mocking laughter of the echo.

Janice had stopped again—held spellbound by wonder and curiosity. The little girl stood in a listening attitude. [Pg 65]

"He-a! he-a! he-a!" she cried again.

The obedient echo repeated the cry; but did the blind girl hear it? She seemed still to be

listening. Janice crept on along the broken wharf, her hand outstretched, her heart beating in her throat.

The child ventured another step, and, indeed, she stamped upon the beam. "He-a! he-a! he-a!" she wailed again—a thin, shrill, unchildlike sound that made Janice shudder.

The cry was almost one of anger, surely that stamping of her foot denoted vexation. Janice could see the profile of the child's face, a sweet, wistful countenance. Her lips moved once more and, in a thin, flat voice, she murmured over and over again: "I have lost it! I have lost it!"

Janice spoke, her own voice shaking: "My dear! do you know it is dangerous here?"

Her hand reached to clutch the child's arm if she was startled. A little misstep would send the blind girl over the edge of the wharf. But it was Janice who was startled!

The child gave her not the least attention—she did not hear. Blind and deaf, and alone upon the shaking, broken timbers of this old wharf!

She raised her wailing cry again, and then listened for the echo that she could no longer hear. The older girl's hand was stayed. She dared not seize the child, for they were both in a precarious place and if the little one was frightened and tried to wrench away from her, Janice feared that they might both fall into the lake. [Pg 66]

But the girl from Greensboro thought quickly; and this was an emergency when quick thought was needed. She remembered having read that blind people are very susceptible to any vibration or jar. She herself stamped upon the old wharf-beam, and instantly the child turned toward her.

"Who is it?" asked the little girl, in a flat, keyless tone.

"You don't know me, my dear," Janice said, instinctively; then, remembering the blind eyes as well as the deaf ears, she drew quite close to the child and gently took her hand.

The child responded and touched Janice lightly, gropingly. The latter could see her eyes now—deep, violet eyes, the appearance of which belied the fact that the light had gone from them. They were neither dull-looking nor with a film drawn over them. It was very hard indeed to believe that the little girl was sightless.

She was flaxen-haired, pink-cheeked, and not too slender. Yet Janice could not say that she was pretty. Indeed the impression the afflicted child made upon one was quite the reverse.

The little hand crept up Janice's arm to her shoulder, touched her hair and neck lightly, and then the slender fingers passed over the older girl's face. She did this swiftly, while Janice took her other hand and with a soft, urgent pressure tried to draw her along. [Pg 67]

But although she seemed so sweet and amenable, Janice did not breathe freely until they were both off the old wharf. Then she demanded, quickly:

"Do they let you come here alone? Where do you live?"

The little girl did not answer; of course she did not hear. She was still looking back toward the tall wall of spruce across the inlet, from which the sharp echo was flung.

"He-a! he-a! he-a!" she wailed again, and the echo sent back the cry; but the little girl shook her head.

"I have lost it! And I don't hear what *you* say—do I? You can speak, can't you?"

Janice squeezed her hand quickly, and the child seemed to accept it as an affirmative reply.

"But, you see, I don't hear you," she continued, in that strange, flat voice. Janice suddenly realized that hearing had much to do with the use of the vocal cords. It is because we can hear ourselves speak that we attune our voices to pleasant sounds. This unfortunate child had no appreciation of the tones that issued from her lips.

"I used to hear," said the afflicted one. "And I could see, too. Oh, yes! I haven't forgotten how things look. You know, I'm Lottie Drugg. I can find my way about. But—but I've lost the echo. I used to hear *that* always. I'd run down there to the wharf and shout to the echo, and it would answer me. But now I've lost it." [Pg 68]

Janice squeezed the little hand again. She found herself weeping, and yet the child did not complain. But it was plainly an effort for her to speak. Like most victims of complete deafness, it would not be long before she would be speechless, too. She "mouthed" her words in a pitiful way.

Blind—deaf—approaching dumbness! The thought made Janice suddenly seize the child in her arms and hug her, tight.

"Do you love me?" questioned Lottie Drugg, returning the embrace. "I wish I could hear you. But I can't hear father any more—nor his fiddle; only when he makes it quiver. Then I know it's crying. Did you know a fiddle could cry? You come home with me. Father will play the fiddle for you, and *you* can hear it."

Janice did not know how to reply. There was so much she wished to say to this poor little thing! But her quick mind jumped to the conclusion that the child belonged to the person whom she had

heard playing the violin as she came down from High Street—the unknown musician in the store above the door of which was the faded sign of "Hopewell Drugg."

She squeezed the little girl's hand again and it seemed to suffice.

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"I know the way. My feet are in the path now," said little Lottie, scuffling her slipper-shod feet about on the narrow footpath. "Yes! I know the way now. The sun is behind us. Come," and she put forth her hand, caught Janice's again, and urged her along the bank of the lake to the foot of the lane down which the girl from Greensboro had wandered.

Up the hill they went, Janice marveling that Lottie could be so confident of the way. She seldom hesitated, and Janice allowed herself to be led. Mr. Cross Moore was still smoking his pipe out in front of his house.

"I calkerlate that child's goin' to be drowned-ed some day," he said calmly, to Janice. "Jest a marcy that she ain't done it afore now. An' Hopewell—Huh! him sittin' up there fiddlin'—"

It seemed to Janice as though a spirit of criticism had entered into all the Poketownites. There was Walky Dexter scoffing at her Uncle Jason; and here was Selectman Moore criticising the father of little Lottie. Yet neither critic, as far as Janice could see, set much of an example for his townsmen to follow!

Lottie, with her hand in the bigger girl's, tripped along the walk as confidently as though she had her eyesight. She was an affectionate little thing, and she "snuggled" closely to Janice, occasionally touching her new friend's face and lips with her free hand.

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"I guess I love you," she said, in her strange, little, flat voice. "You come in and see father. We are most there. Here is Mis' Robbins' gate. I used to see her flowers. Her yard's full of them, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Janice, fighting her inclination to burst into tears. "Oh, yes, dear! beautiful flowers." She pressed the hand tightly.

"I can smell 'em," said the child, snuffing with her nose like a dog. "And now here is the shade of our big trees. It's darker and cooler under these trees than anywhere else on the street. Isn't it?"

Janice agreed by pressing her hand again, and little Lottie laughed—such a shrill, eyrie little laugh! They were before the gloomy-looking store of Hopewell Drugg. The wailing of the fiddle floated out upon the warm afternoon air.

The blind girl tripped up the steps of the porch and in at the open door. "Silver Threads Among the Gold" came to a sharp conclusion.

"Merciful goodness!" croaked a frightened voice. "I thought you was asleep in your bed, Lottie."

Janice had followed the little girl to the doorway. She saw but dimly the store itself and the shelves of dusty merchandise. From the back room where he had been sitting with his violin, a gray, thin, dusty-looking man came quickly and seized Lottie in his arms.

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"Child! child! how you frighten me!" he murmured. Then he looked over the little girl's head and blinked through his spectacles at Janice in the doorway.

"I'm certainly obliged to ye," he said. "She—she gets away from the house and I don't know it. I—I can't watch her all the time and she ain't got no mother, Miss. I certainly am obliged to ye for bringing her home."

"She was down on the old wharf at the foot of the street, trying to wake the echo from the woods across the inlet," said Janice, gravely.

The gray man hugged his daughter tightly, and his eyes blinked like an owl's in strong daylight, as he peered through his spectacles at Janice. "She—she loved to go there—always," he murmured. "I go with her Sundays—and when the store is closed. But she is so quick—in a flash she is out of my sight."

"Can—can nothing be done for her?" questioned Janice, in a whisper.

"She cannot hear you—now," said Hopewell Drugg, gloomily, shaking his head. "And the doctors here tell me she is almost sure to be dumb, too. If I could only get her to Boston! There's a school for such as her, there, and specialists, and all. But it would cost a pile of money."

"You play the fiddle, father," commanded little Lottie. "And make it quiver—make it cry, father! Then I can hear it."

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He set her down carefully, still shaking his head. Her strange little voice kept repeating: "Play for her, father! Play for her, father!"

Hopewell Drugg picked up the violin and bow from the end of the counter. He leaned against the counter and tucked the violin under his chin. There was only a brown light in the dusky store, and the dust danced in the single band of sunlight that searched out a knot hole in the wall of the back room—the shed between the store proper and the cottage in the rear.

"Darling, I am growing old,
Silver threads among the gold—"

The old violin wailed out the tune haltingly. The deaf and blind child caught the tremulo of the final notes, and she danced up and down and clapped her little hands.

"I can hear that! I can hear that!" she muttered, her lips writhing to form the sounds.

Janice felt the tears suddenly blinding her. "I'll come back and see you again—indeed I will!" she said, brokenly, and hugging and kissing little Lottie impetuously, she released her and ran out of the ugly, dark little store.

It is doubtful if Hopewell Drugg even heard her. The violin was still wailing away, while he searched out slowly the minor notes of the old, old song.



The old violin wailed out the tune haltingly.

CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 73]

A BIT OF ROMANCE

"Hopewell Drugg? Ya-as," drawled Aunt Almira. "He keeps store 'crosstown. He's had bad luck, Hopewell has. His wife's dead—she didn't live long after Lottie was born; and Lottie—poor child!—must be eight or nine year old."

"Poor little thing!" sighed Janice, who had come home to find her aunt just beginning her desultory preparations for supper, and had turned in to help. "It is so pitiful to see and hear her. Does she live all alone there with her father?"

"I reckon Hopewell don't do business enough so's he could hire a housekeeper. They tell me he an' the child live in a reg'lar mess! Ain't fittin' for a man to keep house by hisself, nohow; and of course Lottie can't do much of nothing."

"Is he an old man?" queried Janice. "I couldn't see his face very well."

"Lawdy! he ain't what you'd call old—no," said Aunt 'Mira. "Now, let me see; he married 'Cinda Stone when he warn't yit thirty. There was some talk of him an' 'Rill Scattergood bein' sweet on each other onc't; but that was twenty year ago, I do b'lieve."

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"Howsomever, if there *was* anythin' betwixt Hopewell and 'Rill, I reckon her mother broke up the match. Mis' Scattergood never had no use for them Druggs. She said they was dreamers and never did amount to nothin'. Mis' Scattergood's allus been re'l masterful."

Janice nodded. She could imagine that the birdlike old lady she had met on the boat could be

quite assertive if she so chose.

"Anyhow," said Aunt 'Mira, reflectively, "Hopewell stopped shinin' about 'Rill all of a sudden. That was the time Mis' Scattergood was widdered an' come over here from Middletown to live with 'Rill.

"I declare for't! 'Rill warn't sech an old maid then. She was right purty, if she *had* been teachin' school some time. Th' young men use ter buzz around her in them days.

"But when she broke off with Hopewell, she broke off with all. Hopewell was spleeny about it—ya-as, indeed, he was. He soon took up with 'Cinda—jest as though 'twas out o' spite. Anyhow, 'fore any of us knowed it, they'd gone over to Middletown an' got married.

"Cinda Stone was a right weakly sort o' critter. Of course Hopewell was good to her," pursued Aunt 'Mira. "Hopewell Drugg is as mild as dishwater, anyhow. He'd be perlite to a stray cat." [Pg 75]

Janice was interested—she could not help being. Miss Scattergood, it seemed to her, was a pathetic figure; and the girl from Greensboro was just at an age to appreciate a bit of romance. The gray, dusty man in the dark, little store, playing his fiddle to the child that could only hear the quivering minor tones of it, held a place in Janice's thought, too.

"What do you do Saturday mornings, Marty?" asked the visitor, at the breakfast table. Janice had already been to the Shower Bath and back, and the thrill of the early day was in her veins. Only a wolfish appetite had driven her indoors when she smelled the pork frying.

Marty was just lounging to his seat,—he was almost always late to breakfast,—and he shut off a mighty yawn to reply to his cousin:

"Jest as near like I please as kin be."

"Saturday afternoon, where I came from, is sort of a holiday; but Saturday morning everybody tries to make things nice about the yard—fix flower-beds, rake the yard, make the paths nice, and all that."

"Huh!" grunted Marty. "That's work."

"No, it isn't. It's fun," declared Janice, brightly.

"What's the good?" demanded the boy.

"Why, the folks in Greensboro vie with each other to see who shall have the best-looking yard. Your mother hasn't many flowers——" [Pg 76]

"Them dratted hens scratch up all the flowers I plant," sighed Aunt 'Mira. "I give up all hopes of havin' posies till Jason mends the henyard fence."

"Now you say yourself the hens only lay when they're rangin' around, 'Mira," observed Uncle Jason, mildly.

"Ya-as. They lay," admitted Aunt 'Mira. "But I don't git more'n ha'f of what they lay. They steal their nests so. Ol' Speckle brought off a brood only yesterday. I'd been wonderin' where that hen was layin' for a month."

"But, anyway, we can rake the yard and trim the edges of the walk," Janice said to Marty.

"Ya-as, we kin," admitted Marty, grinning. "But will we?"

Janice, however, never lost her temper with this hobbledehoy cousin. Marty could be coaxed, if not driven. After breakfast she urged him out to the shed, and they overhauled the conglomeration of rusted and decrepit hand tools, which had been gathered by Uncle Jason during forty years of desultory farming.

"Here're three rakes," said Marty. "All of 'em have lost teeth, an'—Hi tunket! that one's got a broken handle."

"But there are two which are usable," laughed Janice. "Come on, Marty. Let's rake the front yard all over. You know it will please your mother. And then you can tote the rubbish away in the wheelbarrow while I trim the edges of the front walk." [Pg 77]

"Huh! we don't never use that front walk. Nobody ever comes to our front door," said Marty.

"And there's a nice wide porch there to sit on pleasant evenings, too," cried Janice.

"Huh!" came Marty's famous snort of derision. "The roof leaks like a sieve and the floor boards is rotted. Las' time the parson came to call he broke through the floor an' come near sprainin' his ankle."

"But I thought Uncle Jason was a carpenter, too?" murmured Janice, hesitatingly.

"Well! didn't ye know that carpenters' roofs are always leakin' an' that shoemakers' wives go barefoot?" chuckled Marty. "Dad says he'll git 'round to these chores sometime. Huh!"

Nevertheless, Marty set to work with his cousin, and that Saturday morning the premises about the old Day house saw such a cleaning up as had not happened within the memory of the oldest inhabitant along Hillside Avenue. There was a good sod of grass under the rubbish. The lawn had

been laid down years and years before, and the grass was rooted well and the mould was rich and deep. All the old place wanted was a "chance," for it to become very pretty and homelike.

Marty, however, declared himself "worked to a frazzle" and he disappeared immediately after the noon meal, for fear Janice would find something more for him to do. [Pg 78]

"Wal, child, it does look nice," admitted Aunt Almira, coming to view the front yard. "And you *do* have a way with Marty."

"Just the same," giggled Janice, "he doesn't like girls."

"Sho, child! he doesn't know *what* he likes—a boy like him," returned her aunt.

Sunday was a rainy day, and Janice felt her spirits falling again. It really rained too hard at church time for her to venture out; but she saw that her relatives seldom put themselves out to attend church, anyway. Walky Dexter appeared in an oilskin-covered cart, drawn by Josephus (who actually looked water-soaked and dripped from every angle), delivering the Sunday papers, which came up from the city. The family gave up most of their time all day to the gaudy magazine supplements and the so-called "funny sections" which were a part of these sheets.

Janice finally retired to her depressing bedroom and wrote a long letter to her father which she tried to make cheerful, but into which crept a note of loneliness and disappointment. It wasn't just like talking to Daddy himself; but it seemed to help some.

It enabled her, too, to write shorter letters to friends back in Greensboro and she managed to hide from them much of her homesickness. She could write of the beauty of Poketown itself; for it was beautiful. It was only the people who were so—well! so *different*. [Pg 79]

Janice welcomed Monday morning. Although she had nearly completed her junior year at the Greensboro High School, and knew that she would not gain much help from Miss Scattergood, the girl loved study and she hoped that the Poketown girls would prove to be better companions than they had appeared when she had visited the school.

So she started for the old red schoolhouse in quite a cheerful frame of mind, in spite of Marty's prophecy that "she'd soon git sick o' that old maid." It was not Miss Scattergood that Janice had reason to be "sick of!" The stranger in Poketown had to admit before the day was over that she had never in her life dreamed of such ill-bred girls as some of these who occupied the back seats in 'Rill Scattergood's school.

They had no respect for the little school-teacher, and had Miss Scattergood taken note of all their follies she must have been in a pitched battle with her older pupils all the time. Some of these ill-behaved girls were older than Janice by many months; and they plainly did not come to school to study or to learn. They passed notes back and forth to some of the older boys all day long; when Miss Scattergood called on them to recite, if they did not feel just like it, they refused to obey; and of course their example was bad for the smaller children. [Pg 80]

Janice had determined to join such classes as were anywhere near her grade in her old school. But when she arose to accompany one class to the line in front of the teacher's desk, the girls who had started giggled and ran back to their seats, leaving the new pupil standing alone, with blazing cheeks, before Miss Scattergood. They would not recite with her. At recess when Miss Scattergood tried to introduce Janice to some of the girls, there were but a few who met her in a ladylike manner.

They seemed to think Janice must be stuck up and proud because she had come from another town. One girl—Sally Black—tripped forward in a most affected style, gave Janice a "high handshake," saying "How-do! chawmed ter meet yuh, doncher know!" and the other girls went off into gales of laughter as though Sally was really excruciatingly funny.

Janice was hurt, but she tried not to show it. Miss Scattergood was very much annoyed, and her eyes sparkled behind her glasses, as she said, sharply:

"I really did hope you girls could be polite and kind to a stranger who comes to your school. I am ashamed of you!"

"Don't let it bother you, Scatty," returned the impudent Sally. "We don't want anything to do with your pet," and she tossed her head, looked scornfully at Janice, and walked away with her abettors. [Pg 81]

"I never did take ter them Blacks," declared Aunt Almira, when Janice related to her the unpleasant experience she had suffered at school, on her return that afternoon. "And Sally's mother, who was a Garrity, came of right common stock.

"Ye see, child," added Mrs. Day, with a sigh, "I expect ye won't find many of the children that go ter that school much ter your likin'. 'Rill Scattergood ain't got no way with her, as I sez before; an' folks that can afford it have got in the habit o' sendin' their young'uns over to Middletown School. Walky Dexter takes 'em in a party waggin, and brings 'em back at night."

"But there must be some nice girls in Poketown!" cried Janice.

"Ya-as—I guess there be. But wait till I kin git around an' interduce ye to 'em."

This promise, however, offered Janice Day but sorry comfort. If she waited for Aunt Almira to

take her about she certainly *would* die of homesickness!

But she refused to be driven out of the Poketown School by the unkindness and discourtesy of the larger girls. Her unpopularity, however, made her respond the more quickly to 'Rill Scattergood's advances.

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The school-teacher showed plainly that she appreciated Janice's friendliness. Janice brought her luncheon and ate it with the teacher. They walked down High Street together after school, and on Friday the pretty little school-mistress invited the new girl home for tea.

"Mother wants to see you again. Mother's took quite a fancy to you, Janice—and that's a fact," said Miss 'Rill.

"Of course, we're only boarding; but Mrs. Beasely—she's a widow lady—makes it very homey for us. If mother stays we're going to housekeeping ourselves. And I believe I *shall* give up teaching school. I'm really tired of it."

Janice gladly accepted the invitation, and she bribed one of the youngsters with a nickel to run around to Hillside Avenue and tell Aunt Almira where she was.

Miss 'Rill's boarding place was on the same side street where was located Hopewell Drugg's store. Janice had thought often of poor little Lottie and her father during this week; but as they neared the store and she heard the wailing notes of the man's violin again, she felt a little diffident about broaching the subject of the storekeeper and his child to the school-mistress. It was Miss Scattergood herself who opened the matter.

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She half halted and held up her hand for silence, as she listened to "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

"That's a dreadful pretty tune, I think," she said. "It used to be awful pop'lar when—when I came here to Poketown to teach school."

"Mr. Drugg likes it, I guess," said Janice, lightly. "I've heard him play it before."

"Have you?" queried Miss 'Rill, with that little birdlike tilt of her head. "So you know Mr. Drugg—and poor little Lottie?"

"I've met them both—once," admitted the girl.

"Ah! then you know how little Lottie is to be pitied?"

"And isn't he to be pitied, too?" Janice could not help but ask.

Miss 'Rill blushed—such a becoming blush as it was, too! She answered honestly: "I think so. Poor Hopewell! And I think he plays the fiddle real sweet, too."

"But don't say anything before mother about him. Mr. Drugg's never been one of ma's favorites," added the teacher, earnestly.

CHAPTER IX.

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TEA, AND A TALK WITH DADDY

As it chanced, it was old Mrs. Scattergood herself who broached the forbidden topic, almost as soon as Miss 'Rill and Janice were in the house.

"What do you suppose that great gump, Hopewell Drugg, let his young'un do to-day, 'Rill? I was tellin' Miz' Beasely that it did seem to be *one* mistake that Providence must ha' made, ter let that Drugg an' 'Cinda Stone have a gal baby—'specially if 'Cinda was goin' ter up and die like she done and leave the young'un to his care. Seems a shame, too."

"Why, mother! That doesn't sound a bit reverent," objected Miss 'Rill, softly. "Nor kind."

"Pshaw!" snorted the old lady. "You allus was silly as a goose about that Drugg. Sech shiftlessness I never did see. There the young'un was, out in a white dress an' white kid shoes this mornin'—her best, Sunday-go-ter-meetin' clo'es, I'll be bound!—sittin' on the aidge o' that gutter over there, makin' a mud dam! Lucky yesterday's rain has run off now, or she'd be out there yet, paddlin' in the water."

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"I don't s'pose Hopewell knew of it," said the younger woman, timidly. "The poor little thing can dress herself, blind as she is. It's quite wonderful how she gets about."

"She ain't got no business to be out of his sight," grumbled Mrs. Scattergood.

Miss 'Rill sighed and shook her head, looking at Janice with a little nod of understanding. She changed the subject of talk quickly. The old lady began at once on Janice, "pumping" her as to her interests in Poketown, how she liked her relatives, and all. Then Mrs. Beasely, a very tall, angular figure in severe black, appeared at the sitting-room door and invited them in to supper.

Mrs. Beasely was a famous cook and housekeeper. She was a very grim lady, it seemed to Janice, and the enlarged crayon portrait of Mr. Beasely, its frame draped with crape, which glared down upon the groaning table in the dining-room, almost took the girl's appetite away.

Fortunately, however, the widow insisted upon facing the portrait of her departed husband, and Janice was back to him, so she recovered her appetite. And Mrs. Beasely's "tea", or "supper" as old-fashioned folks called the meal, was worthy of a hearty appetite.

Among old-fashioned New England housekeepers a "skimpy" table—especially when a visitor is present—is an unpardonable sin. There was hot bread and cold bread, sour-milk griddle cakes, each of a delicious golden brown with crisp edges, buttered, sugared, and stacked in tempting piles; sliced cold ham and corned beef; a hot dish of smoked beef and scrambled eggs; two kinds of jelly, and three kinds of preserves; plain and frosted cake, and last of all the inevitable pie and cheese.

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With all this banquet Mrs. Beasely dared raise a moist eye to the grim crayon of the departed, and observe:

"I don't know what poor Charles would say to such a smeachin' supper, if he was alive. Oh, me! it does seem as though I didn't have no heart for cookery no more since he ain't here ter sample my work. A man's a gre't spur to a woman in her housekeepin'."

"Good Land o' Goshen!" ejaculated the outspoken Mrs. Scattergood. "I count 'em a gre't nuisance. If a body didn't have no men folks to 'tend to she could live on bread an' tea—if she so liked.

"Not but what I 'preciate a good lay-out of vittles like this o' yourn, Miz' Beasely. But thank the good Lord! I ain't been the slave to no man's appetite for goin' on fourteen year. An' that's about all men air, come ter think on it—a pair of muddy boots an' an unquenchable appetite!"

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Mrs. Beasely looked horrified, shaking her widow's cap. "Poor Charles wasn't nothin' like that," she declared, softly.

"An' I don't s'pose a worse husband ever lived in Poketown," whispered the pessimistic old lady, when the widow had gone out of the room for something. "He's been dead ten year, ain't he, 'Rill?"

"About that, mother," admitted the school-teacher.

"An' I expect ev'ry year she makes more of a saint of him. I declare for't! sech wimmen oughter be made to marry ag'in. Nothin' but a second one will cure 'em of their fust!"

Mainly Janice and her friend, the little school-teacher, were engaged in their own particular conversation. The girl spent a very pleasant hour after tea, too, and started home just as dusk was dropping over the hillside town.

There was a light in Hopewell Drugg's store. He never seemed to have customers—or so it appeared to Janice. She hesitated a moment to peer into the gloomy place—more a mausoleum than a store!—and saw Hopewell leaning against the counter, while Lottie, in her pink sash and white dress, and the kid boots, sat upon it and leaned against her father while he scraped out some weird minor chords upon the fiddle.

Marty had come down the lane to the corner of High Street to meet Janice. Of course, he wouldn't admit that he had done so; but he happened to be right there when his cousin put in an appearance. There were no street lights on Hillside Avenue, and Janice was glad of his company.

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"Huh! ain't yer gittin' pop'lar?" croaked the boy, grinning at her. "An' goin' ter 'Rill Scattergood's ter supper. Ye must ha' had a fine time—I don't think!"

"Of course I had a nice time," laughed Janice.

"With that old maid," scoffed Marty.

"Say, Marty, would you go to school again if they had a different teacher?" queried Janice.

"Course I would!" returned the boy, stoutly.

"Maybe next Fall they'll have another one. Miss Scattergood talks of giving up teaching."

"I should think she would!" exploded Marty. "But she won't. You'll see. She'll be teachin' Poketown school when she has ter go on crutches."

The next day, after Janice had inveigled Marty into spending most of his forenoon in the yard and garden (and the latter was beginning to look quite like a real garden by now), the girl went shopping. Most of the stores were "general" stores, and she did not believe there was much choice between them. Only she had an interest in Hopewell Drugg; so she proceeded to his dark little shop.

Lottie sat upon a box nursing a rag doll, in the sunlight that came in at the side door. She was crooning to herself a weird little song, and rocking back and forth upon the box. Mr. Drugg seemed to be out.

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Janice walked the length of the store very quietly, and the child did not apprehend her approach.

But when she stepped upon one of the boards of the back-room floor, little Lottie felt the vibration and looked up, directly at Janice, with her pretty, sightless eyes.

"Papa Drugg be right back; Papa Drugg be right back," she said, forming the phrase with evident difficulty.

Janice went close to her and laid a hand upon Lottie's shoulder. The little girl caught at it quickly, ran her slim fingers up her arm to her shoulder and so, jumping up from the box, felt of Janice's face, too. The latter stooped and kissed her.

"I know you—I know you," murmured the child. "You came home from the lake with me. I was trying to find my echo. Did *you* find it?"

Janice squeezed her hand, and she seemed to understand the affirmative.

"Then it's really *there*?" she sighed. "It's only *me* that's lost it. Well—well—Do you think I can ever find it again?"

Janice squeezed the hand firmly, and she put into that affirmative all the confidence which could possibly be thus expressed. She did not believe it to be wrong to raise hope of again hearing in the poor child's heart. [Pg 90]

Mr. Drugg came in from the back, wiping his hands and forearms of soapy water. He had evidently been engaged in some household task. Upon closer acquaintance he was improved, so Janice thought. He possessed the long, thin, New England features; but there was a certain calm in their expression that was attractive. His gray eyes were brooding, and there were many crow's-feet about them; nevertheless, they were kindly eyes with a greater measure of intelligence in them than Janice had expected to find.

It proved that Hopewell had a considerable stock upon his dusty shelves; but how he managed to find anything that a customer called for was a mystery to Janice. She selected the few notions that she needed; and as she did so she just *ached* to get hold of that stock of dry goods and straighten it out.

And the dust—and the flyspecks—and the jumble of useless scraps among the newer stock! The interior of that old store was certainly a heart-breaking sight. Two side windows that might have given light and air to the place were fairly banked up with merchandise. And when had either of the show windows been properly "dressed"?

However, Mr. Drugg was an attentive salesman and he really knew his stock very well. It mystified Janice to see how quickly he could find the article wanted in that conglomeration. [Pg 91]

She remained a while to play with Lottie. Drugg came to look fondly at the little girl putting her rag-baby to sleep in a soap-box crib.

"She's just about ruined that dress and them shoes, I shouldn't wonder," mused the storekeeper. "But I forgot to put out her everyday clo'es where she could find them yesterday morning. There's so much to do all the time. Well!" He drew the violin and bow toward him and sighed. No other customer came into the store. Drugg tucked the fiddle under his chin and began to scrape away.

Lottie jumped up and clapped her little hands when he struck a chord that vibrated upon her nerves. There she stood, with her little, up-raised face flooded by the spring sunshine, which entered through the side doorway, a gleam of pleasure passing over her features when she felt the vibration of the minor notes. They were deeply engaged, those two—the father with his playing, the child in striving to catch the tones.

Janice gathered up her few small purchases and stole out of the old store.

It was more than a week later when Marty came home to supper one night and grinned broadly at his cousin.

"What d'ye s'pose I've got for you, Janice?" he asked. [Pg 92]

His cousin flashed him a single comprehending look, and then her face went white.

"Daddy!" she gasped. "A letter from Daddy?"

"Aw, shucks! ain't there nothin' else you want?" the boy returned, teasingly.

"Not so much as a talk with Daddy," she declared, breathlessly. "And that's almost what a letter will be. Dear Marty! If you've got a letter from him do, *do* let me have it!"

"Don't you torment Janice now, Marty," cried his mother. "I hope he is all right, Janice. Is it writ in his own hand, Marty?"

"I dunno," said the plaguesome boy, looking at the address covertly. "It is postmarked 'Juarez'."

"Oh, yes! oh, yes!" cried Janice. "He would send it down there to be mailed. So he said. Mail service up in Chihuahua is so uncertain. Oh, Marty! p-l-e-a-s-e!"

"You give her that, Marty!" commanded Mr. Day.

Janice snatched the letter when the boy held it out to her; but she flashed Marty a "Thanks, awfully!" as she ran out of the room and upstairs. Supper? What did she care for supper? In the

red light of the sunset she sat by the window in her room and read Mr. Broxton Day's loving letter.

It *was* almost like seeing and talking with Daddy! Those firm, flowing lines of black ink, displaying character and firmness and decision, looked just like Daddy himself! Janice kissed the open page ecstatically, and then began to read: [Pg 93]

"DEAR DAUGHTER:

"The several thousand miles that separate us seem very short indeed when I sit down to write my little Janice. I can see her standing right before me in this barren, corrugated-iron shack—which would have been burned the last time a bunch of the Constitutionals swept through these hills, only iron will not burn. If a party of Federal troops come along they may try to destroy our plant, too. Just at the present time the foreigner, and his property, are in no great favor with either party of belligerents. The cry is 'Mexico for the Mexicans'—and one can scarcely blame them. But although I have seen a little fighting at a distance, and plenty of the marks of battle along the railroad line as I came up here, I do not think I am as yet in any great danger.

"Therefore, my dear, do not worry too much about your father's situation. At the very moment you are worrying he may be eating supper, or hobnobbing with a party of very courteous and hospitable ranch owners, or fishing in a neighboring brook where the trout are as hungry as shoats at feeding time, or otherwise enjoying himself.

"And so, now, to you and your letter which reached me by one of my messengers from Juarez, by whom I shall send this reply. Yes, I knew you would find yourself among a people as strange to you as though they were inhabitants of another planet. Relatives though they are, they are so much different from our friends in and about Greensboro, that I can understand their being a perfect shock to you. [Pg 94]

"I was afraid Jason and Almira lived a sort of shiftless, hopeless, get-along-the-best-way-you-can life. When I left Poketown twenty-five years ago I thought it had creeping paralysis! It must be worse by this time.

"But *you* keep alive, Janice, my dear. Keep kicking—like the frog in the milk-can. *Do something*. Don't let the poison of laziness develop in *your* blood. If they're in a slack way there at Jason's, help 'em out of it. Be your Daddy's own girl. Don't shirk a plain duty. *Do something yourself, and make others do something, too!*"

There was much in Mr. Broxton Day's letter beside this; there were intimate little things that Janice would have shown to nobody; but downstairs she read aloud all Daddy's jolly little comments upon the country and the people he saw; and about his eating beans so frequently that he dreamed he had turned into a gigantic Boston bean-pot that was always full of steaming baked beans. "They are called 'frijoles'," he wrote; "but a bean by any other name is just the same!" [Pg 95]

The paragraphs that impressed Janice most, however, as repeated above, she likewise kept to herself. Daddy had expected she would find Poketown just what it was. Yet he expected something of her—something that should make a change in her relatives, and in Poketown itself.

He expected Janice to *do something*.

CHAPTER X

[Pg 96]

BEGINNING WITH A BEDSTEAD

Janice got up and took her usual before-breakfast run the next morning. The Days remained the last family to rise in the neighborhood. The smoke from the broken kitchen chimney crawled heavenward long after the fires in other kitchen-stoves had burned down to hot coals.

So when the girl got back to the house, Aunt 'Mira had scarcely begun getting the meal. Janice rummaged about in the tool-shed for some minutes before she went upstairs to her room again. Marty crawled down, yawning, and started for the usual morning pail of water from the neighbor's well. Mr. Day was smoking on the bench outside of the kitchen door. The pork began to hiss in the pan.

Suddenly, from upstairs, came a noisy pounding. Nail after nail was being driven with confidence and dispatch.

"For the land's sake!" gasped Aunt 'Mira, looking up from the stove, a strip of pork hanging from her up-raised fork. [Pg 97]

Uncle Jason took his pipe from his lips and screwed his neck around so as to look in at the door.

"What d'you reckon that gal's up to?" he demanded.

Marty came back from the Dickerson's at almost a lope. "What in 'tarnation is Janice doin' up in her room?" he queried, slopping the water as he put the pail hurriedly upon the shelf.

"I haven't the least idea what it can be," said Mrs. Day, almost aghast.

"By jinks!" exclaimed the slangy boy. "I wanter see. By jinks! she socked that nail home—she did!"

The whole house rang with the vigor of Janice's blows. Marty started up the stairs in a hurry, and Mr. Day followed him. Mrs. Day came to the foot of the stairs with the piece of pork still dangling from her fork.

Marty reached his cousin's door and banged it open without as much as saying "By your leave."

"Hullo! What you doin'?" demanded the boy.

"Can't you *see*?" returned Janice, coolly. "I got sick of being rocked to sleep every night on that old soap-box. I'll wager, Marty, that this leg will stay put when I get through with it."

"Wal! of all things!" grunted Mr. Day, with his head poked in at the open door.

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"What's Janice doing?" demanded his wife, too heavy to mount the stairs easily.

Uncle Jason turned about and descended the flight without replying to his wife; but at her reiterated cry Marty explained.

"Ain't that gal a good 'un?" said the boy. "She's gone and put on the old leg to that bedstead. That's been broke off ever since you cleaned house last Fall, Maw."

"Oh! Well! Is that it?" repeated Mrs. Day. Then, when she and her husband were alone in the kitchen, before the young folk came down, she said, pointing the fork at him: "I declare for't! I'd feel ashamed if I was you, Jason Day."

"What for?" demanded her husband, scowling.

"Lettin' Broxton's gal do that. You could ha' tacked on that leg forty times if you could once. Ain't that true?"

But Mr. Day refused to quarrel. He took a long drink from the pail of fresh water Marty had brought. Then he said, tentatively:

"Breakfast most ready, Almiry? I'm right sharp-set."

When Janice and Marty came down they were not talking of the bedstead at all. But Aunt 'Mira was rather gloomy all through the meal, and looked accusingly at her husband every time she heaped his plate with pork, and cakes, and "white gravey."

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Mr. Day quite ignored these looks. He was even chatty—for him—with Janice. It was a school day, and Janice hurried to put on her hat and get her school bag, into which she slipped the luncheon that her aunt very kindly put up for her. Aunt 'Mira had really begun to "put herself out" for her niece, and the luncheon was always tasty and nicely arranged.

"Wait for me, Marty!" she cried, as her cousin was sliding out of the door in his usual attempt to get away unobserved, and so not be called back for any unexpected chores.

"Aw, come on! A gal's always behind—like a cow's tail!" growled the chivalrous Marty. "What you want?"

Janice gave him a quarter of a dollar secretly. "Now, you get that pump leather and you bring it home this noon. Just put it on the table by your father's plate," she commanded. "You going to do it for me?"

"Sure," grinned Marty. "And I'll see that he don't lose it, nuther. I know Dad. He'll need more than *that* suggestion to git him started on that old pump."

"We'll try," sighed Janice; and then Marty ran on ahead of her to overtake one of his boy friends. He would have been ashamed to be caught walking with his girl cousin by daylight, and on the public streets of Poketown!

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After school that day, when Janice arrived again at the old Day house, the first thing she heard was her aunt's complaining voice begging Marty to go down to Dickerson's for a bucket of water.

"What's the matter with Dad?" demanded the boy. "Didn't I bring him that pump leather? Huh!"

"Mebbe your father will git around to fixin' the pump staff, and he kin make that in ten minutes. I believe he's got a stick for't out in the workshop now, he won't be driv'."

"Janice wasted her good money, then," said Marty, with fine disgust. "All else it needs is a pump staff, and he kin make that in ten minutes. I believe he's got a stick for't out in the workshop—had it there for months."

"Now, you git erlong with that pail, Marty," commanded his mother, "and don't stand there a-criticisin' of your elders."

Janice hid behind the great lilac bush until Marty had gone grumblingly down the hill. Then she

heard some loud language from the barnyard and knew that her uncle had come in from the fields. After a little hesitation she made straight for the barn.

"Uncle Jason! won't you please mend the pump? Mr. Pringle has cut you a good pump leather."

"Goodness me, Janice! I'm druv to death. All this young corn to cultivate, an' not a soul to help me. Other boys like Marty air some good; but I can't trust him in the field with a hoss." [Pg 101]

"But you don't work in the field all day long, Uncle," pleaded Janice.

"Seems to me I don't have a minute to call my own," declared the farmer. To hear him talk one would think he was the busiest man in Poketown!

"I expect you are pretty busy," agreed the girl, nodding; "but I can tell you how to find time to mend that pump."

"How's that?" he asked, curiously.

"Get up when I do. We can mend it before the others come down. Will you do it to-morrow morning, Uncle?"

"Wa-al! I dunno——"

"Say you will, Uncle Jason!" cried Janice. "We'll surprise 'em—Aunty and Marty. They needn't never know till it's done."

"I got ter find a new pump shaft——"

"Marty says you've got one put away in the workshop."

"Why—er—so I have, come to think on't."

"Then it won't take long. Let's do it, Uncle—that's a dear!"

The man looked around dumbly; he hunted in his rather slow mind for some excuse—some reason for withdrawing from the venture that Janice proposed.

"I—I dunno as I would wake up——"

[Pg 102]

"I'll wake you. I'll come to your door and scratch on the panel like a mouse gnawing. Aunt 'Mira will never hear."

"No. She sleeps like the dead," admitted Uncle Jason. "Only the dead don't snore."

"Will you do it?"

"Oh, well! I'll see how I feel in the morning," half promised Uncle Jason, and with this Janice had to be content. She did not, however, lose heart. She was determined to stir the sluggish waters in and about the old Day house, if such a thing could be done!

Uncle Jason was rather sombre that evening, and even Marty did not feel equal to stirring the quiet waters of the family pool. Janice stole away early to bed. Aunt Almira was always the last person in the household to retire. Long after the rest of them were asleep she remained swinging in her creaky rocker, close to the lamp, her eyes glued to one of the cheap story papers upon which her romance-loving soul had fed for years.

There was not a cloud at dawn. When Janice rubbed her eyes and looked out of her wide open window the sun was almost ready to pop above the hills. The birds were twittering—tuning up, as it were, for their opening chorus of the day.

This was the day on which Janice determined the Day family should turn over a new leaf!

She doused her face with cool water from her pitcher, and then scrambled into her clothes and tidied her hair. She tiptoed to the door of the bedchamber occupied by her uncle and aunt. At her first tap on the panel Uncle Jason grunted. [Pg 103]

"Well! I hear ye," he said, in no joyful tone.

Janice really giggled, as she listened outside of the door. She was determined to have Uncle Jason up, and she waited, still scratching on the door panel until she heard him give an angry grunt, and then land with both feet on the straw matting. Then she scurried back to her own room and quickly finished dressing.

She was downstairs ahead of him, and quickly opened the doors and windows to the damp, sweet morning air. The cleaning up she and Marty had given the yard had made the premises really pleasant to look at. Flowers were springing along the borders of the path, and vines were creeping up the string trellis by the back door. The apple trees were covering the lawn with their last late shower of flower petals.

How the birds rioted in the tops of the trees! Singing, scolding, mating, they were really the jolliest chorus one ever listened to. The girl ran out into the yard and fairly danced up and down, she felt so *good!* Much of her homesickness had fled since she had received Daddy's letter.

She heard Uncle Jason heavily descending the stairs, his shoes in his hand. Janice broke off a great branch of lilacs, shook off the dew, and buried her face in the fragrant blossoms. Then, [Pg 104]

when Uncle Jason came yawning into the kitchen, closing the stair door behind him, she rushed in, with beaming face, bade him "Good-morning!" and put the lilac branch directly under his nose.

"Just smell 'em, Uncle! Smell 'em deep—before you say a word," she commanded.

He had come down with a full-grown grouch upon him—that was plainly to be seen. But when he had taken in a great draught of the sweet odor of the flowers, and found his niece with her lips puckered, and standing on tiptoe to kiss him on his unshaven cheek, he somehow forgot the grouch.

"Them's mighty purty! mighty purty!" he agreed, and while he pulled on his congress gaiters, Janice arranged the blossoms in a jar of water and set them in the middle of the breakfast table. Aunt 'Mira kept the table set all the time. The red and white tablecloth was renewed only once a week, and the jar of flowers served to hide the unsightly spot where Marty had spilled the gravy the day before.

"Come on and let's see what the matter is with the pump," urged Janice, in fear lest he should get away from her, for already Mr. Day's fingers were searching along the ledge above the door for his pipe.

[Pg 105]

"Wa-al—ya-as—we might as well, I s'pose. I'll make 'Mira's fire later. It's 'tarnal early, child."

"Sun's up," declared Janice. "Hurry, Uncle!"

He shuffled off to get his tools and the piece of oak he had laid aside for a pump staff so long ago. Janice tried to untie the pump handle, and, not succeeding, ran in for the carving knife and managed to saw the rope in two.

"I got ter take off a piece of tin in the roof of the porch—see it up yonder? Then I kin pull out the broken staff and put in a new one," said her uncle, coming back rather promptly for him. "These here wooden pumps is a nuisance; but the wimmen folks all like 'em 'cause they're easier to *pump*. Now! I bet that ladder won't hold my weight."

He searched the old, rough, homemade ladder out of the weeds by the boundary fence. It was built of two pieces of fence rail with rungs of laths,—a rough and unsightly affair; and two or three of the rungs *were* cracked.

"It'll hold *me*," cried Janice. "You let me try, Uncle Jason. Let me have the screwdriver. I can lift the tacks and pull off the tin. You see."

She mounted the ladder in a hurry and crept upon the roof of the porch. Uncle Jason started the nut at the handle, and soon removed that so that the staff could be pulled out. The sheet of tin had covered a hole in the shingles right above the pump. In a minute the cracked staff, with the worn leather valve, was out of the pump entirely, and Uncle Jason carried it out to the workshop where he could labor upon it with greater ease. Janice slid down the ladder, found the little three-fingered weeder, and went to work upon the rich mould around the roots of the vines—the sweet peas and morning glories that would soon be blooming in abundance.

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Before Aunt 'Mira and Marty were up, the pump was working in fine style. Uncle Jason had taken an abundance of water out to the cattle. Usually the drinking trough was filled but once a day, and that about noon. Now the poor horses and the neglected cow could have plenty of water.

And so could the household. Aunt 'Mira need no longer give things "a lick and a promise," as she so frequently expressed it. When she came down it was to a humming fire, a steaming kettle, and a brimming pail on the shelf.

"I declare for't, Janice!" she exclaimed. "What you done now?"

"Nothing, Aunty—save to put a pretty bunch of lilacs on the table for you."

"An' them lilacs is always fragrant," agreed the lady. "Who went for the water? Is Marty up?"

"Marty wouldn't lose his beauty sleep," laughed Janice.

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"For the mercy's sake!" gasped Aunt 'Mira. "The pump bench is wet. I declare for't! Jason never fixed that pump, did he?"

"Just try it, Aunty!" cried the delighted Janice. "See how easy it works! And the more it's pumped the better the water will be. It's not quite clear yet, you know. Moss *will* grow in the pipe."

"Janice, you're a wonder! You kin do more with your uncle than his own fam'bly can, an' that's a fact!"

"I hope you don't mind, Aunty?" she whispered, coming over to the large lady and hugging her. "You know, after all, it's for you he did it."

"Wal, it does lighten my labor, that's a fact," admitted Aunt 'Mira. "He use ter do a-many things for me, years ago. Oh, yes! Your Uncle Jason warn't allus like he is now. But we got kinder in a rut I 'xpec'. An' I ain't young and good-lookin' like I use ter be, an' that makes a difference with a man."

"I think you're very pleasant to look at, Aunt 'Mira," declared the girl, warmly. "And I don't

believe Uncle Jason ever saw a girl he liked to look at so well as you. Of course not!"

"But I be gittin' old," sighed the poor woman. "An' I ain't got a decent gown to put on no more. An' I'm *fat*."

Janice still hugged her. "We'll just overhaul your wardrobe, you and I, Aunty, and I believe we can find something that can be fixed over to look nice. You'd ought to wear pretty gowns—of course you had. Let's surprise Uncle Jason by dressing you up. Why, he hasn't seen you dressed up since—since I've been here." [Pg 108]

"Longer'n that, child—much longer'n that," admitted Aunt 'Mira, shamefacedly. "P'r'aps 'tis my fault. Anyway, I'm glad about the pump," and she kissed her niece heartily.

CHAPTER XI

[Pg 109]

A RAINY DAY

Janice had learned that there were at least two senses left to Hopewell Drugg's unfortunate child that connected her with the world as it is, and with her fellow creatures. As she gradually had lost her sight and hearing, and, consequently, speech was more and more difficult for her, Lottie's sense of touch and of smell were being sharpened.

Her olfactory nerves were almost as keen as a dog's. How she loved the scent of flowers! She named many of the blossoms in the gardens about just by the odor wafted to her upon the air. And she was really a pretty sight, sitting upon the shady porch of her father's store, sorting and making into bouquets the flowers that neighbors gave her.

The old-fashioned shrubs and flowers in the Day yard were in bloom now in abundance, and one morning before school Janice carried to little Lottie a huge armful of odorous blossoms. It was a "dripping" morning. As yet it had not rained hard; but just as Janice turned off High Street toward the store, the heavens opened and the rain fell in torrents. [Pg 110]

She ran laughing to the porch of the Drugg's store. For once the man was at the front, and he welcomed her with his polite, storekeeper's smile, and the natural courtesy which was usual with him. Janice remembered how the carping Mrs. Scattergood had declared that Hopewell Drugg would be "polite to a stray cat!"

"You must not go farther in this rain, Miss Janice," he said. "Do come in. Miss 'Rill went along to school half an hour ago—or she never would have gotten there without a wetting. Are these for little Lottie? How kind of you!"

"She's a dear, and she loves flowers so," replied Janice, brightly. "I *will* come in out of the rain, if you don't mind, Mr. Drugg."

"Yes. The roof of the porch leaks a little. I—I ought to fix that," said the storekeeper, feebly.

He followed his visitor in, and as his fiddle lay on the counter near at hand, he took it up. He was playing softly an old, old tune, when Janice came back through the passage from the house. She had found Lottie in the kitchen, and had left her, delighted with the posies, sitting at the table to make them up into bouquets.

The rain was pouring down with no promise of a let-up, and Janice did not have even an umbrella. She took off her coat and hung her hat to dry on the back of a chair. [Pg 111]

"I shall have to be company for a while, I expect, Mr. Drugg," she said, laughing.

"You are more than welcome, Miss Janice," returned the storekeeper, as he put down his instrument again. "Is the child all right?"

"She will be busy there for an hour, I think," declared Janice.

"I—I am afraid I shall scarcely know how to entertain you, Miss," said Drugg, hesitatingly. "We have little company. I—I have a few books—"

"Oh, my, Mr. Drugg! you mustn't think of entertaining me," cried the girl, cheerfully. "You have your own work to do—and customers to serve—"

"Not many in this rain," he told her, smiling faintly.

"Why, no—I suppose not. But don't you have orders to put up? I supposed a storekeeper was a very busy man."

"I am not that kind of a storekeeper, I am afraid," returned Hopewell Drugg, shaking his head. "I have few customers now. Only a handful of people come in during the day. You see, I am on the side street here. We owned this property—mother and I. Mother was bedridden. I thought it would be easier to keep store and wait on her back in the house there, than to do most things; so I got into this line. It—it barely makes us a living," and he sighed. [Pg 112]

"But you *do* have some business?"

"Oh, yes. Old customers who know my stock is always first-class come to me regularly,—especially out-of-town people. Saturdays I manage to have quite some trade, like the Hammett Twins, and the farmers. I can't complain."

"You never liked the business, then?" asked Janice, shrewdly.

"No. Not that it isn't as good as most livelihoods. We all must work. And I never could do the thing I *loved* to do. Not with mother bedridden."

"And that thing was?" asked Janice.

He touched the violin on the counter softly. "I had just music enough in me to be mad for it," he said, and his gray face suddenly colored faintly, for it evidently cost him something to speak so frankly. "Mother did not approve—exactly. You see, my father was a music teacher, and he never—well—'made good', as the term is now. So mother did not approve. This was father's violin—fiddle 'most folks call it. But it is very mellow and sweet—if I had only been taught properly to play it. You see, father died before I was born."

Out of these few sentences, spoken so gently, Janice swiftly built, in her quick mind, the whole story of the man. His had been a life of repression—perhaps of sacrifice! The soul of music in the man had never been able to burst its chrysalis. [Pg 113]

"Mother died after I was of age. It seemed too late then for me to get into any other business," Hopewell Drugg went on to say, evenly. "You know, Miss, one gets into a rut. I was in a rut then. And we hadn't any too much money left. It was quite necessary that I do something to keep the pot a-boiling. There wasn't enough money left for music lessons, and all that."

"And then——"

He stopped. A queer look came over his face, and somehow the alert girl beside him knew what he was thinking of. 'Rill Scattergood was in his mind. He must have thought a great deal of the little school-mistress at one time—before he had married that other girl. Aunt Almira had said he had married 'Cinda Stone "out of spite!" Was it so?

"Well," sighed the storekeeper, finally coming back from his reverie as though all the time he had been talking to Janice. "It turned out this way for me, you see. And here's Lottie. Poor little Lottie! I wish the store *did* pay me better. Perhaps something could be done for the child at the school in Boston. They have specialists there——"

"But, Mr. Drugg! why don't you *try*?" gasped Janice, quite shaken by all she had heard and *felt*. [Pg 114]

"Try what, Miss?" he asked, curiously.

"Why don't you try to make business better? Can't you improve it?"

"How, Miss?"

"Oh, dear me! You don't want *me* to tell you how, do you?" cried Janice, "I—I am afraid it would sound impudent."

"I couldn't imagine your being that, Miss Janice," he said, in his slow way, looking down at her with a smile that somehow sweetened his gray, lean face mightily.

"But why not put out some effort to attract trade here?"

"To this little, dark, old shop?" asked Drugg, in wonder. "Impossible!"

"Don't use that word!" the girl commanded, with vigor. "How do you know it is impossible?"

"People prefer the big shops on High Street."

"There's not much choice between them and yours, I believe," declared Janice.

"They're handier."

"You've got your own neighborhood. You used to have customers."

"Oh, yes. But that's when the store was new."

"Make it new again," cried Janice, feeling a good deal as though she would like to shake this hopeless man. Hopewell, indeed! His name surely did not fit him in the least. Wasn't old Mrs. Scattergood almost right when she called him "a gump"? At least, if "gump" meant a spineless creature? [Pg 115]

Drugg was looking languidly about the store in the dim, brown light. Outside the rain still fell heavily. Occasionally the clouds would lighten for a moment as they frequently do in the hills; but the rain was still behind them and *would* burst through.

"Come, Mr. Drugg," said Janice, more softly. "Let me show you what I mean. You can't really expect folks to come here and trade when they can scarcely see through the windows——"

"Yes, yes," he murmured. "I *had* ought to clean up a bit."

"More than that!" she cried. "You want to have a regular overhauling—take account of stock, and all that—know what you've got—arrange your goods attractively—get rid of the flies—put on

fresh paint——"

He was looking at her with wide-open eyes. "My soul!" he breathed. "How'd I ever git around to doin' all *that*?"

"You love little Lottie, don't you?" Janice demanded, with sudden cruelty. "I should think you'd be willing to do something for her!"

"What do you mean?" and a little snap, which delighted Janice, suddenly came into Drugg's tone.

"Just what I say, Mr. Drugg. You *speak* as though you loved her."

"And who says I don't?"

[Pg 116]

"Your actions."

"My actions? What do you mean by that?" and the man flushed more deeply than before.

"I mean if you truly loved her, and longed to get her to Boston and to the surgeons, and the school there, it seems to me you'd be willing to work hard to that end."

"You show me—" he began, wrathfully, but she interrupted with:

"Now, wait! Let me have my way for an hour here, will you? I want you to go back to Lottie and do up the housework; I see your breakfast dishes are still unwashed. Leave me alone here and let me do as I like for an hour."

"You mean to clean up?" he asked, gazing about the store hopelessly.

"Something like that. It rains so hard I can't get to school. I'll visit with you, Mr. Drugg," said Janice smiling and her voice cheerful again. "And instead of helping about the housework, I'll help in the store. *Do* let me, sir!"

"Why—yes—I don't mind. I guess you mean right enough, Miss Janice. But you don't understand ——"

"Give me an hour," she cried.

"Why, yes, Miss," he said, in his old, gentle, polite way. "If you want to mess about I won't mind. Come in and I'll give you a big long apron that will cover your frock all over. It—it's dreadful dusty in here."

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Janice would not be discouraged. She smiled cheerfully at him, found brush, pan, broom, pail, and cloths, and with some hot water and soap-powder went back to the store. The rain continued to fall heavily. There was no likelihood of her being disturbed at her work.

She chose the more littered of the two show windows and almost threw everything out of it in her hurry. Then she swept down the cobwebs and dead flies, and brushed away all the dust. It was no small task to scrub the panes of glass clean, and all the woodwork; but Janice knew how to work. The old black Mammy who had kept house for her and Daddy so many years had taught the girl domestic tasks, and had taught her well.

Within an hour the work was done. More light came through the panes of that window than usually ventured in upon a sunshiny day!

The balance of the task was a pleasure. Her bright eyes had noted the newer goods upon Mr. Drugg's shelves. She selected samples of the more recent canned goods—those of which the labels on the cans were fresh and bright. She arranged these with package goods—breakfast foods, and the like—so as to make a goodly display. She found colored tissue papers, too, and she brightened the window shelf with these. She festooned the flyspecked, T-arm light bracket in the window, and carried twisted strings of the pink and green paper to the four corners of the window shelf from the bottom of this bracket.

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She went out upon the porch at last to look in at the display. From the outside the window was pretty and bright—it was like the windows she was used to seeing in the Greensboro stores.

"One thing about it," she declared, with confidence. "There's nothing like this in the whole of Poketown. There isn't another store window that looks so fresh and—yes!—dainty."

Then she went inside to Mr. Drugg. He was listlessly brushing up the cottage kitchen. Lottie had fallen asleep on the wide bench beyond the cookstove, a great bunch of posies hugged against her stained pinafore.

"Come in and see, sir," said Janice, beckoning the gray man into the store. Drugg came with shuffling steps and lack-lustre eyes. He seemed to be considering in his mind something that had nothing whatsoever to do with what she had called him for.

"Do you re'lly suppose, Miss Janice," he murmured, "that I could increase trade here? I need money—God knows!—for little Lottie. If I could get her to Boston——"

"Good gracious, Miss! what you been doing here?" he suddenly gasped.

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"Isn't that some better?" demanded Janice, chuckling. "Astonished, aren't you, Mr. Drugg? Don't you believe if both windows were like that, and the whole store cleaned up, folks would sit up and

take notice?"

"I—I believe you," admitted the shopkeeper, still staring.

"And wouldn't it pay?"

"I—I don't know. It might."

"Isn't it worth trying?" demanded Janice, cheerily. "Now, please, I want you to do as I say—and you must let me have my own way to-day here. I've brought my lunch, and it's too late to go to school now, even if it *does* stop raining. You'll let me, won't you?"

"I—I—I don't know just what you want me to do—or what *you* want to do," stammered Hopewell Drugg, still staring at the transformed window.

"I want you to turn in and help me put your whole store to rights," she declared. "You don't understand, Mr. Drugg. I believe you can attract trade here if you will have things nice, and bright, and tidy. You carry a good stock of wares; and you are not any more behind the times than other Poketown merchants. Why not be *ahead of them all*?"

"Me?" breathed Drugg, in increasing wonder.

"And why not *you*? You've got as good a chance as any. Just get to work and *make* trade. Think of little Lottie. If your business can be increased and you can make money, think of what you can do for her!" [Pg 120]

Drugg suddenly straightened his stooped shoulders and held up his head. "Just you show me what you want me to do," he said, with unexpected fire.

"Grand!" cried the excited Janice. "I can set you to work in a minute. First thing of all, you fix your screen doors; let's keep the fly family out of the store—and we'll kill those already in here. You commence on the screens, Mr. Drugg, while I tackle that other window."

About the time school was usually out, Janice removed her apron and the other marks of her toil, and put on her hat and coat. As she said, they had made a good beginning. Better still, Hopewell Drugg seemed quite inspired.

"You have done me a world of good, Miss Janice," he declared. "And already the shop looks a hundred per cent better."

"I should hope so," said Janice, vigorously. "And you keep right on with the good work, Mr. Drugg. I'll come in and dress your windows every week. And when you've torn those shelves away from the side windows and let the light and air in here, and done your painting as you promised, I'll come and arrange your wares on the shelves."

"Then you get out a little good advertising, and remind folks that Hopewell Drugg is still in Poketown and doing business. Oh! there are a dozen things I want you to do! But I won't tell you about all of them now," and Janice laughed as she picked up her bag and ran out. [Pg 121]

The rain had ceased. The sun was breaking through the clouds, promising a beautiful evening. Janice almost ran into 'Rill Scattergood on the sidewalk.

"Why, Janice dear!" cried the little school-mistress. "I missed you to-day." Then her eyes turned toward the store. "Is—is anything the matter? Nothing's happened to little Lottie?"

"Not a thing," replied the girl, cheerfully.

"Nor—nor to Mr. Drugg? I don't hear him playing," said Miss 'Rill.

"And I hope you *won't* hear him playing so much for a while," laughed Janice. "The fiddle and the bow have been laid away on the shelf for a while, I hope."

"But I really *do* think Mr. Drugg plays very nicely," murmured the little schoolmistress, not at all understanding what Janice meant. But the girl ran on, smiling mysteriously.

CHAPTER XII

[Pg 122]

ON THE ROAD WITH WALKY DEXTER

Janice Day found the weeks sliding by more quickly after this. Although school soon closed, she had begun to find so many interests in Poketown that she could now write dear Daddy in Mexico quite cheerful letters.

She had "kept at" Hopewell Drugg until his store was the main topic of conversation all over town. The man himself was even "spruced up" a bit, and he met the curious people who put themselves out to see his rejuvenated store with such a pleasant and businesslike air, that many new customers were attracted to come again.

Neatly printed announcements had been scattered about Poketown, signed by Hopewell Drugg,

and making a bid for a share of the general trade. His windows remained attractively dressed. He displayed new stock and up-to-the-minute articles. The drummers who came to Poketown began to pay more attention to this store on the side street.

But Janice Day believed, that, like charity, reformation should begin at home. The old Day house was slowly revolutionized that summer. Commencing with the cleaning up of the yard and the mending of the pump, Janice inspired further improvements. Marty and she spent each Saturday morning in the dooryard and garden, while Mr. Day mended the front porch flooring, where the minister had met with his accident, and reshingled the roof.

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The boles of the fruit and shade trees about the house were whitewashed, and the palings of the fence renewed. Somehow a pair of new hinges were found for the gate. The sidewalk was raked, all the weeds cut away from the fence-line, and the sod between the path and the gutter trimmed and its edges cut evenly.

When Marty actually whitewashed the fence, Mr. Day admitted that it was such an improvement he wished he could go on and paint the house. "But, by mighty!" he drawled, "it's been so long since 'twas painted, it 'ud soak up an awful sight of oil."

Other people along Hillside Avenue began to take notice of the improvement about the old Day house. Mr. Dickerson built a new front fence, getting it on a line with the Days' barrier. Others trimmed hedges and trees, put the lawn mower to their grass, bolstered up sagging fences, and rehung gates. Hillside Avenue, up its whole length, began to look less neglected.

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Janice had a fondness for the little inlet, with its background of tall firs, where she had first met little Lottie Drugg, and she often walked down there. So she became pretty well acquainted with "Mr. Selectman" Cross Moore. But as yet she did not get as far out on the Middletown Lower Road as the house where the Hammett Twins lived.

One day she found a long lumber-reach dropping new posts and rails along the length of the deep ditch into which the twins' pony had come so near to backing the little old ladies on that memorable day when Janice had first met them.

"Hi tunket!" ejaculated Mr. Moore, grinning in a most friendly way at Janice, "I hope you'll be satisfied now. You've jest about hounded me into havin' this fence put up again."

"Why, Mr. Moore! I never said a thing to you about it," cried the girl.

"No. But I see ye ev'ry time you go by, and I'm so reminded of the 'tarnal fence that I remember it o' nights. If somebody *should* fall inter the ditch, ye know. And then—Well, I've found out you've made little Lottie Drugg promise not to come down this way 'nless somebody's with her. 'Fraid *she'll* fall in here, too, I s'pose——"

"Well, she might," said Janice, firmly.

"She won't have no chance," growled Mr. Moore, but with twinkling eyes in spite of his gruffness. "Hi tunket! I'll build a railing along here that'll hold up an elephant."

[Pg 125]

This day Janice had set forth for a long jaunt into the country. She took the turn where the Hammett Twins and their pony had first come into her sight, and kept walking on the Middletown Lower Road for a long way. It overlooked the lake, Janice had been told, for most of the distance to the larger town.

She passed several farmhouses but did not reach the Hammett place; instead she rested upon a rustic bridge where a swift, brawling brook came down from the hills to tumble into the lake. Then, as she was going on, a quick "put, put, put" sounded from along the road she had been traveling.

"It's a motorcycle," thought Janice. "I didn't know anybody owned one around Poketown."

Turning the bend in the road the 'cycle flashed into view, along with a whisp of dust. A young man rode the machine—a young man who looked entirely different from the youths of Poketown. Janice looked at him with interest as he flashed past. She thought he was going so fast that he would never notice her curiosity.

He was muscularly built, with a round head set firmly upon a solid neck, from which his shirt was turned well away, thus displaying the cords of his throat to advantage. He was well bronzed by the sun, and the heavy crop of hair, on which he wore a visorless round cap, was crisp and of a dull gold color. He really *was* a good-looking young man, and in his knickerbockers and golf stockings Janice thought he seemed very "citified" indeed.

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"He's a college boy, I am sure," decided the girl, with interest, watching the rider out of sight. "I couldn't see his eyes behind those dust glasses; but I believe there was a dimple in his cheek. If his face was washed, I don't doubt but what he'd be good-looking," and she laughed. "Why! here's Walky Dexter!"

The red-faced driver of the "party wagon" drew in Josephus and his mate, with a flourish.

"Wal, now! I *am* beat," he ejaculated, his little eyes twinkling. "Can't be I've found a *lost* Day?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Dexter," she told him. "I *was* thinking I'd walk to the Hammetts'; but it's turned so hot and dusty——"

"And the Hammett gals live two good mile ahead o' ye."

"Oh! as far as that?"

"Surest thing ye know. Better hop in an' jog along back 'ith me," said Walkworthy Dexter, cordially.

"Can I, Mr. Dexter?"

"You air jest as welcome as the flowers in May," he assured her. "Whoa, Josephus. Stand still, Kate! My sakes! but the flies bite the critters this morning, an' no mistake."

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Janice "hopped in," and Mr. Dexter clucked to the willing horses.

"I jest been takin' a party of our young folks over to Middletown to take examinations for entrance to the Academy," proclaimed Walky. "An' that remin's me," added he. "Did yer see that feller go by on one o' them gasoline bikes?"

"On the motorcycle?"

"Ya-as."

"I saw him," admitted Janice.

"Know him?"

"Of course not. He doesn't belong in Poketown, I'm sure."

"Mebbe he will," said Walky, his eyes twinkling with fun again.

Janice looked at him, puzzled.

"Ain't you heard?" he questioned. "'Rill Scattergood's resigned and the school committee is lookin' for a new teacher. *That* feller's got the bee in his bonnet, they told me at Middletown."

"The school-teaching bee?" laughed the girl.

"Yep. He'd been for his certif'cate. He's been writin' to the Poketown committee."

"But—but he isn't much more than a boy himself, is he?"

"They tell me he's been through college. Must be a smart youngster for, as you say, he's nothin' but a kid."

"I didn't say that!" cried Janice, in some little panic, for she knew Dexter's proneness to gossip. "Don't you dare say I did!"

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He chuckled. "Wa-al, ye meant it. Come now—didn't ye? An' he *is* a mighty young feller ter be teachin' school. 'Specially with sech big girls an' boys in it. He'll have ter fight the boys, it's likely, an' I shouldn't wonder if the big gals set their caps for him."

"I'm afraid you're a very reckless talker, Mr. Dexter," sighed Janice. Then her hazel eyes brightened suddenly, and she added, "They ought to call you 'Talky' Dexter, instead of 'Walky', I believe."

"'Talkworthy Dexter', eh?" he grinned.

"I'm not sure that you *do* always *talk worthy*," she told him, shaking a serious head. "You're very apt to say things to 'stir folks all up,' as my Aunt says. Oh, yes, you do! You know you do, Mr. Dexter."

"Wal, I declare!" chuckled the man, but with a queer little side glance at the serious face of the girl. "Think I'm a trouble-breeder, do ye?"

"You just ask yourself that, sir," said Janice, firmly. "You know you're just delighted if you can say something to 'start things going,' as you call it. And it isn't worthy of you—"

"Whether I'm 'Talkworthy', or 'Walkworthy', eh?" he broke in, laughing.

"Oh, I didn't mean any offence!" exclaimed Janice, much disturbed now to think that she had criticised the man just as he was in the habit of criticising everybody else.

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"I snum! mebbe you're right," grunted Walky Dexter. "And I reckon talkin' don't do much good after all. Now, look at Cross Moore. I been at him a year an' more to fix that rail fence along the ditch by his house. 'Tain't done no good. But, by jinks! somebody else got at him," added Walky, slyly, "an' I see this mornin' Cross was gittin' the rails and new posts there. He was right on the job."

Janice's cheeks grew rosy. "Why!" she cried, "I never said a word to him about it."

"No; but somehow he got the idee from you. He told me so," and Walky chuckled.

"I think Mr. Moore likes to joke—the same as you do, Mr. Dexter," said Janice, quietly.

"Ahem! You sartainly have got some of us goin'," said the driver, whimsically. "Look at Jase Day! I never *did* think nothin' less'n Gabriel's trump would start Jase. But yest'day I'm jiggered if I didn't

see him mendin' his pasture fence. And the old Day house looks like another place—that's right. How d'you do it?"

"I—I don't just know what you mean," stammered Janice, feeling very uncomfortable.

He looked at her with his eyes screwed up again. "D'you know what they said about yer uncle las' year? He come down to Jefferson's store with a basket of pertaters. All the big ones was on top and the little ones at the bottom. Huh! *He* ain't the only one that 'deacons' a basket of pertaters," and Walky chuckled. [Pg 130]

"But the boys said 'twas easy to see how come Jase's pertaters that-a way. 'Twas 'cause it took him so 'tarnal long to dig a basket, that the pertaters grew ahead of him in the row—that's right! When he begun they was little, but by the time he got a basket full they'd growed a lot," and the gossip guffawed his delight at the story.

"But he's sure gettin' 'round some spryer this year. An' I snum! there's Marty, too. He's workin' in his mother's garden reg'lar. I seen him. 'Fore you came, Miss Janice, if Marty was diggin' in the garden an' found a worm, he thought he was goin' fishin' and got him a bait can and a pole, an' set right off for the lake—that's right!" and Walky shook all over, and grew so red in the face over his joke that Janice was really afraid he was becoming apoplectic.

But something in the middle of the road, as they made another corner, stopped all this fun.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Walky. "That young feller on the gasoline bike has had an accident. Don't it look that way to you?"

CHAPTER XIII

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NELSON HALEY

The team drew to a halt without any command, and directly beside the young man, who was working diligently over the overturned motorcycle. His repair kit was spread out at the roadside, and the cause of the trouble was self-evident, it would seem. But Walky was a true Yankee and had to ask questions.

"Had a puncture, Mister?" he drawled, as the young man looked up, saw Janice on the seat beside the driver, and flushed a little.

"Oh, no!" returned the victim of the accident, with some asperity. "I'm just changing the air in these tires. The other air was worn out, you know."

For a moment Walky's eyes bulged, and Janice giggled loudly. Then Mr. Dexter saw the point of the joke. He slapped his leg and laughed uproariously.

"You'll do! By jinks! you surely will *do*," he declared. "I reckon you air smart enough, young feller, ter teach the Poketown school. An' that's what they say you're in these parts for?" [Pg 132]

"I am here to see the school committee about the position," said the young fellow. "Are you one of the committee?"

"Me? No—I should say not!" gasped Walky. "Old Bill Jones, an' 'Squire Abe Connett, and Elder Concannon air the committee."

"Oh!" returned the youth, quite coolly. "I didn't know but you were one of the number, and that I was already being put through my examination."

But Walky Dexter was not easily feazed. He just blinked twice over this snub and pursued the conversation:

"They tell me you've been ter college?"

"My! my!" exclaimed the young man, "*they* tell you a good deal, don't they? Is it just a habit folks have, or have the Poketown selectmen passed an ordinance that you are to be the recipient of all personal information?"

Janice was still amused, although she thought the young man was rather hard upon the town gossip. But Walky thought the observation over, and seemed finally to realize that the motorcyclist was making sport of him.

"Aw, well," he said, grinning broadly, "if you air tender about your pussonal record, I'll say no more about it. But I allus b'lieve in goin' right ter headquarters when I want ter know anything. Saves makin' mistakes. If you air ashamed of your criminal past, Mister, why, that's all right—we won't say no more about it." [Pg 133]

At this the young fellow stood up, put his hands upon his hips, and burst into a hearty shout of laughter. Janice had to join in, while Walky Dexter grinned, knowing he had made a good point.

"You certainly had me there, old timer!" declared the youth at last. "Now providin' you will be as frank, and do the honors as well, I'll introduce myself as Nelson Haley. I hail from Springfield. I

have spent four years in the scholastic halls of Williamstown. I hope to go to law school, but meanwhile must earn a part of the where-with-all. Therefore, I am attacking the citadel of the Poketown School."

"Oh! That's the why-for of it, eh?" crowed Walky. "Much obleeged. I'll know what to say now when anybody asks me."

"I hope so," returned Nelson Haley, with some sarcasm. "But fair exchange, Mister. You might tell me who I have the honor of speaking to—and, especially, you might introduce me to the lady?"

"Oh! Eh?" and Walky looked at the blushing Janice, questioningly. The girl smiled, however, and the driver cleared his throat and gravely made the introduction. "And I'm Walky Dexter," he concluded. "If you git the Poketown school you'll come ter know me quite well, I shouldn't wonder."

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"That is something to look forward to, I am sure," declared Nelson Haley, drily. Then he turned to Janice, and asked:

"Will you be one of my pupils, if I have the good fortune to get the school, Miss Day?"

"I—I am afraid not. I do not really belong in Poketown," Janice explained. "And the ungraded school could not aid me much."

"No, I suppose not," returned the young man. "Well! I hope I see you again, Miss Day."

Walky clucked to the horses and they jogged on, leaving Nelson Haley to finish his repairs. Walky chuckled, and said to Janice:

"He's quite a flip young feller. He is young to tackle the Poketown school. An' 'twill be an objection, I shouldn't wonder. Ye see, they couldn't find that fault with 'Rill Scattergood."

"But I venture to say that they did when she first came to Poketown to teach," cried Janice.

"Oh, say! I sh'd say they did," agreed Walky, with a retrospective rolling of his head. "An' she was a purty young gal, then, too. There was more on us than Hopewell Drugg arter 'Rill in them days—yes, sir-ree!"

Janice was curious, and she yielded to the temptation of asking the town gossip a question:

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"Why—why didn't Miss 'Rill marry Hopewell, then?"

"The goodness only knows why they fell out, Miss Janice," declared Walky. "We none of us ever made out. I 'spect it was the old woman done it—ol' Miz' Scattergood. She didn't take kindly to Hopewell. And then—Well, 'Cinda Stone was lef' all alone, an' she lived right back o' Drugg's store, an' her father had owed Drugg a power of money 'fore he died—a big store bill, ye see. Hopewell Drugg is as soft as butter; mebbe he loved 'Cinda Stone; anyhow he merried her after he'd got the mitten from Amarilla. Huh! ye can't never tell the whys and wherefores of sech things—not re'lly."

A presidential election would have made little more stir in Poketown than the coming there of this young man who looked for the position of school-teacher. Marty brought home word at night to the old Day house that Mr. Haley had put up at the Lake View Inn; that he had let two of the older boys try out his motorcycle; that he could pitch a ball that "Dunk" Peters couldn't hit, even though "Dunk" had played one season with the Fitchburg team. Likewise, that Mr. Haley was to go before the school committee that evening. And after supper Marty hastened down town again to learn how the examination of the young collegian "came out."

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"I do hope," sighed Aunt 'Mira, "that this young man gits the school. Mebbe Marty will like him, an' go again. I won't say but that the boy's a good deal better'n he was; he's changed since you've come, Janice. But he'd oughter git more schoolin'—so he had."

"I met Mr. Haley," said her niece, quietly. "He seems like quite a nice young man; and, if he has any interest in his work, he ought to give a good many of the Poketown boys a better start."

For Marty Day was not the only young loafer in the town. There was always a group of half-grown boys hanging about Josiah Pringle's harness shop, or the sheds of the Lake View Inn.

In Greensboro there had been a good library and reading-room, and the Young Men's Christian Association boys and young men had a chance *there*. Janice knew that her father's influence had helped open these club-like places for the boys, and so had kept them off the streets. There wasn't a thing in Poketown for boys to do or a place to go to, save the stores where the older men lounged. Sometimes, her aunt told her, men brought jugs of hard cider to the Inn tables, and the boys got to drinking the stuff.

"Now, if this Nelson Haley is any sort of a fellow, and he gets the school," murmured Janice to herself, "he may do something."

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Marty brought home the latest report from the committee meeting before they went to bed. Mr. Haley seemed to have made a good impression upon the three old dry-as-dust committeemen, especially on old Elder Concannon, the superannuated minister who had lived in Poketown for fifty years, although he had not preached at the Union Church, saving on special occasion, for

two decades.

"The Elder says he thinks this Haley'll do," said Marty, with a grin. "I heard him tell Walky Dexter so. He knows some Latin, Haley does," added the boy. "What's Latin, Janice?"

"Nothing that will help him in the least to teach the Poketown School," declared his cousin, rather sharply for her. "Isn't that ridiculous! What can that old minister be thinking of?"

"The Elder's great on what he calls 'the classics,'" said Mr. Day, with a chuckle. "He reads the Bible in the 'riginal, as he calls it. He allus said 'Rill Scattergood didn't know enough to teach school."

"I don't believe that Poketown really needs a teacher who reads Hebrew and can translate a Latin verse. That is, those studies will not help Mr. Haley much in your school," Janice replied.

"Wal," said Marty, "I'll go when school opens and give him a whirl. Maybe he'll teach me how to fling that drop curve."

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"Now!" whined Aunt 'Mira, when Marty had stumped up to bed. "What good is it goin' ter do that boy ter go ter school an' learn baseball, I want ter know?"

CHAPTER XIV

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A TIME OF TRIAL

Janice met Nelson Haley a couple of days later in Hopewell Drugg's store. The matter had been decided ere then; Haley had obtained the school and had quickly established himself in a boarding-place, as the school would open the next week.

'Rill Scattergood and her mother had already gone to housekeeping in three nice rooms just around the corner on High Street, and Mr. Haley had the good fortune to be "taken in" by Mrs. Beasely. The gaunt old widow was plainly delighted once more to have "a man to do for."

"If my digestion holds out, Miss Day," whispered the young man to Janice, "I'm going to do fine with Mrs. Beasely. Good old creature! But she may kill me with kindness. I don't see how I am going to be able to do full justice to her three meals a day."

"I hope you will like it as well in school as you do at your boarding-place," ventured Janice, timidly.

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"Oh, the school? That's going to be pie," laughed Haley. "You know about how it's been run, don't you?"

"I—I attended for more than a month last spring," admitted the girl.

"Then you know very well," said the young man, smiling broadly, "that it won't be half a trick to satisfy the committee. They don't expect much. 'Just let things run along easy-like'; that will please them. If I can keep the boys straight and teach the youngsters a little, that will be about all the committee expects. Elder Concannon admitted that much to me. You see, the whole committee are opposed to what they term 'new-fangled notions.'"

"But there is some sentiment in town for an improvement in the school," declared Janice. "Don't you know that? Many people would like to see the children taught more, and the school more up-to-date."

"Oh, well," and Haley laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "The committee seem to be in power, and—Well, Miss Day, you can be sure that I know which side my bread is buttered on," he concluded, lightly.

Janice liked this bright, laughing young man very much. But she was sorry he had no more serious interest in his position than this conversation showed.

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Then there suddenly came a time when Janice Day's own interest in Poketown and Poketown people—in everything and everybody about her—seriously waned. Daddy had not written for a fortnight. When the letter finally came it had been delayed, and was not postmarked as usual. Daddy only hinted at one of the belligerent armies being nearer to the mines, and that most of his men had deserted.

There was trouble—serious trouble, or Daddy would not have kept his daughter in suspense. Janice watched the mails, eagle-eyed. She wrote letter after letter herself, begging him to keep her informed,—begging him to come away from that hateful Mexico altogether.

"Broxton's no business to be 'way down there at all," growled Uncle Jason, who was worried, too, and hadn't the tact to keep his feelings secret from the girl. "Why, Walky Dexter tells me they are shootin' white folks down there jest like we'd shoot squirrels in these parts."

"Oh, Jason!" gasped Aunt 'Mira. "It can't be as bad as that!"

"Wuss. They jest shot a rancher who was a Britisher, an' they say there'll be war about it. I

dunno. Does look as though our Government ought ter do somethin' to protect Americans as well as Britishers. But, hi tunket! Broxton hadn't ought ter gone down there—no, sir-ree!"

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This sort of talk did not help Janice. She drooped about the house and often crept off by herself into the woods and fields and brooded over Daddy's peril. School had begun, and Marty went with several of the bigger boys that had hung around Pringle's harness shop and the Inn stables.

"That Nelse Haley is all right," the boy confided to his cousin. "We're going to have two baseball teams next year. He says so. Then we kin have matched games. But now he's goin' to send for what he calls a 'pigskin' and he's a-goin' to teach us football. Guess you've heard of that, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Janice. "It's a great game, Marty. But what about school? Is he teaching you anything?"

Marty grinned. "Enough, I guess. Things goin' along easy-like. He don't kill us with work, that's one thing. Old Elder Concannon's been up once and sat an' listened to the classes. He seems satisfied."

Janice did not lose sight of Hopewell Drugg and little Lottie. The store was now doing a fairly good business; but the man admitted that the profits rolled up but slowly, and it would be a long time before he could take his little daughter to Boston.

These fall days Janice was frequently with Miss 'Rill. The little maiden lady seemed to understand better than most people just how Janice was troubled by her father's absence, his silence, and his peril. Besides, when old Mrs. Scattergood did not know, many were the times that 'Rill and Janice went to Hopewell Drugg's and "tidied up" the cottage for him. 'Rill would not go without Janice, and they usually stole in by the side door without saying a word to the storekeeper. He was grateful for their aid, and little Lottie was benefited by their ministrations.

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Then another letter came from Broxton Day. He admitted that the two armies were very near—one between him and communication with his friends over the Rio Grande—and that operations at the mine had completely ceased. Yet he felt it his duty to remain, even though the property was "between two fires," as it were.

Ere this Janice had sent off for an up-to-date map of northern Mexico and the Texan border. She and Marty and Mr. Day had pored over it evenings and had now marked the very spot in the hills where the mine was located. The girl subscribed for a New York newspaper, too, and that came in the evening mail. So they followed the movements of the Federal and the Constitutionalist armies as closely as possible from the news reports, and Janice read about each battle with deeper and deeper anxiety.

Had her uncle and aunt been wise they would have interfered in this occupation, or at least, they would not have encouraged it. Janice lost her cheerfulness and her rosy cheeks. Aunt 'Mira declared she drooped "like a sick chicken."

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"Ye mustn't pay so much 'tention to them papers," she complained. "I never did think much o' N'York daily papers, nohow. They don't have 'nuff stories in 'em."

But it was her own money Janice spent for the papers. Whenever Daddy had written he had usually enclosed in his envelope a bank note of small denomination for Janice. The bank in Greensboro sent the board money regularly to Uncle Jason (and Aunt 'Mira got it for her own personal use, as she declared she would), but Janice always had a little in her pocket.

Had she been well supplied with cash about this time the girl would have been tempted to run away and take the train for Mexico herself. It did seem to her, when the weeks went by without a letter reaching her from her father, as though he must be wounded, and suffering, and needing her!

But she did not have sufficient money to pay her fare such a long distance.

Aunt 'Mira was a poor comforter. Yet she fortunately aided in giving Janice something else to think about just then. The girl had helped "spruce up" Aunt 'Mira long since, so that they could go to church together on Sundays. But now the good lady was in the throes of making herself a silk dress for best—a black silk. It was the thing she had longed for most, and now she could satisfy the craving for clothes that had so obsessed her.

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Aunt 'Mira loved finery. Janice had to use her influence to the utmost to keep the good lady from committing the sin of getting this wonderful dress too "fancy." Left to herself, Mrs. Day would have loaded it with bead trimming and cut-steel ornaments. At first she even wanted it cut "minaret" fashion, which would have, in the end, made the poor lady look a good deal like an overgrown ballet dancer!

Janice had been glad to go to church. Always, before coming to Poketown, the girl had held a vital interest in church and church work. But here she found there was really nothing for the young people to do. They had no society, and aside from the Sunday School, a very cut-and-dried session usually, there was no special interest for the young.

Mr. Middler, the pastor, was a mild-voiced, softly stepping man, evidently fearing to give offense. Although he had been in the pastorate for several years, he seemed to have very little influence in the community. Elder Concannon and several other older members controlled the church and its policies utterly; and they frowned on any innovation.

One Sabbath, old Elder Concannon—a grizzled, heavy-eyebrowed man, with a beak-like nose and flashing black eyes—preached, and he thundered out the "Law" to his hearers as a man might use a goad on a refractory team of oxen. Mr. Middler was a faint echo of the old Elder on most occasions. He seemed afraid of taking his text from the New Testament. It was Law, not Love, that was preached at the Poketown Union Church; and although the dissertations may have been satisfactory to the older members, they did not attract the young people to service, or feed them when they *did* come!

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Janice often wondered if the loud "Amens!" of Elder Concannon, down in the corner, were worth as much to poor little Mr. Middler as would have been a measure of vital interest shown in the church and its work by some of the young people of the community.

There was a Ladies Sewing Circle. There is always a Ladies Sewing Circle! But, somehow, the making up of barrels of cast-off clothing for unfortunate missionaries in the West, or up in Canada, or the sewing together of innumerable ill-cut garments, which must, of course, be "misfits" for the unknown infants for whom they were intended,—all this never could seem sufficient to "feed the spirit," to Janice Day's mind.

Once or twice she went with Aunt 'Mira (who was proud of her new clothes and would occasionally go about to show them, now) to the sewing society meeting. But there were few other young girls there, and the gossip was not seasoned to her taste.

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One day came a letter from Daddy's friend and business associate in Juarez. For three weeks Janice had not received a word from her father. The man in Juarez wrote:

"DEAR MISS JANICE:—

"Communication is quite shut off from the district in which your father's property lies. From such spies as have been able to get to me, I learn that a disastrous battle has been fought near the place and that the Constitutionals have swept everything before them. They have overrun that part of Chihuahua and, that being the case, foreigners are not likely to be well treated or their property conserved.

"I write this because I think it my duty to do so. You should be warned that the very worst that can happen must be expected. I have not heard directly from Mr. Day for a fortnight, and then but a brief message came. He was then well and free, but spoke of being probably obliged to desert his post, after all.

"Just what has become of him I cannot guess. I have put the matter in the hands of the consul here, the State Department has already been telegraphed, and an inquiry will be made. But Americans are disappearing most mysteriously every week in Mexico, and I cannot hold out any hope for Mr. Day. He may get word through to you by some other route than this; if so, will you wire me at once?

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"Sincerely yours,
"JAMES W. BUCHANAN."

CHAPTER XV

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NEW BEGINNINGS

The very worst of it was, there was nothing Janice could do! She must wait, and to contemplate that passive state, almost drove her mad!

Day after day passed without bringing any further news. She read the papers just as eagerly as before; but the center of military activity in Mexico had suddenly shifted to an entirely different part of the country. There was absolutely no news in the papers from the district where the mine was situated.

Mr. Buchanan wrote once again, but even more briefly. He was a busy man, and had done all that he could. If he heard from, or of, Mr. Day he would telegraph Janice at once, and if *she* heard she was to let him know by the same means.

That was the way the matter stood. It seemed as though the State Department could, or would, do nothing. Mr. Day, like other citizens of the United States, had been warned of the danger he was in while he remained in a country torn by civil strife. The consequences were upon his own head.

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The folks who knew about Janice's trouble tried to be good to her. Walky Dexter drove around to invite the girl to go with him whenever he had a job that took him out of town with the spring wagon. Janice loved to jog over the hilly roads, and she saw a good bit of the country with Dexter.

"I'd love to own just a little automobile that I could run myself," she said once.

"Why don't you borry Nelse Haley's gasoline bike?" demanded Walky, with a grin. "Or, mebbe he'll put a back-saddle on fer yer. I've seen 'em ride double at Middletown."

"I don't like motorcycles. I want a wide seat and more comfort," said Janice. "Daddy said that, perhaps, if things went well with him down there in Mexico, I could have an auto runabout," and she sighed.

"Now, Miss Janice!" exclaimed the man, "don't you take on none. Mr. Broxton Day'll come out all right. I remember him as a boy, and he was jest as much different from Jason as chalk is from cheese! Yes, sir-ree!"

This implied a compliment for her father, Janice knew, so she was pleased. Walky Dexter meant well.

Little Miss Scattergood was Janice's greatest comfort during this time of trial. She did not discuss the girl's trouble, but she showed her sympathy in other ways. Old Mrs. Scattergood always wanted to discuss the horrors of the Mexican War, whenever she caught sight of Janice, which was not pleasant. So Miss 'Rill and Janice arranged to meet more often at Hopewell Drugg's, and little Lottie received better care those days than ever before. [Pg 151]

Miss 'Rill was not a bad seamstress, and the two friends began to make Lottie little frocks; and, as Hopewell only had to supply the material out of the store, Lottie was more prettily dressed—and for less money—than previously.

As Janice and the ex-schoolmistress sat sewing in the big Drugg kitchen, Hopewell would often linger in the shed room with his violin, when there were no customers, and play the few pieces he had, in all these years, managed to "pick out" upon his father's old instrument. "Silver Threads Among the Gold" was the favorite—especially with Lottie. She would dance and clap her hands when she felt the vibration of certain minor chords, and come running to the visitors and attract their attention to the sounds that she could "hear."

"He-a! he-a! he-a!" she shouted in that shrill toneless voice of hers.

Janice noticed that she talked less than formerly. Gradually the power of speech was going from her because of disuse. It is almost always so with the very young who are deprived of hearing. [Pg 152]

Such a pitiful, pitiful case! Sometimes Janice could not think of little Lottie without weeping. It seemed so awful that merely a matter of money—a few hundred dollars—should keep this child from obtaining the surgical help and the training that might aid her to become a happy, normal girl.

It was from Mr. Middler—rather, through a certain conversation with the minister—that Janice received the greatest help during these weeks when her father's fate remained uncertain.

She could not spend all her time at Hopewell Drugg's, or with Walky Dexter, or even about the old Day house. Autumn had come, and the mornings were frosty. The woods were aflame with the sapless leaves. Ice skimmed the quiet pools before the late-rising sun kissed them.

Janice had sometimes met the minister when she tramped over the hillside—and especially up toward the Shower Bath in Jason Day's wood lot. One glowing, warm October afternoon the girl and the gentle little parson met on the cow path through Mr. Day's upper pasture.

"Ah, my dear!" he said, shaking hands. "Where are you bound for?"

"I don't know whether I had better tell you, or not, sir," she returned, smiling, yet with some gravity. "You see, I was going to get comfort." [Pg 153]

"Comfort?"

"Yes, sir. You see, sometimes I get to thinking of—of Daddy so much that the whole world seems just made up of *my* trouble!" said Janice, with a sob. "Do you know what I mean, sir? Just as though me and my troubles were the most important things in existence—the *only* things, in fact."

"Ah—yes. I see—I see," whispered Mr. Middler, patting her shoulder, but looking away from her tear-streaked face. "We are all that way—sometimes, Janice. All that way."

"And then I go somewhere to get out of myself,—to—to get comfort."

"I see."

"And so I am going now to the place I call The Overlook. It's a great rock up yonder. I scramble up on top of it, and from that place I can see so much of the world that, by and by, I begin to realize just how small I really am, and how small, in comparison, my troubles must be in the whole great scheme of things. I begin to understand, then," she added, softly, "that God has so much to 'tend to in the Universe that He can't give me first chance *always*. I've got to wait my turn."

"Oh, but my dear!" murmured the doctrinarian. "I wouldn't limit the power of the Almighty—even in my thoughts."

"No-o. But—but God does just seem more *human* and close to me if I think of Him as very busy—yet thoughtful and kind for us all. Just—just like my Daddy, only on a bigger scale, Mr. Middler." [Pg 154]

The minister looked at her gravely for a moment and then took her hand again. "Suppose you show me that place of comfort?" he suggested, quietly.

They went on together through the pasture and up into the wood lot. They came out upon an unexpected opening in the wood, at the beginning of a great gash in the hillside. At the center of this opening was a huge boulder, surrounded by hazelnut bushes, to which the brown leaves still clung.

"You can climb up easily from the back. Let me show you," said Janice, who had by now got control of her tears, and was more like her smiling, cheerful self.

She ran up the incline, sure-footed as a goat; but at the more difficult place she gave the minister her hand. He was much more breathless than she when they stood together upon the overhanging rock.

Below them was the steep, wooded hillside, and the broken pastures and scattered houses north of Poketown, along the shore of the lake. This spot was on the promontory that flanked the bay upon one side. From this point it seemed that all of the great lake, with both its near and distant shores, lay spread at their feet!



**God's world *did* look bigger and greater from
The Overlook. (See page 155.)**

In the northwest frowned the half-ruined fortress, so heroic a landmark of pre-Revolutionary times. Nearer lay the wooded, rocky isle where a celebrated Indian chief had made his last stand against the encroaching whites. Yonder was the spot where certain of those bold pioneers and fighters, the Green Mountain Boys, embarked under their famous leaders, Allen and Warner, upon an expedition that historians will never cease to write of.

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It was a noble, as well as a beautiful, view. God's world *did* look bigger and greater from The Overlook. Sitting by her side, the minister held the girl's hand, and listened to her artless expressions. She told him quite frankly what all this view meant to her,—how it helped and soothed her worried spirit, brought comfort to her grieving heart. Here were many square miles of God's Footstool under her gaze; and there were many, many thousands of other spots like this between her and the Mexican mountains in which her father was held a prisoner. And God had the same care over one bit of landscape as he did over another!

"Then," she said, softly, in conclusion, "then I just seem to grasp the idea of God's *bigness*—and how much He has to do. I won't complain. I'll wait. And meanwhile I'll do, if I can, what Daddy told me to."

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"What is that, Janice?" asked the minister, still gazing out over the vast outlook himself.

"I must *do something*,—keep to work, you know. Try and make things better. You know: 'Each in his small corner.' And there's so much to be done in Poketown!"

"So much—in Poketown?" ejaculated the minister, suddenly brought out of his reverie.

"Yes, sir."

"But I thought Poketown was a particularly satisfactory place. There really is very little to do here. We have a very clean political government, remarkably so. Of course, that fact would not so much interest you, Janice. But the life of the church is very spiritual—very. We have no saloons; we seldom have an arrest—"

"Oh, I never thought of those things," admitted Janice. "There isn't really anything for young people to do in the Poketown Church, I know. But outside—"

"And what can be done outside?" asked the minister, and perhaps he winced a little at the confidence in Janice's voice when she spoke of the church system which kept the young people at a distance.

"Why, you know, there are the boys. Boys like Marty—my cousin. He goes to school now, it's true; but he's down town just as much as ever at night. And there's no good place for the boys to go—to congregate, I mean." [Pg 157]

"Humph! I thought once of opening the church basement to them," murmured Mr. Middler. "But—but there was opposition. Some thought the boys might take advantage of our good nature and be ill-behaved."

"So they continue to hang around the hotel sheds and the stores," pursued Janice, thoughtfully, without meaning to be critical. "Boys *will* get together in a club, or gang. Daddy used to say they were naturally gregarious, like some birds."

"Yes," said the minister, slowly.

"They ought to have a nice, warm, well-lighted room where they could go, and play games, and read,—with a circulating library attached. Of course, a gymnasium would be too much to even *dream* of, at first! Why! wouldn't that be fine? And isn't it practical? *Do* say it is!"

"I do not know whether it is practicable or not, Janice," said the minister, slowly, yet smiling at her. "But the thought is inspired. You shall have all the help I can give you. It *ought* to be in the church—"

"No. That would scare the boys away," interposed Janice, with finality. [Pg 158]

"Why, my dear? You speak as though the church was a bogey!"

"Well—but—dear Mr. Middler! Just ask the boys themselves. How many of them love to go to church—even to Sunday School? I mean the boys that hang about the village stores at night."

"It is so—it is so," he admitted, with a sigh.

From this sprang the idea of the Poketown Free Library. It was of slow growth, and there is much more to be said about it; but Janice found her personal troubles much easier to bear when she began trying to interest the people of Poketown in the reading-room idea.

And didn't Mr. Middler bear something of his own away from that visit to The Overlook—something that glowed in his heart? He preached quite a different kind of a sermon that next Sunday, and the text was one of the most helpful and *living* in all the New Testament.

Some of the older members of his congregation shook their heads over it. It was not "strong meat," they said; there was nothing to argue about! But a dozen troubled, needy members who heard the sermon, felt new hope in their hearts, and they got through the following week—trials and all!—much easier than usual.

CHAPTER XVI

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"SHOWING" THE ELDER

No millionaire library-giver had found Poketown on the map. Or else, the hard-headed and tight-fisted voters of that Green Mountain community were too sharp to allow anybody to foist upon them a granite mausoleum, the upkeep of which would mainly advertise the name of the donor.

The Union Sunday School had a library; but its list of volumes was open to the same objections as are raised to many other institutions of its kind. Nor was a circulating library so much needed in Poketown as a reading and recreation room for the youth of the village.

Aside from her brief talk with Mr. Middler, Janice Day advised with no adult at first as to how the establishment of the needed institution should be brought about.

The girl had studied Marty, if she had had little opportunity of becoming acquainted with other specimens of the genus *boy*. She knew they were as bridle-shy as wild colts. [Pg 160]

The idea of the club-room for reading and games must seem to come from the boys themselves. It must appear that they accepted adult aid perforce, but with the distinct understanding that the room was *theirs* and that there was not to be too much oversight or control by the supporting

members of the institution.

The scheme was not at all original with Janice. The nucleus of many a successful free library and village club has been a similar idea.

"Marty, why don't you and your chums have a place of your own where you can read and play checkers these cold nights? I hear Josiah Pringle has chased you out of his shop again."

"Ya-as—mean old hunks!"

"But didn't somebody spoil a whole nest of whips for him by pouring liquid glue over the snappers?"

"Well! that was only one feller. An' Pringle put us all out," complained the boy, but grinning, too.

"You wouldn't have let that boy do such a thing in your own club-room—now, would you?"

"Huh! how'd we ever git a club-room, Janice? We had Poley Haskin's father's barn one't; but when we tried to heat it with a three-legged cookstove, Poley's old man put us out in a hurry."

"Oh, I mean a real *nice* place," said the wily Janice. "Not a place to smoke those nasty cigarettes in, and carry on; but a real reading-room, with books, and papers, and games, and all that." [Pg 161]

"Oh, that would be fine! But where'd we get that kind of a place in Poketown?" queried Marty.

That was the start of it.

There was an empty store on High Street next to the drug store. It was a big room which could be easily heated by a pot stove and a few lengths of stovepipe. It was owned by the drug-store man, and had been empty a long time. He asked six dollars a month rent for it.

It was just about this time that Janice learned she possessed powers of persuasive eloquence. The druggist was the first person she "tackled" in her campaign.

"It's a secret, Mr. Massey," she told him; "but some of the boys want a reading-room, and some of the rest of us are anxious to help them get it. Only it mustn't be talked of at first, or it will be all spoiled. You know how 'fraid boys are that there is going to be a trap set for them."

"Ain't that so?" chuckled the druggist.

"And we want your empty room next door."

"Wa-al—I dunno!" returned the man, finding the matter suddenly serious, when it was brought so close home to him.

"Of course, we expect to pay for it. Only we'd like to have you cut the rent in two for the first three months," said Janice, quickly.

"Say! that might be all right," the druggist observed, more briskly. "But I don't know about all these harum-scarums collecting around this corner. I have been glad heretofore that they have hung around Pringle's, or Joe Henderson's, or the hotel, instead of up here. They've been up to all sorts of mischief." [Pg 162]

"If they don't behave reasonably they'll lose the reading-room. Of course that will be understood," said Janice.

"You can't trust some of 'em," growled the druggist. "Never!"

"We'll make those who want the reading-room make the mischievous ones behave," laughed Janice.

"Well," agreed the druggist, "we'll try it. Three dollars a month for three months; then six dollars. I can afford no more."

"So much for so much!" whispered Janice, when she came away from the store. "At least, it's a beginning."

But it was a very small beginning, as she soon began to realize. She had no money to give toward the project herself, and it was very hard to beg from some people, even for a good cause.

There was needed at least one long table and two small ones, as well as some sort of a desk for whoever had charge of the room; and shelves for the books, and lamps, and a stove, and chairs, beside curtains at the windows. These simple furnishings would do to begin with. But how to get any, or all, of these was the problem. [Pg 163]

Janice went to several people able to help in the project, before she said anything more to Marty. Some of these people encouraged her; some shook their heads pessimistically over the idea.

She wished Elder Concannon to agree to pay the rent of the room for the first three months. It would be but nine dollars, and the old gentleman could easily do it. Since closing his pastorate of the Union Church, years before, Mr. Concannon had become (for Poketown) a rich man. He had invested a small legacy received about that time in abandoned marble quarries and sugar-maple orchards. Both quarries and orchards had taken on a new lease of life, and had enriched the shrewd old minister.

But Elder Concannon let go of a dollar no more easily now than when he had been dependent upon a four-hundred-dollar salary and a donation party twice a year.

It was not altogether parsimony that made the old gentleman "hem and haw" over Janice Day's proposal. Naturally, an innovation of any kind would have made him shy, but especially one calculated to yield any pleasure to the boys of Poketown.

"I don't dispute but you may mean all right, Miss Day," he said, shaking his bristling head at her. "But there's no good in those young scamps—no good at all. You would waste your time trying to benefit them. They would turn your reading-room into a bear garden." [Pg 164]

"You do not *know* that, sir," said Janice, boldly. "Let us try them."

"You are very young, Miss Day," said the Elder, stiffly. "You should yield more easily to the opinions of your elders."

"Why?" demanded the girl, quickly, but smiling. "We young ones have got to learn through our own experiences, haven't we? When *you* were young, sir, you had to learn at first hand—isn't that so? You would not accept the opinions of the older men as infallible. Now, did you, sir?"

The Elder was a bit staggered; but he was honest.

"Ahem!" he said. "For that very reason I desire to have you accept my advice, young lady. It will save you much trouble and heartache. These boys need a stronger hand than yours——"

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Janice. "*I* wouldn't undertake to have anything to do with governing them—no, indeed! I thought of speaking to Mr. Haley—if I could interest him in the project—and get him to keep an eye on the reading-room at night. But the boys will have to understand that they can only have the benefits of the place as long as they are on their good behavior." [Pg 165]

"Ahem!" coughed the Elder again. "Mr. Haley is a very bright young man—an especially good Latin scholar. But I fancy he finds the boys quite enough to handle during the daytime, without having the care of them at night. And—to be frank—I do not approve of the idea at all."

"Then—then you positively will not help us?" asked Janice, disappointedly.

"You have not proved your case—to *my* mind—Miss Day," said the old gentleman, sternly. "It is not a feasible plan that you suggest. The young rascals would make the place a regular nuisance. They would be worse than they already are—and that is saying a good deal."

"I am sorry you think that, sir," returned Janice, quietly. "I think better of them than you do. I believe the boys will appreciate such a place and—if I can find enough people to help—I hope to see the reading-room established."

"I disapprove, Miss—I disapprove!" declared Elder Concannon, almost angrily, for he was not used to being crossed, especially in any semi-public matter like this. "You will find, too, that my opinion is the right one. Good-day, Miss. I am sorry to find one so young impervious to the advice of her elders."

"I'll just *show* him! That's what I'll do—I'll *show* him!" was the determination of the girl from Greensboro. "And I don't believe Poketown boys are much worse than any other boys—if they only have half a chance." [Pg 166]

Fortunately all those to whom Janice went in her secret canvass were not like the opinionated old minister. Several subscribed money, and insisted upon paying their subscription over to her at once so that she might have a "working fund." Janice set aside three dollars for the first month's rent of the store and with the remainder purchased a second-hand table, some plain kitchen chairs, and some lumber. She began to use this subscribed money with some little trepidation, for—suppose her scheme fell through, after all?

She got her uncle to agree to the needed carpenter's work; a painter gave her a brush and sufficient wood-stain to freshen up all the woodwork of the store. Miss 'Rill came and helped her clean the place and kalsomine the walls and ceiling. A storekeeper gave her enough enameled oilcloth to cover neatly the long table. Hopewell Drugg furnished bracket lamps, and gave her the benefit of the wholesale discount on a hanging lamp and reflector to light the reading-table.

Walky Dexter did what carting was needed. Janice and her aunt made the curtains themselves, and they put them up so as to keep out the prying eyes of all Poketown, for the community now began to wonder what was going on in the empty room next the drug store. As Walky had been bound to secrecy, too, the curious had no means of learning what was going on. It was just as though the printing office of a thriving town newspaper had burned down and there was no means of disseminating the news. This was the effect of the muzzle on Walky Dexter! [Pg 167]

It was at this point that Janice took Marty, and through him, the other boys, into the scheme.

"What would you boys each pay in dues to keep up a nice reading-room such as we talked about, Marty?" she asked her cousin.

"Aw, say!" grunted Marty. "Let's talk about the treasure chest we've found in our back yard. *That* sounds more sensible."

"Wouldn't you be glad of such a place?" laughed Janice.

"Say! would a duck swim?" growled the boy, thinking that she was teasing him. "Bring on your old reading-room, and we'll show ye."

That very afternoon she and Miss 'Rill had given the last touches to the room. It was as neat as a pin; the lamps were all filled and the chimneys polished. It was only a bare room, it was true; but there were possibilities in it, Janice was sure, that would appeal to Marty. She put on her hat and held her coat out for him to help her into.

"I'm going down town with you to-night, Marty," she said, smiling. "I've got something to show you."

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"Huh! What's it all about?"

"You come along and see," she told him. "It's just the finest thing that ever happened—and you'll say so, too, I know."

But she refused to explain further until they turned up High Street and stopped at the dark and long-empty shop beside the drug store.

"Oh, gee! In Massey's store?" gasped Marty, when his cousin fitted a key to the lock.

"Come in and shut the door. Now stand right where you are while I light the lamp," commanded Janice.

She lit the hanging lamp over the table. The soft glow of it was soon flung down upon the dull brown cloth. Marty stared around with mouth agape.

His father had built a sort of counter at one end, with a desk and shelves behind it. Of course, there was not a book, or paper, in the place as yet—nor a game. But Marty needed no explanation.

"Janice Day! did you do all this?" he demanded, with a gasp.

"Of course not, goosey! Lots of people helped. And they're going to help more—if you boys show yourselves appreciative."

"What's that 'appreciative' mean?" demanded Marty, suspiciously.

"No fights here; no games that are so boisterous as to disturb those who want to read. Just gentlemanly behavior while you are in the room. That's all, besides a small tax each month to help toward the upkeep of the room. What do you say, Marty?"

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"You done this!" declared the boy, with sudden heat. "Don't say you didn't, for that'll be a lie. I never saw a girl like you, Janice!"

"Why—why—Don't you like it?" queried Janice, disturbed.

"Of course I do! It's bully! It's great!" exclaimed Marty. "Lemme show it to the boys. They'll be crazy about it. And if they don't behave it'll be because they're too big for me to lick," concluded Marty, nodding his head emphatically.

Janice burst out laughing at this, and pressed the key into his hand. "Until we get organized properly, you will take charge of the room, won't you, Marty?"

"Sure I will."

"You'll need a stove; I think I can get that for you in a day or two. And lots of folks have promised books. I've written to friends in Greensboro for books, too. And several people who take magazines and papers regularly have promised to hand them over to the reading-room just as soon as they have read them. And you boys can bring your checkers, and dominoes, and other games, from home, eh?"

Marty was scarcely listening; but he was looking at her with more seriousness than his plain face usually betrayed.

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"Janice, you're almost as good as a boy yourself!" he declared. "I'm not sorry a bit that you came to Poketown."

Janice only laughed at him again; yet the boy's awkward earnestness warmed her heart.

The girl was finding in these busy days the truest balm for her own worriments. Nothing more was heard of Mr. Broxton Day; yet Janice felt less need of running alone into the woods and fields to find that comfort about which she had told the minister.

Besides, it soon grew too cold for frequent jaunts afield. The small streams and pools were icebound. Then, over the fir-covered heights, sifted the first snow of winter, and Poketown seemed suddenly tucked under a coverlet of white.

The reading-room was an established fact. An association to support it was formed, divided into active and honorary members. The boys, as active members, themselves contributed twenty-five cents per month each, towards its support. Tables for games were set up. A goodly number of books appeared on the shelves. From Greensboro a huge packing-case of half-worn books was sent; Janice's friends at home had responded liberally.

Files of daily and weekly papers were established and magazines of the more popular kind were subscribed for. Nelson Haley gave several evenings each week to work as librarian, and to keep a general oversight of the boys. To tell the truth, he did this more because Janice asked him to than from personal interest in the institution; but he did it.

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Slowly the more pessimistic of the townspeople began to show interest in the reading-room. Mr. Middler openly expressed his approval of the institution. Mr. Massey, the druggist, reported that the boys behaved themselves "beyond belief!"

At length, even old Elder Concannon appeared unexpectedly in the reading-room one night to see what was going on. He came to criticise and remained to play a game of "draughts," as he called them, with Marty Day himself!

"Them young scalawags, Elder," declared Massey, when the old gentleman dropped into the drug store afterward. "Them young scalawags are certainly surprising *me*. They behaved themselves more like human bein's than I ever knowed 'em to before. An' it's a nice, neat, warm room, too, ain't it, now?"

"Ahem! It appears to be," admitted Elder Concannon, and not so grudgingly as might have been expected. "But where's that young girl who had so much to do with it at first—where's that Day girl?"

"Why, pshaw, Elder! *she* don't have nothing to do with the reading-room," and the druggist's eyes twinkled. "Don't you know that she only *starts* things in this town? She sets folks up in the business of 'doing for themselves'. Then she goes along about her own business.

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"What's *that*? Well, I dunno. I'm wonderin' myself just where she'll break out next!"

CHAPTER XVII

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CHRISTMAS NEWS

It bade fair to be an old-fashioned northern New England winter. Janice Day had never seen anything like this in the prairie country from which she had come.

There three or four big storms, the traces of which soon melted, had been considered a "hard" winter. Here in Poketown the hillside was made white before Thanksgiving, and then one snow after another sifted down upon the mountains. Tree branches in the forest broke under the weight of snow. Sometimes she lay awake in the night and heard the frost burst great trees as though a stick of dynamite had been set off inside them.

The lake ice became so thick that the steamboat could no longer make her trips. Walky Dexter became mail carrier and brought the mail from Middletown every other day.

Janice found the time not at all tedious in its flight. There really was so much to do!

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As for real *fun*—winter sports had been little more than a name to the girl from the Middle West before this winter. The boys had got their bob-sleds out before Thanksgiving. Toboggans were not popular in Poketown, for the coasting-places were too rough. At first Janice was really afraid to join the hilarious parties of boys and girls on some of the slides.

Marty, however, owned a big sled, and she did not want her cousin to lose his good opinion of her. He had declared that she was almost as good as a boy, and Janice successfully hid from him her fear of the sport that really is a royal one.

A favorite slide of the Poketown young people was from the head of the street on which Hopewell Drugg's store was located, down the hill, past the decayed dock on which Janice had first seen little Lottie Drugg, and on across the frozen inlet to the wooded point in which Lottie declared the echo dwelt.

When the whole lake froze solidly, the course of the sleds was continued across its level surface as far as the momentum from the hill would carry the bobs. There was skating here, too; and many were the moonlight nights on which a regular carnival was held at the foot of these hilly streets.

Walky Dexter owned a great sledge, too, and when he attached two span of horses to this, and the roads were even half broken, he could drive parties of Poketown young people all over the county, on moonlight sleigh-rides. Janice was invited to go on several of these, and she did so. Her heart was not always attuned to the hilarity of her companions; but she did not allow herself to become morose, or sad, in public.

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Yet the gnawing worriment about her father was in her mind continually. It was an effort for her to be lively and cheerful when the fate of Mr. Broxton Day was so uncertain.

Her more thoughtful comrades realized the girl's secret feelings. She was treated with more consideration by the rough boys who were Marty's mates, than were the other girls.

"Say, that Janice girl is all right!" one rough fellow said to Marty Day. "I see her scouring the

papers in the readin'-room the other night, and she was lookin' for some news of her father, of course."

"I reckon so," Marty answered. "We don't know nothing about what's become of him. They stand 'em up against a wall down there in Mexico and shoot 'em just for fun—so Walky Dexter says. Dad says he never expects to hear of Uncle Brocky alive ag'in."

"And yet that girl keeps up her pluck! She's all right," declared the other. "Gee! suppose she should come smack upon the story of her father's death some night there in the readin'-room? Wouldn't that be tough?"

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From this conversation sprang the idea of a sort of Brotherhood of Defense (in lieu of a better title) among the boys who used the reading-room whose existence Janice Day's initiative had established. Whoever got the papers from the mail and spread them on the file in the reading-room, first examined the columns carefully for any mention of the execution of prisoners by either belligerent party in Mexico; especially was the news searched for any mention of the lost Mr. Day.

Sometimes, when the news story suggested one of these horrible executions, the whole paper was "lost in the mail." At least, when it was inquired for, that was the stock reply. The boys made sure that Janice should never see such blood-chilling accounts of Mexican activities.

It drew toward Christmas. Janice had another sorrow, of which she never said a word. Her spending money was nearly gone. She saw the bottom of her narrow purse just as the season of giving approached!

There were so many things she wanted to do for all her friends, both in Poketown and back at Greensboro. Some few little things she had made, for her fingers were both nimble and dexterous. But "homemade" presents would not do for Uncle Jason, Aunt 'Mira, Marty, and a dozen other people towards whom she felt kindly.

She had begun to worry, too, about what would finally happen to her if her father never came back! How long would the bank continue to pay her board to Uncle Jason? And how was she to get clothes, and other necessary things?

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In the midst of these mental tribulations came a letter from the Greensboro bank, addressed to Janice herself. In it was the cashier's check for twenty-five dollars, and a brief note from the official himself, stating that Mr. Day, before ever he had separated from his daughter, had looked forward to her Christmas shopping and instructed the bank to send on the fifteenth of December this sum for her personal use.

"Dear, dear Daddy! He forgot nothing," sobbed Janice, when she read this note, and kissed the check which seemed to have come warm from her father's hand. "Whatever shall I do all through my life long without him, if he never comes back?"

Christmas Eve came. The clouds had been gathering above the higher peaks of the Green Mountains all day, and, as evening dropped, the snow began falling.

Janice and Marty went down town together after supper. Even Poketown showed some special light and life at this season. Dusty store windows were rejuvenated; candles, and trees, and tinsel, and wreathes blossomed all along High Street. Janice was proud to know that the brightest windows, and the most tastefully dressed, were Hopewell Drugg's. And in the middle of the biggest window of Drugg's store was a beautiful wax doll, which she and Miss 'Rill had themselves dressed. On Christmas morning that doll was to be found by Lottie Drugg, fast asleep with its head on the blind child's own pillow!

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Janice had to run around just to take a last peek at the window and the doll, while Marty went to the post office for the evening mail. Papers and magazines were due in that mail for the reading-room; and, despite the fact that the snow was falling more heavily every minute, there would be some of the "regulars" in the reading-room, glad to see the papers.

Janice had turned her own subscription for the New York daily over to the reading-room association; and when she wanted to read the New York paper herself, she went to the files to look at it. Weeks had passed now since there had been anything printed about that district in Chihuahua where her father's mine was located.

Coming back, down the hill from Drugg's, Janice saw that Marty had not gone at once into the reading-room and lit the lamps. Her cousin was standing in the light of the drug-store window, a bundle of papers and magazines under his arm, and one paper spread before his eyes. He seemed to be reading eagerly.

"Hey, Marty! come on in and read! It's awful cold out here!" she shouted to him, shaking the latch of the reading-room door with her mittened hand.

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Marty, roused, looked up guiltily, and thrust the quickly folded paper into the breast of his jacket. "Aw, I'm comin'," he said.

But when he came to open the door Janice noticed that he seemed to fumble the key greatly, and he kept his face turned from her gaze.

"What's the matter, Marty?" she asked, lightly.

"Matter? Ain't nothin' the matter," grunted the boy.

"Why, Marty! you're crying!" gasped Janice, suddenly.

"Ain't neither!" growled the boy, wiping his rough coat sleeve across his eyes. "Snow's blowed in 'em."

"That's more than snow, Marty," was Janice's confident remark.

"Huh!" snorted Marty. "Girls allus know so much!"

He seemed to have suddenly acquired "a grouch." So Janice went cheerily about the room, singing softly to herself, and lighting the lamps. Nobody else had arrived, for it was still early in the evening.

Marty stole softly to the stove. The fire had been banked, and the room was quite chilly. He rattled the dampers, opened them, and then, with a side glance at his cousin, pulled the paper from within the breast of his jacket and thrust it in upon the black coals before he closed the stove door.

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"Where's the New York paper, Marty?" Janice was asking, as she arranged the Montpelier and the Albany papers on their files.

"Didn't come," grunted Marty, and picked up the empty coal hod. "I got to git some coal," he added, and dashed outside into the snow.

Instantly the girl hastened across the room. She jerked the stove door open. There lay the folded paper, just beginning to brown in the heat of the generating gas. She snatched it from the fire and, hearing the outer door opened again, thrust the paper inside her blouse.

It wasn't Marty, but was one of the other boys. She did not understand why her cousin should have told her an untruth about the New York paper. But she did not want an open rupture with him here and now—and before other people.

"I'm going right home," she said to Marty, when he came back with the replenished coal hod. "It's snowing real hard."

"Sure. There won't be many of the fellows around to-night, anyway. Peter here will stay all evening and lock up—if Mr. Haley don't come. Won't you, Pete?"

"Sure," was the reply.

"Then I'll go along with you," declared Marty, who wasn't half as ashamed to escort a girl on the street nowadays as he had been a few months before.

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Now, Janice had intended running over to Hopewell Drugg's store and looking at the paper Marty had tried to destroy. She did not for a moment suspect what was in it, or why her cousin had told her a falsehood about it. But she saw she would have to defer the examination of the news-sheet.

"All right. Come along, Marty," she agreed, with assumed carelessness.

The boy was very moody. He stole glances at her only when he thought she was not looking. Never had Janice seen the hobbledehoy act so strangely!

They plowed through the increasing snow up Hillside Avenue, and the snow fell so rapidly that the girl was really glad she had come home. She entered first, Marty staying out on the porch a long time, stamping and scraping his boots.

When he came in he still had nothing to say. He pulled his seat to the far side of the glowing stove and sat there, hands in his pockets and chin on his breast.

"What's the matter with you, Marty?" shrilled Mrs. Day. "You ain't sick, be ye?"

"Nop," growled her son.

That was about all they could get out of him—monosyllables—until Janice retired to her own room. The girl was so anxious to get upstairs and look at that paper she had recovered from the reading-room fire, that she went early. When she had bidden the others good night and mounted to her room, however, she did something she had never done before. She unlatched her door again softly and tiptoed out to the landing at the top of the stairs, to listen.

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Marty had suddenly come to life. She heard his voice, low and tense, dominating the other voices in the kitchen. She could not hear a word he said, but suddenly Aunt 'Mira broke out with: "Oh! my soul and body, Marty! It ain't so—don't say it's so!"

"Be still, 'Mira," commanded Uncle Jason's quaking voice. "Let the boy tell it."

She heard nothing more but the murmur of her cousin's voice and her aunt's soft crying. Janice stole back into her cold room. She shook terribly, but not with the chill of the frosty air.

Her trembling fingers found a match and ignited the wick of the skeleton lamp. She had, ere this, manufactured a pretty paper shade for it, and this threw the stronger radiance of the light upon a round spot on the bureau. She drew out the scorched paper and unfolded it in that light.

She did not have to search long. The article she feared to see was upon the first page of the

THE BANDIT, RAPHELE, AT WORK

A Fugitive's Story of the Christmas-Week Execution in Granadas District

TWO AMERICANS DRAW LOTS FOR LIFE

John Makepiece Tells His Story in Cida; His Fellow-Prisoner, Broxton Day, Fills One of Raphele's "Christmas Graves"

CHAPTER XVIII

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"THE FLY-BY-NIGHT"

Janice Day could never have told how long she sat there, elbows on the bureau, eyes glued to those black lines on the newspaper page. The heat of the tall oil lamp almost scorched her face; but her back was freezing. There was never anything invented—not even a cold storage plant—as cold as the ordinary New England farmhouse bedchamber!

But the girl felt neither the lamp's heat, nor the deadly chill of the room. For a long time she could not even read beyond the mere headlines of the article telegraphed from Cida.

This seemed to be conclusive. It was the end of all hope for Janice—or, so she then believed. There seemed not a single chance that her father could have escaped. No news had been good news, after all. This story in the paper was all too evil—all too certainly evil!

By and by she managed to concentrate her numbed mind upon the story itself. There is no need to repeat it here in full; when Janice had read it twice she could not easily forget its most unimportant phrase.

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The man, John Makepiece, with Broxton Day, of Granadas district, had been held "incommunicado" for months by the bandit, Raphele. This leader had fought with his *commando* for the Constitutionals at the battle of Granadas; but he was really an outlaw and cutthroat, and many of his followers were brigands like him.

The prisoners had been held for ransom. Several of the Mexican captives of Raphele had managed to pay their way out of the villain's clutches; but both Americans refused to apply to their friends for ransom. Indeed, they did not trust to Raphele's protestations, believing that if any money at all for their release was forthcoming, it would only whet the villain's cupidity and cause Raphele to make larger demands.

Raphele feared now to remain longer in that part of Chihuahua. His unlawful acts had called down upon his head the serious strictures of the Constitutionalist leaders. They were about to abolish his command.

In his rage and bloodthirstiness he had declared his intention of either destroying his remaining prisoners, or sending them to their homes crippled. But the two Americans he treated differently. With fiendish delight in seeing those two brave men suffer, he had commanded them to cast lots to see which should be escorted beyond the lines, while the other was marched to the edge of an open grave, there to find a sure and sudden end under the rain of bullets from a "firing squad."

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John Makepiece had drawn the long straw. There was no help for it. He rode away on a sorry nag that was given him, and from a distant height saw the other American marched out to the place of burial, and even waited to see the puff of smoke from the guns as the soldiers fired at the doomed man.

The details were horrible. The effect upon Janice was a most unhappy one. For more than an hour she sat there before her bureau in the cold room, her gaze fastened upon the story in the newspaper.

Then the family came up to bed. Aunt 'Mira saw the light under the girl's door.

"Janice! Janice!" she whispered. "Whatever is the matter with you?"

Aunt 'Mira had been crying and her voice was still husky. When she pushed open the door a little way and saw the girl, she gasped out in alarm.

"Oh, my dear!" sobbed Aunt 'Mira. "*Do you know?*"

Janice could not then speak. She pointed to the paper, and when Aunt 'Mira folded her in her arms, the girl burst into tears—tears that relieved her overcharged heart.

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"You run down an' open up the drafts of that stove again, Jason," exclaimed the fleshy lady, for once taking command of affairs. "This child's got a chill. She's got ter have suthin' hot, or she'll be sick on our hands—poor dear! She's been a-settin' here readin' all that stuff Marty told us was in the paper—I do believe. Ain't that so, child?"

Janice, sobbing on her broad bosom, intimated that it was a fact.

"That boy ain't no good. He didn't burn up the paper at all. She got holt on it," declared Uncle Jason, quite angry.

"Oh, it wasn't—wasn't Marty's fault," sobbed Janice. "And I had to know! I had to know!"

They got her downstairs, and Mrs. Day sent "the men folks" to bed. She insisted upon putting Janice's feet into a mustard-water bath, and made her swallow fully a pint of steaming hot "composition." Two hours later Janice was able to go to bed, and, because she hoped against hope, and was determined not to believe the story until it was thoroughly confirmed, she fell immediately into a dreamless sleep.

When she awoke on Christmas morning, it was with a full and clear knowledge of what had happened, and a pang of desolation and grief such as had swept over her the night before. But she set herself to hope as long as she could, and to suppress any untoward exhibition of her sorrow and pain, while she made every effort to find out the truth about her father.

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The family was very gentle with the heartsick girl. Even Marty showed by his manner that he sympathized with her. And she could not forget that he had tried his very best to keep the knowledge of the awful crime from her.

Janice brought down with her to the breakfast table the little presents which she had prepared for her uncle, and aunt, and cousin. There were no boisterous "Merry Christmases" in the old Day house that morning; even Uncle Jason wiped his eyes after saying grace at the breakfast table.

After all, Janice was the most self-controlled of the four. She said, midway of the meal:

"I cannot believe all of that dreadful story in the paper. I want to know more of the particulars."

"Oh, hush! hush!" begged her aunt. "I read it. It's too horrible! I wouldn't want to know any more, child."

"But I must *know* more—if there's more to be known. I believe I can telegraph to Cida. At least, Mr. Buchanan at Juarez may know something more about this man's story. I wish there was either telegraph, or telephone, in Poketown."

"Gee, Janice!" exclaimed Marty. "Nobody could git over to Middletown to-day. Not even Walky Dexter. The wind blowed great guns last night, and the roads are full of drifts."

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"But it doesn't look so from my window," said his cousin.

"Pshaw! all you can see is the lake. Snow blowed right across the ice, an' never scarcely touched it. But there's heaps and heaps in the road. Say! we got ter dig out Hillside Avenue—ain't we, Dad?"

"A lot of snow fell in the night—that's a fact," admitted Uncle Jason.

"But I see somebody coming up the street now," cried Janice, jumping up eagerly from the table.

It was Walky Dexter, plowing his way through the drifts in hip boots.

"This is sure a white Christmas!" he bawled from the gate. "I got suthin' for you, Janice. Hi tunket! can't git through this here gate, so I'll climb over it. Wal, Janice, a Merry Christmas to ye!" he added, as he stumped up upon the porch, and handed her a little package from Miss 'Rill.

"I am afraid not a very merry one, Walky," said the girl, shaking his mittened hand. "Come inside by the fire. Uncle Jason, where is that paper? I want Mr. Dexter to read it."

"Oh, dear, me!" murmured Walky, when he saw the heading of the Mexican telegraph despatch. Then, with his fur cap cocked over one ear, and his boots steaming on the stove hearth, he read the story through. "Oh, dear, me!" he said again.

"I want you to try to get me to Middletown, Walky," Janice said, with a little catch in her voice. "Right away."

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"Mercy on us, child! a day like this?" gasped her aunt.

"Why, the storm's over," said Janice, firmly. "And I must send some telegrams and get answers. Oh, I must! I must!"

"Hoity-toity, Miss Janice!" broke in Walky. "'Must' is a hard driver, I know. But I tell ye, we couldn't win through the drif's. Why, I been as slow as a toad funeral gettin' up here from High Street. The ox teams won't be out breakin' the paths before noon, and they won't get out of town before to-morrer, that's sure, Miss."

"Oh, my dear!" cried her aunt, again. "You mustn't think of doing such a thing. Wait."

"I *can't* wait," declared Janice, with pallid face and trembling lip, but her hazel eyes dry and hard. "I tell you I must know *more*."

"I can't take ye to Middletown, Janice. Not till the roads is broke," Walky said, firmly, shaking his head.

"Hi! here comes somebody else up the road," shouted Marty, from outside.

Janice ran, hoping to see a team. It was only a single figure struggling through the snow.

"By jinks!" exclaimed Marty. "It's the teacher."

"It *is* Mr. Haley," murmured Janice.

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The young collegian, well dressed for winter weather, waved his hand when he saw them, and struggled on. He carried a long parcel and when he went through the more than waist-high drifts he held this high above his head.

"Hi, there!" yelled Marty, waving his mittened hands. "Ain't you lost over here, Mr. Haley?"

"I see somebody has been before me," laughed Nelson Haley, following Walky Dexter's tracks over the fence and up to the cleared porch. "How do you do, Miss Janice? A very happy Christmas to you!"

"Thank you for your good wish, Mr. Haley," she replied, soberly. "But it is not going to be a very glad Christmas for me, I fear. Oh! is it for *me*?" for he had thrust the long pasteboard box into her arms.

"If you will accept them, Miss Janice," returned the young man, with a bow.

"Open it, Janice!" exclaimed Marty. "Let's see."

"I—I—"

"Lemme do it for you," cried Marty, the curious.

He broke the string, yanked off the paper, and Janice herself lifted the cover. A great breath of spicy odor rushed out at her from the box.

"Oh! Mr. Haley! Cut flowers! *Hothouse flowers!* Wherever did you get them?" cried Janice, drawing aside the tissue paper and burying her face in the fragrant, dewy blossoms.

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"Aw—flowers! Huh!" grunted Marty, in disappointment.

"I am glad you like them so," said Nelson Haley. "Marty, I didn't bring them to *you*. But here is something that will please you better, I know," and he put into the boy's hand a combination pocketknife that would have delighted any out-of-door youth. "Only you must give me a penny for it. I don't believe in giving sharp-edged presents to friends. It cuts friendship, they say," and the collegian laughed.

"Golly! that's a dandy!" acknowledged Marty. "Here's your cent. Thanks! See what Mr. Haley gimme, Maw!" and he rushed into the house to display his treasure.

Haley and Janice were left alone in a sheltered corner of the porch.

"Oh, Mr. Haley," the girl repeated. "How lovely they are! And how kind of you to get them for me! How did you ever secure such fresh cut flowers 'way up here? Nobody has a hothouse in Poketown."

"They come from Colonel Van Dyne's place at the Landing."

"Way down there!" exclaimed Janice, in wonder. "Why, it's farther than Middletown. That's where I took the boat to get here?"

"I guess so, Miss Janice."

"But—but the boats aren't running," she cried, in amazement. "And these flowers are so fresh."

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"*My* boat is running," and Haley laughed. "I brought them up for you yesterday afternoon. Got in just before it began to snow hard."

"Mr. Haley! The lake is frozen solidly!"

"Sure," he laughed. "But my boat sails on the ice. Didn't you hear that I had built the *Fly-by-Night*? It's an ice boat—and it's a dandy! I hope to take you out in it—"

"An ice boat?" cried Janice. "Oh! you can—you shall! You can take me to the Landing. There is a telegraph office there, isn't there?"

"Why—why—Yes! At the railroad station," the young man admitted, rather amazed.

Janice stepped up to him, with the pasteboard box of flowers in her arms, and her eyes shining in expectation.

"Oh, Mr. Haley! You *must* take me down there. Won't you?"

Marty ran out again, and heard what she said. "Where you goin'?" he demanded. "Mr. Haley can't ice boat you to Middletown."

"To the Landing," begged Janice.

"By jinks! so he can," shouted the boy. "Lemme go, too, Mr. Haley. You'll want somebody to 'tend sheet on the *Fly-by-Night*."

"But I do not understand?" queried the teacher, staring from one to the other of the excited pair.

"You—you tell him, Marty!" said Janice, turning toward the door. "I must put these beautiful flowers in water. Come in, Mr. Haley, and get warm." [Pg 194]

But the teacher remained out there on the windswept porch while he listened to what Marty had to tell. The girl's trouble struck home to the generous-hearted young man. He was moved deeply for her—especially upon a day like this when, in the nature of things, all persons should be joyous and glad.

"I will take you to the Landing, if the breeze holds fair," he declared and he pooh-poohed Mrs. Day's fears that there was any danger in sailing the ice boat. He had come up from the Landing himself the night before in an hour and a half.

"What a dreadful, dreadful way to spend Christmas Day!" moaned Aunt 'Mira, as she helped Janice to dress. "Something's likely to happen to that ice boat. I've seen 'em racing on the lake. Them folks jest take their lives in their han's—that's right!"

"I'll make the boys take care," Janice promised.

Aunt 'Mira saw them go with fear and trembling, and immediately ensconced herself in the window of Janice's room, with a shawl around her shoulders, to watch the flight of the ice boat after it got under way down at the dock.

Janice, and the teacher and Marty had fairly to wade to the shore of the lake. The drifts were very deep on land; but, as Marty said, the wind had swept the ice almost bare. Here and there a ridge of snow had formed upon the glistening surface; but Mr. Haley made light of these obstructions. [Pg 195]

"The *Fly-by-Night* will just go humming through those, Miss Janice. Don't you fear," he said.

There were few people abroad in High Street, for it was not yet mid-forenoon. Most who were out were busily engaged shoveling paths. The three young folks got down to the dock, and Haley and Marty turned up the heavy body of the ice boat and swept the snow off.

There was a good deal of a drift of snow right along the edge of the lake; but they pushed the ice boat out beyond this windrow, with Janice's help, and then stepped the mast and bent on the heavy sail. It was a cross-T boat, with a short nose and a single sail. The steersman had a box in the rear and in this there was room for Janice to ride, too. The sheet-tender likewise ballasted the boat by lying out on one or the other end of the crosspiece.

There was a keen wind, not exactly fair for the trip down the lake; yet their sheet filled nicely on the longer tack, and the *Fly-by-Night* swept out from the Poketown dock at a very satisfactory speed.

"We'll hit the Landing in two hours, at the longest, Miss Janice," declared Nelson Haley. "Keep your head down. This wind cuts like needles. Too bad you haven't a mask of some kind." [Pg 196]

He was wearing his motorcycle goggles, while Marty had one of those plush caps, that pull down all around one's face so that nothing but the eyes peer out, and was doing very well.

As the ice yacht gathered speed, Janice found that she could not face the wind. Nor could she look ahead, for the sun was shining boldly now, and the glare of it on the ice was all but blinding.

The timbers of the boat groaned and shook. The runners whined over the ice with an ever-increasing note. Ice-dust rose in a thin cloud from the sharp shoes, and the sunlight, in which the dust danced, flecked the mist with dazzling, rainbow colors.

When the ice boat came about, it was with a leap and bound that seemed almost to capsize the craft. Janice had never traveled so fast before—or so she believed. It fairly took her breath, and she clung to the hand-holds with all her strength.

"Hi, Janice!" yelled Marty, grinning from ear to ear. "How d'ye like it? Gittin' scaret?"

She had to shake her head negatively and smile. But to tell the truth there was an awful sinking in her heart, and when one runner went suddenly over a hummock and tipped the ice boat, she could scarcely keep from voicing her alarm.

CHAPTER XIX

[Pg 197]

CHRISTMAS, AFTER ALL!

Janice Day possessed more self-control than most girls of her age. She would not, even when her heart was sick with apprehension because of the story in the newspaper, give her cousin the opportunity of saying that she showed the white feather.

She lay close to the beam of the ice boat, clung to the hand-holds, and made no outcry as the craft flew off upon the other tack. Had the wind been directly astern, the course of the *Fly-by-Night* would have been smoother. It was the terrific bounding, and the groaning of the timbers while the boom swung over and the canvas slatted, that really frightened the girl.

It seemed as though the mast must be wrenched out of the boat by the force of the high wind filling the canvas. And the shrieking of the runners! Janice realized that the passage of an ice boat made as much noise as the flight of a fast train.

She could scarcely distinguish what Nelson Haley shouted at her, and he was so near, too. He pointed ahead. She stooped to look under the boom and saw a great windrow of snow—a huge drift more than six feet high—not half a mile away. [Pg 198]

This drift stretched, it seemed, from side to side of the lake. They could not see what lay beyond it. Janice expected the others would drop the sail and bring the ice boat to a halt. Some roughness in the ice, or perhaps a narrow opening, had caught the first driven flakes of snow here the night before. The snow had gathered rapidly when once a streak of it lay across the lake. Deeper and deeper the drift had grown until tons of the white crystals had been heaped here in what looked to Janice to be an impassable barrier.

"Oh! Oh!" she shrieked. "Won't you stop?"

Nelson Haley smiled grimly and shook his head. Marty uttered a shriek of exultation as the ice boat bore down upon the drift. *He* was quite speed-mad.

"Hang on! hang on!" commanded Nelson Haley.

Another moment and the frightened Janice saw the bow of the boat rise—as it seemed—straight into the air. Amid the groaning of timbers and the shrieking of the wind, the *Fly-by-Night* shot up the steep slant of the drift and over its crest!

The cry Janice tried to utter was frozen in her throat. She saw the ice ahead and below them. Like a great bird—or a huge batfish leaping from the sea—the ice boat shot out on a long curve from the summit of the hard-packed snowdrift. [Pg 199]

The shock of its return to the ice was terrific. Janice felt sure the boat must be racked to bits.

But the *Fly-by-Night* was strongly built. With the momentum secured by its leap from the drift, it skated over the ice for a mile or more, with scarcely a thimbleful of wind in its sail, yet traveling like a fast express.

Then it answered the helm again, the wind filled the sail, and they bore down upon the Landing on a direct tack.

"Gee! Ain't it great?" cried Marty, as Nelson Haley signaled him to drop the sail. "Don't that beat any traveling you ever done, Janice?"

Janice faintly admitted that it did; but neither the boy nor Nelson Haley realized what a trial the trip had been to the girl. Janice was too proud to show the fear she felt; but she could scarcely stand when the *Fly-by-Night* finally stopped with its nose to the shore, just beyond the steamboat dock.

Popham Landing was scarcely larger than Poketown; only there were canning factories here, and the terminus of the narrow-gauge railroad on which Janice had finished her rail journey from Greensboro the spring before. So it was a livelier place than the village in which the girl had been living for eight months.

Colonel Van Dyne, owner of one of the canning factories, had a fine home on the heights overlooking the lake. It was with the colonel's gardener and superintendent that Nelson Haley had an acquaintance, and through that acquaintanceship had obtained the cut flowers from the colonel's greenhouse. [Pg 200]

When the three had hurried up the half-cleared landing to the railroad station, Janice fairly staggering between her two companions, the office was closed and nobody was about the railroad premises. It was a holiday, and no more trains were expected at the Landing until night.

Janice all but broke down at this added bad turn of affairs. To come all this distance only to be balked!

"It's jest blamed *mean!*" sputtered Marty. "Telegraph shops ain't got no right to shut up—in the daytime, too."

"It's not a Western Union wire," explained Nelson. "The railroad only takes ordinary messages as a matter of convenience. But wait! That door's open and there's a fire in the waiting-room, you see. Just because this card says the agent and operator won't be here till five o'clock doesn't mean that he's gone out of town. Besides, I'll see my friend, Jim Watrous."

This was the gardener and general factotum at Colonel Van Dyne's. The Poketown school-teacher hurried away, and left Janice and Marty sitting together in the railroad station.

"He'll find some way—don't you fear, Janice," said the boy, with much more sympathy than he had ever shown before. Janice squeezed his hand and hid her own face. She could not forget how Marty had tried the evening before to hide the knowledge of her father's fate from her. *This* was a much different Marty than the boy she had first met at the old Day house on her arrival at Poketown. [Pg 201]

In half an hour Nelson Haley was back with the operator and agent. The gardener at Colonel Van

Dyne's knew the man personally. The story in the newspaper, and an explanation of who Janice was, did the rest.

"There isn't any better day than Christmas, I reckon," said the telegraph operator, when he shook hands with the girl and she tried to thank him in advance for the trouble he was taking on her behalf, "to do a helpful deed. And I want to help you, Miss Day, if I can. Write your messages and I will put them through as rapidly as possible. I shall have plenty of time to go home for dinner between the sending of your telegrams, and the receiving of the answers. Now, don't worry at all about it."

"Oh, dear!" half sobbed the girl. "Everybody is *so* good to me."

"Not a bit more than you deserve, I am sure," laughed the operator. "Now, Miss, if you are ready, I am."

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Janice knew just what she wished to say. If she had not written the messages she was anxious to send, she had already formulated them in her mind. It was but a few minutes' work to write both—one to Mr. Buchanan at Juarez, and the other addressed to the man, John Makepiece, who claimed to have been a fellow-prisoner with Mr. Broxton Day.

When the messages were sent, all they could do was to wait. Janice had expected that she and Marty and Mr. Haley would have to camp in the waiting-room of the station during the long interval, and the girl was very sorry that, because of her, her friends would have to forego any holiday dinner.

While Janice was engaged, Nelson Haley had been off on an excursion of his own. He came tramping back into the station just as the operator closed his key and told Janice that there was nothing to do now but wait.

"And I'm afraid it will be an awfully tedious time for you, Marty," said the girl. "I'm sorry. Aunt 'Mira was going to have *such* a nice dinner for you, too!"

"Huh! I guess I won't starve," growled the boy. "Mebbe we can find some sandwiches somewhere—and a cup of coffee. By jinks! flyin' down the lake like we did, *did* make me sharp-set."

"If you're hungry, then, Marty," broke in Nelson Haley, "we'll all go to dinner. It's just about ready by now, I reckon."

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"Aw! don't fool a feller," said Marty, ruefully.

The school-teacher laughed at him. "I'm not fooling," he said. "I was quite sure Miss Janice would be hungry enough to eat, too; so I found a kind woman who is willing to share her dinner with us. Come on! She and her daughter are all alone. The storm has kept their friends from coming to eat with them, so we're in luck."

The three had quite a delightful dinner at the Widow Maltby's. Nelson had told her and her daughter something about Janice's trouble, and the good creatures did everything they could to make it agreeable for the girl.

As for Marty, the "lay-out," as he expressed it, was all that heart could desire—a boy's heart, at least! There was turkey, with dressing, and cranberries, and the usual vegetables, with pie and cake galore, and a pocketful of nuts to top off with.

Janice was afraid that the dinner would cost Nelson a great deal of money, until she saw him fairly press upon the good widow a two-dollar bill for their entertainment!

"And I ain't right sure that I'd ought to take anything at all," the widow declared. "An' at sech a time, too! We'd never been able to eat all o' them vittles, Em and I, an' we're thankful to have somebody come along and help us. An' it sure has perked us up right smart."

Nelson had been very gay at the dinner, and had kept the widow and her daughter in good humor. But with Janice, as they walked back to the station (Marty had gone off on some matter of his own), the young man was very serious.

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"I sincerely hope, Janice, that you will hear better news from your father or his friends on the border than the newspaper gave last night. The trains are snowbound, and no morning papers have reached the Landing yet, so nobody here knows more than we do about the matter. Don't set your heart too strongly upon hearing better news—that's all."

"I do not need that warning," Janice told him, with a sigh. "But I felt as though I should quite go all to pieces if I had to sit still and just *wait*. I had to *do something*. I can't tell you how thankful I am to you for your trouble in bringing me down here."

"Trouble?" cried Nelson Haley. "You know it is a pleasure, Janice," and just then they reached the railroad station and found the operator at his telegraph key again.

"I was just going to hunt you up, Miss Day," he cried, beckoning her into the office. "Do you know, young lady, that you have suddenly become a person of considerable importance?" and he laughed again.

"*Me?*" cried Janice, in amazement.

"You are the tea party—yes, ma'am! You are an object of public interest. Two New York papers

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have sent to me for five-hundred word interviews with you——"

"My goodness me!" gasped Janice. "How dreadful! What does it mean?"

"Your father's case has been taken up by the big papers all over the country. It may be made a cause for American intervention. That is the talk. The newspapers are interested, and the truth about your father is likely to be known very quickly. All the special correspondents down there on the border have been set to work——Ah! and here is something from your man at Juarez."

The telegrapher had caught the relay number of the despatch then coming over the wire, and knew that it was from Juarez. "Hello!" he chuckled, when the sounder ceased. "Your man is certainly some brief—and to the point."

He scratched off a copy of the message and put it into Janice's eager hand. The girl read it out loud:

"J. M. always a story-teller. Have telegraphed consular agent at Cida for later particulars. I consider any news of B. D. good news.

JAMES W. BUCHANAN."

"That Buchanan evidently knows the John Makepiece who is telling this yarn," observed the telegraph operator, "and he doesn't have much confidence in him."

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"Oh, dear!" murmured the girl. "Maybe it's even worse than Makepiece reported."

"Hardly," broke in Nelson Haley, quickly. "He intimated that your father was surely dead. But this friend of yours at Juarez says any news at all is good news."

"Keep your heart up, Miss," urged the telegraph operator. "And do tell me a little something about yourself, so that I can satisfy these insistent newspapers."

"Oh, dear, me! I don't want to get into the newspapers," cried Janice, really disturbed by this possibility.

"But folks will be awfully interested in reading about you, Miss Day," urged the man; "and the newspapers are going to do more than anybody else for you and your father in this trouble. You may make sure of *that*."

But it was because of the operator's personal kindness that Janice submitted to the "interview." Nelson Haley entered into the spirit of the affair and wrote down Janice's personal history to date, just as briefly and clearly as the girl gave it under the operator's questioning. Young Haley added a few notes of his own, which he explained in the operator's ear before the latter tapped out his message to New York.

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It was only when Janice saw the paper a few days later that she realized what, between them, the school-teacher and the telegraph operator had done. There, spread broadcast by the types, was the story of how Janice had come to Poketown alone, a brief picture of her loneliness without her father, something of the free reading-room Janice had been the means of establishing, and a description of the flight down the lake on the *Fly-by-Night* on Christmas morning, that she might gain further particulars of her father's fate.

It was the sort of human-interest story that newspaper readers enjoy; but Janice was almost ashamed to appear in public for several days thereafter!

However, this is ahead of our story.

The wait for further messages from the border was not so tedious, because of these incidents. By and by an answer came from the American consular agent at Cida, relayed from Juarez by Mr. Buchanan. The agent stated his doubt of the entire truth of John Makepiece's story. The man was notoriously a reckless character. It was believed that he himself had served with the Constitutionalist army in Mexico some months. Since appearing in Cida and telling his story to the Associated Press man, he had become intoxicated and was still in that state, so could not be interviewed for further particulars.

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A posse had started for Granadas the day before, to see what was the condition of affairs around the mining property of which Mr. Day had had charge. It was a fact that the guerrilla, Rophele, had overrun that district and had controlled it for some months; but his command was now scattered, and the more peacefully-inclined inhabitants of Granadas were stealing back to their homes.

"Have requested consular agent at Cida to wire you direct to Popham Landing, report of returning posse now overdue," was how Mr. Buchanan concluded the message.

"And that report may be along any time, now," declared the operator, encouragingly. "You people haven't got to start back up the lake yet awhile?"

"We'll stay as long as Miss Day wants to," said Nelson Haley, quickly.

"Sure we'll stay," cried Marty. "Miss Maltby told me to come back by and by, and finish that mince pie I couldn't manage at dinner time. There ain't no hurry to get back to Poketown, is there?"

Janice and Nelson were much amused by this frank statement of the boy; but the girl was only too glad to have the others bear out her own desire to remain within reach of the telegraph wires for a while longer. Mr. Buchanan's messages had eased her heart greatly.

Janice cried a little by herself—the first tears she had shed since the night before. But even Marty respected them and did not make fun of his cousin. [Pg 209]

"Everybody is so good to me!" she cried again, when she had wiped her eyes and could smile at Marty and Nelson Haley. "And I believe it's all coming out right. This long day is going to be a *real* Christmas Day, after all!"

CHAPTER XX

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THE TROUBLE WITH NELSON HALEY

From that time on Janice refused longer to be in what she called "the dumps." It was not her way to mope about; usually she cheered other people and did not herself stand in need of cheering.

She made the operator go home to his family to spend Christmas afternoon. When his call came Marty was to run over after him. This kept the trio of friends from Poketown close to the railroad station all the afternoon; but the interval was spent quite pleasantly.

Mrs. Maltby and her daughter came over, through the snow, to visit a while with Janice—and to bring Marty the pie!—and several other villagers dropped in. News of Janice's reason for being at Popham Landing had been spread abroad, and the people who came were more than curious—they were sympathetic.

The pastor of one of the churches, who was well acquainted with Mr. Middler, left his own family for half an hour and came to the station to ask if he could do anything of practical use for Janice. Had it been wise the trio from Poketown could have accepted half a dozen invitations for supper and evening entertainment. [Pg 211]

"People *are* so good!" Janice cried again to Haley and Marty. "I never realized that mere strangers could be so very, very nice to one."

"Huh!" grunted Marty. "Ain't *you* always nice to folks—an' doing something for 'em? How do you like it yourself?" which remark made Janice and Nelson Haley laugh very heartily.

So, after all, it *was* a real Christmas, as Janice said. It was an odd one, perhaps, but there were some very enjoyable things about it. For instance, Janice and the young school-teacher got far better acquainted than they had ever been before—and Janice had always liked Nelson Haley.

In this present situation, Nelson stood out well. He was generous, sympathetic, and helpful. The fact that he was inclined to pursue the way of least resistance, and considered it right to "let well enough alone," did not impress one so deeply at the present moment.

Janice learned that the young man had neither father nor mother, and that his nearest relative was an old aunt who had supplied the money for his college tuition—at least, such money as he had not been able to earn himself. Nelson Haley, however, desired to be self-supporting, and he felt that he had accepted all the assistance he should from the old aunt, whose patrimony was not large. [Pg 212]

"Old Aunty Peckham is just as good as she can be," he confided to Janice; "but I realize now—have realized for some years, in fact—that if she had not had me to worry about, she could have enjoyed many more good things in life than she has. So I told her I'd come to the end of accepting money from her whenever my own purse got low.

"I'll teach school in Poketown a couple of years and save enough to take up law; or perhaps I'll get a chance in some small college. Only, to teach in a real college means *work*," and he laughed.

"But—but don't you like to work?" queried Janice, doubtfully.

"Now, Janice! who really *likes* work?" demanded the young man, lightly. "If we can get through the world without much effort, why not take it easily?"

"That is not *my* idea of what we are put in the world for—just to drift along with the current."

"Oh, dear, me! what a very strenuous person you are," said the young man, still teasingly. "And—I am afraid—you'd be a most uncomfortable person to have around all the time. Though that doesn't sound gallant, I admit."

Janice laughed. "I tell you what it is," she observed, not at all shaken by the young man's remark, "I shouldn't want to feel that there wasn't something in life to get by going after it." [Pg 213]

"By going after it?" repeated the young man, in some puzzlement.

"Yes. You say I'd be an uncomfortable comrade. And I expect you're right. Especially for a downright *lazy* person."

"Oh, oh!" he cried. "That was a hard hit."

"You're not really lazy, you know," she pursued, coolly. "You only haven't been 'woke up' yet."

"I believe that's worse than your former statement," he cried, rather ruefully now. "I suppose I *do* drift with the current."

"Well!"

"What kind of a fellow do you expect to marry, Janice?" he asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Why, I'll tell you," said the girl, practically and without a shadow of false modesty. "I expect a man to prove himself good for something in the world before he even *asks* me to marry him."

"Goodness me! he must be a millionaire, or president, or something like that?" chuckled Nelson.

"Nothing at all so great," she returned, with some heat. "I don't care if he's right down *poor*, if only he has been successful in accomplishing some really hard thing—something that shows the metal he's made of. No namby-pamby young man for me. No, sir! They can keep away," and Janice ended her rather serious speech with a laugh and a toss of her head.

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"I shall bear your strictures in mind, Miss Day," declared Haley, with mock gravity. "I see very plainly what you mean. The young St. George who wears your colors must have slain his dragon."

"At least," Janice returned, softly, "he must have shown his willingness to kill the horrid thing."

The short winter day was already drawing to a close when the telegraph sounder began to call the station. Marty ran out at once and brought back the operator. He was quickly in communication with one of the great New York papers and found that it was over the paper's private wire that first authentic news from the Granadas district had arrived in the East.

The posse from Cida had found everything peaceful about the mines. The guerrilla leader, Raphele, had decamped. There had been an execution on the day John Makepiece had fled from the place; but the victims were some unfortunate Indians. The bandit had not dared kill the remaining American prisoner.

Mr. Broxton Day had managed to get into a shaft of the mine and there had lain hidden until Raphele, and his gang, had departed. Now he had gathered some of his old employees, and armed them with rifles hidden all these months in the mine, and the property was once more under Mr. Day's control and properly guarded.

Through the posse, Mr. Day made a statement to the newspapers, and to his friends and fellow-stockholders of the mine, in the States. To Janice, too, he sent a brief message of love and good cheer, stating that letters to her were already in the mail.

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The relief Janice felt is not to be easily shown. To be positive, after these hours of uncertainty—and after the long weeks of worry that had gone before—that dear Daddy was really alive and well, seemed too good to be true.

"Oh, do you suppose it *can* be so?" she cried, again and again, clinging to Nelson Haley's arm.

"Of course it is! Pluck up your courage, Janice," he assured her, while Marty sniveled:

"Aw, say, Janice! Doncher give way, now. Uncle Brocky is all right an' it would be dead foolish ter cry over it, when you kep' up your pluck so, before."

"Well! to please you both!" choked Janice, trying to swallow the sobs. "But—but—Come on! let's go home. Just think how worried Aunt 'Mira will be."

So they shook hands with the telegraph operator and Janice thanked him heartily. There were several other friendly folk of the neighborhood in the waiting-room when the three friends came out of the office, and the happy girl thanked them, too, for their sympathy.

It was quite dark when they got out into the cold again. The wind had shifted a point or two since morning, but it was still in their favor. Although the sun had set, the way up the lake was clearly defined. The stars began to twinkle, and after the *Fly-by-Night* was gotten under way the course seemed plain enough before them.

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Now Janice enjoyed the sail. She was no longer afraid, and her heart beat happily. The ice boat made good its name on the trip to Poketown, and Nelson Haley brought the craft to land beside the steamboat dock in season for a late supper.

There was a crowd down at the lake's edge to see them come in. News of their trip to the Landing, and the reason for it, had been well circulated about town; and when Marty shouted to some of his boy friends that "Uncle Brocky was found—and he warn't dead, neither!" the crowd started to cheer.

The cheers were for Janice—and she realized it. The folks were glad of her father's safety because they loved her.

"People are so kind to me—they are so kind to me!" she cried again, and then she *did* burst into tears, much to Marty's disgust.

A STIR OF NEW LIFE IN POKETOWN

After that strange Christmas Day Janice saw a good deal more of Nelson Haley than she had before. The teacher was several years her senior, of course; but he seemed to find more than a little pleasure in her society.

On Janice's side, she often told herself that Nelson was a real nice young man—but he could be so much more attractive, if he would! When the girl sometimes timidly took him to task for his plain lack of interest in the school he taught, he only laughed lightly.

Nelson Haley suited the committeemen perfectly. He made no startling innovations; he followed the set rules of the old-fashioned methods of teaching; and (to quote Elder Concannon) he was a Latin scholar! Why the old gentleman should consider that accomplishment of such moment, when no pupil in the Poketown school ever arrived even to a Latin declension, was a mystery to Janice.

Even Miss 'Rill had better appreciated the fact that Poketown needed a more advanced system of education, and a better school building as well. And there were other people in the town that had hoped for a new order of things when this young man, fresh from college, was once established in his position. [Pg 218]

They waited, it seemed, in vain. Nelson Haley was content to jog along in the rut long since trodden out for the ungraded country school.

It was not long after the Christmas holidays, however, when there began to be serious talk again in the town over the inconvenience in locality and the unsanitary condition of the present schoolhouse. Every winter the same cry had been raised—for ten years! Elder Concannon declared loudly, in the post office one day, that if the school had been good enough for the fathers of the community, and for the grandfathers as well, it should be good enough for the present generation of scholars. Truly, an unanswerable argument, it would seem!

Yet there was now a stir of new life in Poketown. There was a spirit abroad among the people that had never before been detected. Walky Dexter hit it off characteristically when he said:

"Hi tunket! does seem as though that air reading-room's startin' up has put the sperit of unrest in ter this here village. People never took much int'rest in books and noospapers before in Poketown. Look at 'em, now. I snum! they buzz around that readin'-room for chances to read the papers like bees around a honey-pot. [Pg 219]

"An' that ain't all—no, sir! 'Most ev'rybody seems ter be discontented—that's right! Even folks that git their 'three squares' a day and what they want to wear, ain't satisfied with things as they is, no more. I dunno what we're all comin' to. 'Lectric street lights, and macadamized roads, and all sech things, I s'pose," and Walky chuckled over his flight of imagination.

"Wal, I dunno," said the druggist, argumentatively, "I'm free ter confess for one that a different system of street lightin' wouldn't hurt Poketown one mite. This here havin' a lot of ile lamps, that ain't lighted at all if the almanac says the moon ought ter shine, is a nuisance. Sometimes the moon acts right contrary!"

"My soul an' body!" gasped Walky. "You say that to Elder Concannon, and Mr. Cross Moore, and ol' Bill Jones! They say taxes is high 'nuff as they be."

"And school tax, too, I s'pose?" demanded another idler in the drug store.

"Wal," said Walky, "I b'lieve we *could* give the little shavers a better chance to l'arn their A, B, C's. And that old schoolhouse can't be het on re'l cold days. And it's as onhandy as it can be——"

"I believe you're goin' in for these new-fangled notions, too, Walky," declared the druggist. [Pg 220]

"Guess I be, on the school question, anyway. My woman says she sha'n't let our Helen go ter school again this winter, for she's got one cold right on top of another las' year. It's a plumb shame."

It was from talks such as these in the village stores that the fire of public demand for a new school building—if not for a new system of education—finally burst into open flame.

Usually, when there was a public meeting, the basement of the Union Church—"the old vestry", as it was called—was used. But although Mr. Middler had timidly expressed himself as in favor of a new school building, he did not have the courage to offer the use of the vestry room.

Therefore the reading-room next to the drug store was one evening crowded with earnest supporters of the belief that it was time Poketown built a new structure for the training of her youth.

Janice saw to it that Uncle Jason went. Indeed, with Janice on one side and Marty on the other, Mr. Day could scarcely escape, for his son and his niece accompanied him to the place of meeting.

Not that the young folks went in, for there wasn't room. It seemed that the people who favored a

change in the old town's affairs were pretty numerous, and there was not a dissenting voice in the meeting. It was decided to have a special town meeting called to vote, if possible, an appropriation for the building of a new schoolhouse.

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This first meeting was only a beginning. It served merely to solidify that public opinion which was in favor of the improvement. At once opposition raised its head, and during the fortnight preceding the town meeting, argument, *pro* and *con*, was hotter than at election time.

Janice was deeply interested in the project, although she had, during these first weeks of the New Year, more important thoughts to fill her heart and mind. Daddy was writing to her regularly. The mine buildings were being re-erected. The old force had come back to work, and for the first time since Broxton Day had arrived in Mexico, the outlook for getting out ore and making regular "cleanups" was bright. But trouble down there was not yet at an end, and that worried her greatly.

The story of her father's captivity in the hands of the brigand, Raphele, had been made of light moment in Mr. Day's letters that immediately followed his escape; but Janice understood enough about it to know that God had been very good to her. Some other American mining men and ranchers in Granadas had not escaped with their lives and property from Raphele and his ilk.

Daddy sent a photograph, too; but that was not until he had recovered some from his hiding out in the mine without much to eat. Although he was haggard and bewhiskered, his eyes had that look in them that Janice so clearly remembered. When she awoke and lit her lamp in the early morning, there he was looking at her from the bureau; and when she retired she kissed the picture in lieu of having his real presence to bid good-night.

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Those gray eyes of Broxton Day reminded her always of his oft-spoken motto: "Do something!" He seemed to be saying that to Janice from his photograph; therefore the girl was not likely to lose her interest in such a momentous affair as the new schoolhouse.

There was another interest that held Janice's mind and sympathy. This was the condition of poor little Lottie Drugg. As she had been quite blind when Janice first met her, now her hearing had departed entirely. She could seldom now distinguish the notes of her father's violin as he played to her. She would sit on the store counter and put her hand often on Hopewell's bow-hand as he dragged the more or less harmonious sounds out of the wood and strings. Otherwise she could not know that he was playing at all!

Nelson Haley had been touched by the case of the storekeeper's little girl, and had discussed the matter with Janice. Nelson had even written to a Boston specialist who treated the eyes, and who had been very successful in such cases as Lottie's. The fee the surgeon demanded was from five hundred to a thousand dollars for an operation. And poor Hopewell Drugg, although he strained every effort, had succeeded in saving less than two hundred dollars during all these months!

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Nevertheless, Janice would not let the storekeeper lose heart. "It will come in time, Mr. Drugg," she told him, cheerfully. "And Lottie will be able to go to that wonderful school, too, where she will be taught many things."

For if the child could once obtain her sight, lip-reading would be possible for her, and through that the little girl might gradually become as well educated as any one, and have a fair chance for happiness in the world after all!

Although Nelson Haley was touched by Lottie's sad condition, and by anything else going on about him that had the personal note in it, Janice thought the Poketown school-teacher showed very little public spirit.

She began to realize that his overseeing of the reading-room and library was inspired by his wish to please *her* instead of his actual interest in the institution. This was very complimentary, but it did not satisfy Janice Day at all.

She was not interested in Nelson Haley in a way to crave the attentions that he had begun to show her. Indeed, she did not really appreciate his attitude, for there was nothing silly in Janice's character. She was still a happy, hearty *girl*; and if she had romantic dreams of the future, they were nothing but dreams as yet!

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She had the same interest in Nelson that she had in her cousin Marty. It troubled her that the young man did not seem to have any serious interest in life. Just as long as he tutored his classes through their recitations in a manner satisfactory to the school committee, he seemed quite careless of anything else about the school. He admitted this, in his laughing way, to the girl, when she broached the subject of the fight for a new school.

"But it's your *job*!" exclaimed Janice. "You more than anybody else ought to be interested in having the boys and girls of Poketown get a decent schoolhouse."

"And suppose old Elder Concannon and the rest of the committee get after me with a sharp stick?" queried Nelson.

"I should think *you*, a collegian and an educated man, would be only too eager to help in such a movement as this," Janice cried. "Oh, Nelson! don't you know that the people who are waking up in this town need your help?"

"My goodness me! how serious you are about it," he returned, teasingly. "Of course, if you insist,

I'll risk my job with the committee and come out flat-footed for the new schoolhouse and reform."

"I don't wish you to do anything at all for *me*," returned Janice, rather tartly. "If your own conscience doesn't tell you what course to pursue, pray remain neutral—as you are. But I am disappointed in you." [Pg 225]

"There is feminine logic for you!" laughed the young man. "With one breath you tell me to follow the dictates of my own conscience, and then you show me plainly just how much you will despise me if I go against your side of the controversy."

"You are mistaken," Janice said, with some little heat. "I do not personally care what you do, only as your action reflects upon your own character."

"Now, dear me!" he sighed, still amused at her earnestness, "I thought if I came out strongly at the town meeting for the new school, you would award me the palm."

"My goodness me!" exclaimed the exasperated girl. "Somebody ought to award you a palm—and right on the ear! You're as big a tease as Marty," and she refused to discuss the school project with him any further.

CHAPTER XXII

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AT THE SUGAR CAMP

Nelson Haley was, however, at the town meeting and spoke in favor of the new school building. Janice had a full report of it afterward from Marty, who squeezed in at the back with several of the other boys and drank in the long and tedious wrangle between the partisans in the school matter.

"And, by jinks!" the boy proclaimed, "lemme tell you, Janice, it looked like the vote was goin' ag'in us till Mr. Haley began to talk. I thought he didn't have much interest in the thing. Nobody thought he did. I heard some of the old fellers cacklin' that 'teacher didn't favor the idee none.'

"But, say! When he got up to talk, he showed 'em. He was sitting alongside of Elder Concannon himself, and the Elder had made a mighty strong speech against increasin' taxes and burdenin' the town for years and years with a school debt.

"But, talk about argument! Mr. Haley sailed inter them old fossils, and made the fur fly, you bet!" [Pg 227]

"Oh, Marty! Fur fly from fossils?" chuckled Janice.

"That *does* sound like a teaser, don't it?" responded her cousin, with a grin. "Just the same, Mr. Haley made 'em all sit up and take notice. He didn't only speak for the schoolhouse, and new methods of teaching, and a graded school; but he took up Elder Concannon's arguments and shot 'em full of holes.

"You ought to have seen the old gentleman's face when Mr. Haley proved that a better-taught generation of scholars would possess an increased earning power and so be better able to take up and pay the school bonds than the present taxpayers.

"Say! the folks cheered! When Mr. Haley sat down, the question was put and the vote went through with a rush. But Elder Concannon and Old Bill Jones, and Mr. Cross Moore, and some of the others, were as mad as they could be."

"Mad at Mr. Haley?" queried Janice, with sudden anxiety.

"You bet! But they can't take the school away from him till the end of the year, as long as he doesn't neglect his work. So Dad says, and he knows."

Janice was worried. She knew that Nelson Haley had hoped to teach the Poketown school at least two years, so as to get what he called "a stake" for law-school studies. And there were not many ungraded schools in the state that paid as well as Poketown's; for it was a large school. [Pg 228]

The furor occasioned by the special town meeting, and the fight for the new school, passed over. A site for the school was secured just off of High Street near the center of the town—a much handier situation for all concerned. The ground would be broken for the cellar as soon as the frost had gone.

The committee appointed at the town meeting to have charge of the building of the school were all in favor of it. There were three of them,—Mr. Massey, the druggist, the proprietor of the Lake View Inn, and Dr. Poole, one of the two medical practitioners in the town. These three were instructed to appoint two others to act with them, and as these two appointees need not be taxpayers, one of them was Nelson Haley, who acted as secretary.

When Janice heard of this, she was delighted. She had not seen the teacher more than to say "how-de-do" since their rather warm discussion before the date of the town meeting. Now she put herself in the way of meeting him where they might have a tête-à-tête.

There were not many social affairs in Poketown for young people. Janice had attended one or two of the parties where boys and girls mingled indiscriminately and played "kissing games," then she refused all such invitations. She was not old enough to expect to be bidden to the few social gatherings held by the more lively class of people in the town.

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The church did little outside of the ladies' sewing circle to promote social intercourse in the congregation. So, although the school-teacher might have been invited to a dozen evening entertainments during that winter, Janice did not chance to meet him where they could have a "good, long talk" until the Hammett Twins gave their annual Sugar Camp party.

The two little old ladies, whom Janice had met so soon after coming to Poketown, had become staunch friends of the girl. She had been at their home on the Middletown road several times—twice to remain over night, for both Miss Blossom and Miss Pussy enjoyed having young people about them.

They were an odd little couple, but kindly withal, and loved children desperately, as many spinster ladies do. They had never married because of the illness for many years of both their father and their mother. Besides, the twins had never wished to be separated.

Now, at something over sixty years of age, they owned a fine farm and the most productive sugar-maple orchard in that part of the state. At sugaring time each year they invited all the young folk Walky Dexter could pack into his party wagon, to the camp not far from their house; and, as maple-sugar making was a new industry to Janice, she was not a little eager when she received her invitation from the two old ladies.

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The "sugaring" was on a Saturday, and the party met at the schoolhouse. Some of the larger girls who had treated Janice so unpleasantly when she first visited the school were yet pupils; but they were much more friendly with the girl from Greensboro than at first. They might have been a wee bit jealous of her, however; for Nelson Haley would never treat them other than as a teacher should treat his scholars, whereas he paid marked attention to Janice whenever he was in her society.

Once he had asked permission to call upon her; but Janice had only laughed and told him that her aunt would be pleased to have him come, of course. She was not at all sure that she liked Mr. Nelson Haley well enough to allow him to confine his attentions to her! Young as she was, Janice had serious ideas about such matters.

However, she was glad to have him to talk to again on this occasion.

"I've never had a chance to tell you how proud of you I was when they told me what you did at the town meeting," Janice whispered, as they sat side by side in the party wagon.

Nelson grinned at her cheerfully. "The old Elder scarcely speaks to me," he said. "He's even forgotten that I can turn a Latin phrase as they used to when he went to the university."

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"Oh, that is too bad! But don't you feel that you did right?"

"I'll tell you better when it comes time to engage a teacher for next year."

"Oh, dear! Maybe they'll put in a new school committee at the July school meeting. They ought to."

"The Elder and his comrades in crime have been in office for eight or ten years, I understand. They are fairly glued there, and it will take a good deal to oust them. You see, they have nothing to do with the building of the new school."

"But if that school is finished and ready for occupancy next fall, you ought to be at the head of it. It won't be fair to put you out," Janice said, with gravity.

"We'll hope for the best," and Nelson Haley laughed as usual. "But if I lose my job and have to beg my bread from door to door, I hope you will remember, Janice, that I told you so."

"You are perfectly ridiculous," declared the girl. "Aren't you ever serious two minutes at a time?"

"Pooh! what's the good of being 'solemncholly'? Take things as they come—that's *my* motto."

Still, Janice believed that the young man was really becoming more deeply interested in the Poketown school and its problems that he was willing to admit, even to her. She had heard that the Middletown architect who was planning the school had consulted Nelson Haley several times upon important points, and that the teacher was the most active of all the five special committeemen.

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They reached the sugar camp before the middle of the forenoon, although the roads at that season were very heavy. Winter had by no means departed, although a raucous-voiced jay or two had come up from the swamp and scoured the open wood as though already in search of spring quarters.

The Hammett sugar camp consisted of an open shed in which to boil the sap and an old cabin—perhaps one of the first built in these New Hampshire grants—in which dinner was to be cooked and eaten. Miss Blossom Hammett was already busy over the pots, and pans, and bake oven in the cabin; while her sister, the thin Miss Pussy, overseered the sap-boiling operations.

It was a regular "bee", for beside the twins' hired hands, there were several of their neighbors, and the visitors from Poketown were expected to make themselves useful, too, the boys and Nelson Haley especially.

Janice joined the sap gatherers, for she was strong and liked exercise. They carried buckets to collect the sap that had already run into the shiny two-quart cups which were used to collect it.

First an incision was made through the bark and into the wood of the tree. Into this incision was thrust a whittled plug that had a shallow gutter cut in its upper side, and notches from which the bail of the two-quart cup hung. Into the cup the sap dripped rapidly—especially about midday, when the sun was warmest. [Pg 233]

They tapped only about a quarter of the grove belonging to the old ladies, for that numbered as many trees as could be handled at once. Pail after pail of the thin sap was brought in and emptied into one of the two big cauldrons, under which a steady fire of hickory and beech was kept burning. Later the fire was started under the second pot, while the contents of the first one was allowed to simmer down until the sugar would "spin", when dipped up on the wooden ladle and dropped into a bowl of cold water.

The old ladies supplied a hearty and substantial dinner for the young folks to put away before the sugar was boiled enough to spin. After that, the visitors gathered about the sugar troughs like flies about molasses. The Hammett Twins were not niggard souls by any manner of means; but they kept warning the girls and boys all the afternoon to "save room for supper."

In truth, the supper down at the old Hammett farmhouse, after the work of the day was over, was the principal event. It grew cold towards night, and that sharpened the young folks' appetites. The sap ceased running before sunset, so they trooped down from the camp, the little old ladies riding in their phaeton behind Ginger. Walky Dexter was going to drive out to the Hammett place after supper to pick up his load of young people. [Pg 234]

But Walky was late—very late indeed. After supper the majority of the young folk, both those from Poketown and in the near neighborhood, began to play forfeit games; so Janice and Nelson Haley slipped away, bidding the kind old ladies good-night, and set out to walk home.

The distance was under five miles; there was a good path all the way despite the mud in the driveway, and there was a glorious moon. The wind had died down and, although the night air was keen, it was a perfect hour for walking.

CHAPTER XXIII

"DO YOU MEAN THAT?"

"It was right along here—at the bridge, you know—I saw you the first time, Janice," said the teacher, when they had covered some two miles of the way. "Do you remember?"

"I didn't suppose *you* would," laughed Janice, blushing a little. "And I stared at you because you were the first citified-looking person I had seen since coming to Poketown."

He laughed. "Did I look as bad as all that? I was going fast, I know, but I could see that you were a mighty pretty girl."

"Why! That's a story!" exclaimed Janice, seriously, and looking at the young man in astonishment. "You know that isn't so. I'm *not* pretty."

"Goodness me! am I not to have my way in *anything*?" demanded Nelson Haley, in mock anger. "If I think you're pretty I can say so, I hope?"

"No, sir. Such ridiculous statements are forbidden. I shall think your eyes need treating almost as badly as do poor little Lottie's. Dear me, whatever are we going to do about that child?" [Pg 236]

"If either of us were rich it would be an easy question to answer."

"True enough. I know what *I'd* do. And I believe you'd be a very generous young man, indeed—as long as being generous did not entail any particular work on your part."

"Oh—now—I call that unfair!" he complained. "We can't all be like you, Janice. I believe you lay awake nights thinking up nice things to do for folks—"

"There you go again—making fun of me," she said, shaking a gloved finger at him. "I don't claim to be a bit more unselfish than the next one. But I'm not lazy."

"Thanks! I suppose I am?"

"There you go—picking one up so quick," Janice repeated. "I *do* think, however, that you just don't care, a good deal of the time. If things only go on smoothly—"

"That's what I told you Christmas Day," he said, quickly.

"And isn't it so?"

"Well—it used to be," he admitted, shaking his head ruefully. "But I'm not sure but that, since you've got me going——"

"*Me?*" exclaimed Janice. "What have *I* got to do with it?"

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"Now, there's no use your saying that you don't know *why* I took up that matter of the new school last month," said Nelson Haley, seriously. "You spoke just as though you were ashamed of me when we talked about it, and I began to wonder if I wasn't a fit subject for heart-searching inquiry," and the teacher burst into laughter again.

But Janice felt that he was more serious than usual, and she hastened to say: "I should really feel proud to know that any word of *mine* suggested your present course, Mr. Nelson Haley. Why! what a fine thing that would be."

"What a fine thing *what* would be?" he demanded.

"To think that I could really influence an educated and clever young man like you to do something very much worth while in the world. Nelson, you are flattering me."

"Honest to goodness—it's so," he said, looking at her with a rather wry smile. "And I'm not at all sure that I thank you for it."

"Why not?"

"See what you've got me into?" he complained. "I've got a whole bunch of extra work because of the school building, and in the end the old Elder and his friends may discharge me!"

"But you've brought about the building of a new school, and Poketown ought always to thank you."

"Likely. And they'll build a monument to me to stand at the head of High Street, eh?" and he laughed.

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"I do not care," said Janice, seriously, and looking up at him with pride. "*I* shall thank you. And I shall never forget that you said it was *my* little influence that made you do it."

"Your *little* influence——"

But she hastened to add: "It's a really great thing for me to think of. And how proud and glad I'll be by and by—years and years from now, I mean—when you accomplish some great thing and I can think that it was because of what *I* said that you first began to use your influence for good among these people——"

Her voice broke a little and she halted. She feared she had gone too far and that perhaps Nelson Haley would misunderstand her. But he was only silent for a moment. Then, turning to her and grasping her hands firmly, he said:

"Do you mean that, Janice?"

"Yes. I mean just that," she said, rather flutteringly. "Oh! here comes a wagon. It must be Walky."

"Never mind Walky," said Nelson, firmly. "I want to tell you that I sha'n't forget what you've said. If there really is a nice girl like you feeling proud of me, I'm going to do just my very best to retain her good opinion. You see if I don't!"

They were in the shadow as Walky drove by and he did not see them. After that Janice and the teacher hurried on so as not to be overtaken by the noisy party of young folks before they reached the village.

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As they came up the hill toward Hopewell Drugg's store they saw a dim light in the storekeeper's back room, and the wailing notes of his violin reached their ears.

"Hopewell is grinding out his usual classic," chuckled Nelson Haley. "I hear him at it morning, noon, and night. Seems to me 'Silver Threads Among the Gold' is kind of *passé*."

"Hush!" said Janice. "There is somebody standing at the side gate, listening. You see, sir, everybody doesn't have the same opinion of poor Mr. Drugg's music——"

"My goodness!" ejaculated Nelson, under his breath. "It's Miss Scattergood, I do believe!"

The timid little spinster could not escape. They had come upon her so quietly.

"Oh! is it you, Janice dear?" she said, in a startled voice.

"And Mr. Haley. We are walking home from the Hammetts' sugaring."

"Well! I'm glad it ain't anybody else," said Miss 'Rill frankly. "But I *do* run around here sometimes of an evening, when mother's busy or asleep, just to listen to that old song. Mr. Drugg plays it with so much feelin'—don't you think so, Mr. Haley? And then—I was always very fond of that song."

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They left her at the corner of High Street, and the flurried little woman hurried home.

"I do believe there is a romance there," whispered the teacher, when Miss 'Rill was out of earshot.

"So there is. Didn't you know that—years and years ago—she and Mr. Drugg were engaged?" cried Janice. "Why, yes, they were. But why they did not marry, and why he married the girl he did, and why Miss 'Rill kept on teaching school and never would look at any other man, is all a mystery."

"Romance!" commented Nelson, with a little laugh, yet looking down upon Janice with serious eyes. "The night is full of it—don't you think so, Janice?"

"No, no!" she laughed up at him. "It's only the moonlight," and a little later he left her at the old Day house with a casual handshake.

CHAPTER XXIV

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THE SCHOOL DEDICATION

Thereafter there was a somewhat different tone to the friendship between Janice and the school-teacher. They were confidential. They both assumed that the other was interested in the matters dear to each. It was a comradeship that had no silly side to it. Nelson Haley was a young man working his way up the first rungs of the ladder of life; Janice was his good friend and staunch partisan.

As neither was possessed of brother or sister, they adopted each other in that stead.

The winter fled away at last and Spring came over the mountain range and down to the lakeside, scattering flowers and grasses as she passed. Although Janice had enjoyed some of the fun and frolic of the New England winter, she was perfectly delighted to see the season change.

It had been late spring when she reached Poketown the year before. Now she saw the season open, and her first trips over the hillsides and through the wood lot where the snow still lay in sheltered places, searching for the earliest flowers, were days of delight for the girl.

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The Shower Bath was released from its icy fetters, and the little mountain stream poured over the lip of granite with a burst of sound like laughter. She visited The Overlook, too; but she did not need to view the landscape o'er to enable her to understand why God did not immediately answer her prayers for her father.

Great news from the mine in Mexico:

"We haven't made much money yet, it is true," Mr. Day wrote about this time. "But things are going right. The armies—both of them—are now far away and if they leave us in peace for a few months, your Daddy will make so much money that you can have the desire of your heart, my dear."

And the "desire of her heart" just then was—and had been for months—a little automobile in which she might ride over the roads about Poketown. There wasn't a good horse and carriage obtainable in the town; and Janice found the time hanging heavily upon her hands.

"If I just had a car!" she would often say, until Marty got to teasing her about it, and Nelson Haley, whenever he saw her, usually asked very sober questions about her car—if she'd had much tire trouble on her last trip, and so forth!

"You can all just laugh at me," Janice declared. "I know Daddy will send the money some time. And then, if you are not *very* good, and *very* polite, you sha'n't ride with me at all."

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Aunt 'Mira was so inspired by her niece's talk of an automobile that she studied the mail-order catalogues diligently, and finally sent off for a coat and veil, together with an approved automobile mask, to be worn when she went motoring through the country with Janice!

The spring passed and summer came. The cellar walls of the new schoolhouse were laid, and then the framework went up, and finally the handsome edifice was finished upon the outside. Really, Poketown was fairly startled by the appearance of the new building. Some of the very people who had been opposed to the thing were won over by its appearance.

"Hi tunket!" exclaimed Mr. Cross Moore, "barrin' the taxes we'll haf ter pay for the next ten year, I could be glad ter see sech a handsome house in the town. An' they tell me 'at teacher has had more ter do with the plannin' of the school than the architect himself. Too bad Mr. Haley ain't goin' ter be here no longer than this term. He'd ought ter have the bossin' of the new school."

"Who says he won't?" snapped Walky Dexter, who heard the selectman's statement.

"You ax the Elder—or old Bill Jones," chortled Moore.

"Come now! what do you mean by that?" demanded Mr. Massey, in whose store the conversation took place.

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"Ax 'em," said Mr. Moore again. "They've got it fixed up to fire Mr. Haley at the end of this term."

"Nothin' like bein' warned in time," said Walky Dexter. "Them old shagbarks ain't been e-lected

themselves for next year, yet. They air takin' too blamed much for granted, that's what's the matter with them. July school meetin' is purty near; but mebbe we kin put a spoke in their wheel."

Forthwith Walkworthy Dexter began to earn his right to the nickname Janice had once given him. He became "Talky" Dexter, and he talked to some purpose. When the school meeting was held in July there was the most astonishing overturn that had been seen in Poketown for years. An entirely new committee was elected to govern school affairs, and all were men in favor of new methods.

Before this, the school had closed and Nelson Haley had gone to Maine to work in a hotel during the summer. The last half of the school year had been much different from the young man's fall term. Although he gave the boys all the instruction in baseball he had promised, and otherwise had kept up their interest in the school, he had begun to lay out the work differently for the pupils and really try to increase the value of his instruction. Whether he was to be fortunate enough to head the new school in the fall, or not, he began to train the pupils to more modern methods. Whoever took hold of the new school would find the scholars somewhat prepared for the graded system.

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Poketown was actually shocked! The good old Elder and his mates had so long governed school matters just as they pleased that many of the people could not realize that a new day had dawned—in school affairs, at least.

Elder Concannon was doomed to see more of his influence wane during this summer. Heretofore he had managed to keep out of the church anything like a young people's society, in spite of Mr. Middler's desire to the contrary. But there were now several earnest young people in the church membership who were anxious to be set to work to some purpose.

The association was a small one at first. Janice was a member. Soon the influence of the organization began to be felt in more ways than one.

"I can see just how things are going, Brother Middler—I can see plainly," old Elder Concannon declared. "Just as soon as they told me that Day girl was a member of the society I knew what would happen. A new carpet for the aisle and the pulpit chairs upholstered! Ha! And them girls and boys themselves cleaning windows and sweeping and dusting the whole church once a month. Ridiculous! Myron Jones has always suited us as sexton before. Oh! we'll have no peace—no peace at all!"

"But, Elder," timidly suggested the pastor, "such things as the young people have asked to do have been helpful things. And I'm sure if you would attend one of their meetings you would find their spiritual growth commendable—surely commendable."

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"Ha!" sniffed the old gentleman, wagging his bristling head. "What do those boys and girls know about religion, and the work of the spirit, and—"

"One thing is sure, Elder," interposed Mr. Middler with more courage than was usual with him, "One thing is sure: if our children have no proper appreciation of such things, it is certainly *our* fault. We older ones have been remiss in our duty."

This seemed to take the Elder aback. He stared at the younger man for a moment; but as he turned away he muttered:

"It's all nonsense! And it's just as I've said. No peace since that Day girl came to town."

Mr. Middler had the courage of his convictions for once. He said nothing more to rasp the old gentleman's feelings and prejudices; but he backed up the young people in their attempt to freshen up the old church. He mingled with them more than ever he had before; and from that contact with their young and hopeful natures he carried into his pulpit a more joyful outlook upon life. Mr. Middler was growing, along with his young people, and he really preached a sermon now and then in which there wasn't a doctrinal argument!

Not that Janice held a very important position in the young people's society. But she had belonged to one back in Greensboro, in her own beloved church, and she had helped form this Poketown organization. She would not take office in this new society, for all the time she hoped that her father's affairs would change and they might be together again.

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There was never a day begun that Janice did not hope that this reunion might be consummated soon; and the desire was a part of her bedside prayer at night. She was no longer lonely, or even homesick, in Poketown. She really loved her relatives, and she knew that they loved her. She had made many friends, and her time was fairly well occupied.

But her longing for Daddy seemed to grow with the lapse of time. She wanted to see him so much that it actually *hurt* when she allowed herself to think about it!

"Ain't you ever goin' to be still a minute, Janice?" complained her aunt frequently. "You're hoppin' 'round all the time jest like a hen on a hot skillet, I declare for't!"

"Why, Aunt 'Mira," she told the good lady, "I couldn't possibly sit with my hands folded. I'd rather work on the treadmill than do *that*."

"You wait till you've worked as many years as I have—an' got as leetle for it," said Aunt 'Mira,

shaking her head. "You won't be so spry," and with that she buried herself in her story paper again.

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There was an improvement, however, even in Aunt 'Mira. She could not leave the "love stories" alone, and if she had a particularly exciting one, she would sit down in her chair in the middle of the kitchen floor and let the breakfast dishes go till noon.

Usually, however, she "slicked up," as she called it, after dinner, instead of spending her time on the sofa, and sometimes she and Janice went calling with their needlework, like the other ladies up and down Hillside Avenue, or had some of the neighbors in to call on them.

Aunt 'Mira had spent some of Janice's board money on the furnishings of the house as well as in silk dresses and automobile veils. There were new curtains at the windows; the sitting-room had a new rag carpet woven by a neighbor; the rather worn boards of the kitchen were covered with brightly-figured linoleum.

Inside and out there were now few "loose ends" about the old Day house. The stair to the upper story was mended, and covered with a bright runner. The premises about the house were kept neat and attractive, and Mr. Day had somehow found the money to paint the house that spring, while the stables and other outbuildings looked much neater than when Janice had first seen them.

She and Marty had taken complete charge of the garden this year, and the girl had inspired her cousin with some of her own love of neatness and order. The rows of vegetables were straight; the weeds were kept out; and they had earlier potatoes and peas for the table than anybody else on Hillside Avenue.

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The lane was, by the way, different in appearance from the untidy and crooked street up which Janice had climbed with Uncle Jason that day of her arrival at Poketown. The neighboring homes showed the influence of association with the Day place.

There had been other houses painted on the street that spring. More fences had been reset and straightened. The driveway itself had had some attention from the town. And you couldn't have found a one-hinged gate the entire length of the street!

As for Uncle Jason, he was really carrying on his farming in a businesslike way. Marty was getting to be a big boy now, and he could help more than he once had. Janice had suggested to Uncle Jason that, as he had such good pasture at the upper end of his farm, and as the milk supply of Poketown was but a meager one, it would pay somebody to run a small dairy.

Mr. Day now had three cows that he proposed to winter, and was raising one heifer calf. Such milk as the family did not use themselves the neighbors gladly bought. Mrs. Day was doing better with her hens, too. The wire fencing had been repaired and she gave the biddies more attention; therefore she was being repaid in eggs and chickens for frying. Altogether it could no longer be said that the Day family was shiftless.

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Janice received several cheerful and entertaining letters that summer from Nelson Haley. He was clerk of a summer hotel on the Maine shore, and he seemed to be having a good time as well as earning a considerable salary.

When the new school committee of Poketown tendered him an offer of the head mastership of the school (he was to begin with one assistant for the kindergartners), he threw up his clerkship and hastened to a certain summer normal school in central Massachusetts.

Janice was very glad, although his action surprised her, knowing, as she did, how much young Haley needed the money he was earning at the hotel. His tuition at the summer school for a month, and his board there, would eat up a good deal of the money he had saved. He might not be able to enter for his law studies at the end of another school year.

Janice believed, however, that Nelson Haley was "cut out," as the local saying was, for a teacher. He had an easy, interesting manner, which was bound to hold the attention of even the wandering minds among his pupils. She knew by the improvement in Marty that the young man's influence, especially on the boys of Poketown, was for good.

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"If he would only make up his mind to *work*, he might rise high in the profession," she thought. "Some day he might even be president of a college—and wouldn't that be fine?"

But she did not write anything of this nature to the absent Nelson. She treasured in her mind what he had said about working because *she* was proud of him; and she wisely decided that Nelson Haley was a young man who needed very little encouragement in some ways. Janice was by no means sure that she liked Nelson Haley as he liked her.

So she kept her answers to his letters upon a coolly friendly basis and only showed him, when he returned to Poketown in September in time for the dedication exercises of the school building, how glad she was to see him by the warmth of her greeting.

It was a real gala day in Poketown when the new school building was thrown open for public inspection. In the evening the upper floor of the building (which for the present was to be used as a hall) was crowded by the villagers to hear the "public speaking"; and on this occasion Nelson Haley again covered himself with glory.

He seemed to have gained enthusiasm, as well as a distinct idea of modern school methods, from his brief normal training. He managed to inspire his hearers with hope for a broader and higher education; his hopes for the future of the Poketown school lit responsive fires in the hearts of many of his listeners.

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Of course, Elder Concannon did not agree. He was heard to say afterward that he couldn't approve of "no such new-fangled notions," and that he believed the boys and girls of Poketown "better stick to the three R's—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic!"

However, the opinion of the people in general seemed to be in favor of the new ideas, and they promised to back up Nelson Haley in his work of modernizing the school.

"Of course you'll make it one of the best schools in the state—I know you will, Nelson," declared Janice, when he walked home with her after the exercises.

"If *you* say so—of course!" replied the young man, with a smile.

CHAPTER XXV

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THROUGH THE SECOND WINTER

During the summer, matters at the reading-room and library had been allowed to drift along to a great extent. Marty and one of his particular chums had kept the reading-room open evenings during Mr. Haley's absence; but now Janice knew that the school-teacher would have his hands quite full without giving any time to the reading-room.

She set about making a second campaign for the advancement of the institution and the broadening of its work. She found five girls beside herself willing to keep the reading-room open one afternoon a week, and to exchange books for the members of the library association. The institution had proved its value in the community and Janice privately went to several people who were well able to help, and collected a fund for the payment of a regular librarian in the evening.

One of the boys who had shown most advancement during the spring in school work was glad to earn a small wage as librarian and caretaker of the reading-room evenings. An effort was made, too, to increase the number of volumes in the library so as to obtain a share of the State Library Appropriation for the next year.

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Janice was not alone interested in the reading-room's affairs. There was the matter of a new piano for the Sunday-school room. The instrument in use had been a second-hand one when the Sunday School obtained it; and it was forever out of tune.

"However can you expect the children to sing in unison, and sing well, Mr. Scribner," Janice said to the Sunday-school superintendent, "when there isn't an octave in harmony on the old piano? Come on! let's see what we can do about getting a brand-new, first-class instrument?"

"Oh, my dear girl! Impossible! quite impossible!" declared the superintendent, who was a bald, hopeless little man, who kept books for the biggest store in town, and was imbued with the prevailing Poketown spirit of "letting well enough alone."

"How do you know it is impossible till you try?" demanded the girl, laughing. "How much would you give, yourself, toward a new instrument?"

Mr. Scribner winked hard, swallowed, and burst out with: "Ten dollars! Yes, ma'am! I'd go without a new winter overcoat for the sake of having a decent piano."

"That's a beginning," Janice said, gravely, seizing paper and pad. "And I can spare five. Now, don't you see, if we can interest everybody else in town proportionately, we'd have enough to buy *two* pianos, let alone one.

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"But let us start the subscription papers with our own offerings. You take one, and I'll take the other. You can ask everybody who comes into the store, and I'll go out into the highways and hedges and see what I can gather."

Janice interested the young people's society in the project, too; and her own enthusiasm, plus that of the other young folks, brought the thing about. At the usual Sunday-school entertainment on Christmas night the new piano was used for the first time, and Mrs. Ebbie Stewart, who played it, fairly cried into her score book, she was so glad.

"I was *so* sick of pounding on that old tin-panny thing!" she sobbed. "A real piano seems too good to be true."

The old Town Hall standing at the head of High Street—just where the street forked to become two country highways—had a fine stick of spruce in front of it for a flagpole; but on holidays the flag that was raised (if the janitor didn't forget it) was tattered like a battle-banner, and, in addition, was of the vintage of a score of years before. Our flag has changed some during the last two decades as to the number of stars and their arrangement on the azure field.

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Of a sudden people began to notice the need of a new flag. Who mentioned it first? Why, that Day

girl!

And she kept right on mentioning it until some people began to see that it was really a disgrace to Poketown—and almost an insult to the flag itself—to raise such a tattered banner. A grand silk flag, with new halyards and all, was finally obtained, the Congressman of the district having been interested in the affair. And on Washington's Birthday the Congressman himself visited the village and made an address when the flag was raised for the first time.

Gradually, other improvements and changes had taken place in Poketown. There was the steamboat dock. It had been falling to pieces for years. It had originally been built by the town; but the various storekeepers were most benefited by the wharf, for their freight came by water for more than half of the year.

Walky Dexter started the subscription among the merchants for the dock repairs. He subscribed a fair sum himself, too, for he was the principal teamster in Poketown.

"But who d'you s'pose started Walky?" demanded Mr. Cross Moore, shrewdly. "Trace it all back to one 'live wire'—that's what! If that Day gal didn't put the idee into Walky's head for a new dock, I'll eat my hat!"

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And nobody asked Mr. Moore to try that gastronomic feat.

The selectman, himself, seemed to get into line during that winter. He stopped sneering at Walky Dexter and for some inexplicable reason he began agitating for better health ordinances.

There was an unreasonable warm spell in February; people in Poketown had always had open garbage piles during the winter. From this cause, Dr. Poole, the Health Officer, declared, a diphtheria epidemic started which caused several deaths and necessitated the closing of a part of the school for four weeks.

Cross Moore put through a garbage-collection ordinance and a certain farmer out of town was glad of the chance to make a daily collection, the year around, for the value of the garbage and the small bonus the town allowed him. If the truth were known Mr. Moore's ordinance was copied almost word for word from the printed pamphlet of ordinances in force in a certain town of the Middle West called Greensboro. Now, how did the selectman obtain that pamphlet, do you suppose?

Yet Poketown, as a whole, looked about as forlorn and unsightly as it had when Janice Day first saw it. The improvement was not general. The malady—general neglect—had only been treated in spots.

There were still stores with their windows heaped with flyspecked goods. The horses still gnawed the boles of the shade trees along High Street. The flagstone sidewalks were still broken and the gutters unsightly. High street itself was rutted and muddy all through the early spring, after the snow had gone.

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A few of the merchants patterned after Hopewell Drugg, brightened up their stores, and exposed only fresh goods for sale. But these few changes only made the general run of Poketown institutions appear more slovenly. The contrast was that of a new pair of shoes, or a glossy hat, on a ragged beggar!

With Janice on one side to spur him, and Miss 'Rill's unbounded faith in him on the other hand, how *could* Hopewell Drugg fall back into the old aimless existence which had cursed him when first Janice had taken an interest in his little Lottie, his store, and himself?

But, of course, Hopewell could not *make* trade. He had gained his full share of the Poketown patronage, and held all his old customers. But the profits of the business accumulated slowly. As this second winter drew to a close the storekeeper confessed to Janice that he had only saved a little over three hundred dollars altogether towards the betterment of Lottie's condition.

Janice began secretly to complain. Her heart bled for the child, shut away in the dark and silence. If only Daddy would grow suddenly very wealthy out of the mine! Or if some fairy godmother would come to little Lottie's help!

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The person who seemed nearest like a fairy godmother to the child was Miss 'Rill. She spent a great deal of her spare time with the storekeeper's daughter. Sometimes she went to Mr. Drugg's cottage alone; but oftener she had Lottie around to the rooms she occupied with her mother on High Street.

"I declare for't, 'Rill," sputtered old Mrs. Scattergood, one day when Janice happened to be present, "you'll have the hull town talkin' about you. You're in an' aout of Hopewell Drugg's jest as though you belonged there."

"I'm surely doing no harm, mother," said the little spinster, mildly. "Everyone knows how this poor child needs somebody's care."

"Wal! let the 'somebody' be somebody else," snapped the old lady. "I sh'd think you'd be ashamed."

"Ashamed of what, mother?" asked Miss 'Rill, with more spirit than she usually displayed.

"You know well enough what I mean. Folks will say you're flingin' yourself at Hopewell Drugg's

head. An' after all these years, too. I—"

"Mother!" exclaimed her daughter, in a low voice, but earnestly. "Don't you think you did harm enough long, long ago, without beginning on that tack now?"

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"There! that's the thanks one gets when one keeps a gal from makin' a perfect *fule* of herself," cried the old lady, bridling. "S'pose you'd been jest a drudge for Hopewell all these years, Amarilla Scattergood?"

"I might not have been a drudge," said Miss 'Rill, softly, flushing over her needlework. "At least my life—and his—would have been different."

"Ye don't know how lucky you be," snapped her mother. "And this is all the thanks I git for tellin' Hopewell Drugg that he'd brought his pigs to the wrong market."

"At least," said the spinster, with a sigh, "he will never worry you on that score again, mother—he nor any other man. When a woman gets near to forty, with more silver than gold in her hair, and the best of her useless life is behind her, she need expect no change in her estate, that's sure."

"Ye might be a good deal wuss off," sniffed her mother.

"Perhaps that is so," agreed Miss 'Rill, with a sudden hard little laugh. "But don't you take pattern by me, Janice, no matter what folks tell you. Mrs. Beasely is better off than I am. She has the memory of doing for somebody whom she loved and who loved her. While I—Well, I'm just an old maid, and when you say that about a woman, you say the worst!"

"Why, the idee!" exclaimed her mother, with wrath. "I call that flyin' right in the face of Providence."

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"I don't believe that God ever had old maids in the original scheme of things."

"Humph! didn't He?" snapped Mrs. Scattergood. "Then why is there so many more women than men in the world? Will you please tell me *that*, Amarilla?" and this unanswerable argument closed what Janice realized was not the first discussion of the unpleasant topic, between the ex-schoolteacher and her sharp-tongued mother.

CHAPTER XXVI

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JUST HOW IT ALL BEGAN

It was one of those soft, irresponsible days of April. The heavens clouded up and wept like a naughty child upon the least pretext; yet between the showers the sun warmed the glad earth, and coaxed the catkins into bloom, and even expanded the first buds of the huge lilac bush at the corner of the Day house.

This was a special occasion; one could easily guess that from the bustle manifest about the place. Aunt 'Mira and Janice had been busy since light. Mrs. Day was not in the habit of "givin' things a lick and a promise" nowadays when she cleaned house. No, indeed! They gave the house a "thorough riddin' up," and were scarcely through at dinner-time.

Then they hurried the dinner dishes out of the way, drove Marty and his father out of the house and hurried to change into fresh frocks; for company was expected.

The ladies' sewing circle of the Union Church was to meet with Mrs. Day. These meetings of late had become more like social gatherings than formerly. The afternoon session was better attended; then came a hearty supper to which the ladies' husbands, brothers, or sweethearts were invited; and everything wound up with a social evening.

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Aunt 'Mira and Janice had made many extra preparations for the occasion in the line of cooked food; there were two gallon pots of beans in the oven cooking slowly; and every lady, as she arrived, handed to Janice some parcel or package containing cooked food for the supper.

The girl was busy looking after these donations when once the members of the sewing circle began to arrive; and Aunt 'Mira's pantry had never before been so stacked with food. Marty stole in to gaze at the goodies, and whispered:

"Hi tunket! Just you go away for half an hour, Janice, and lemme be here. I could do something to that tuck right now."

"And so soon after dinner?" cried his cousin. "I wonder if boys *are* hollow all the way down to their heels, as they say they are?"

"It ain't that," grinned Marty. "But a feller runs so many chances in this world of going hungry, that he ought ter fill up while he can. You just turn your back for a while and I'll show you, Janice."

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But his cousin turned the key in the pantry door and slipped it into her pocket for safety. "We'll have no larks like *that*, Master Marty," she declared.

Mrs. Scattergood and 'Rill were among the first to arrive; and then came Mrs. Middler, the minister's wife. Mrs. Beasely was there, and Walky Dexter's wife, and the druggist's sister, who kept house for him; and Mrs. Poole, the doctor's wife; and Mrs. Marvin Petrie, who had married children living in Boston and always spent her winters with them, and had just come back to Poketown again for the season.

Many of the ladies of Poketown never thought of making up their spring frocks, or having Mrs. Link, the milliner, trim their Easter bonnets, until Mrs. Marvin Petrie came from Boston. She was supposed to bring with her the newest ideas for female apparel, and her taste and advice was sought on all sides when the ladies sat down to their sewing in the big sitting-room of the old Day house.

Mrs. Marvin Petrie, however, was one of those persons who seem never to absorb any helpful ideas. Her forte was mostly criticism. She could see the faults of her home town, and her home people, in comparison with the Hub; but she had never, thus far, led in any benefit to Poketown.

"You can't none of you understand how glad I am to git to my daughter Mabel's in the winter; and then how glad I am to shake the mud of Boston off my gaiters when it comes spring," declared the traveled lady, who had a shrill voice of great "carrying" quality. When Mrs. Marvin Petrie was talking there was little other conversation at the sewing circle. Her comments upon people she had met and things she had seen, were in the line of a monologue. [Pg 265]

"I do sartainly grow tired of Poketown when it comes fall, and things is dead, and the wind gets cold, and all. I'm sartain sure glad to git shet of it!" she pursued on this particular afternoon. "And then the first sight of Boston—and the mud—and the Common and Public Library,—and the shops, and all, make me feel like I was livin' again.

"Mabel says to me: 'How kin you live, Maw, most all the year in Poketown! Why, I was so glad to git away from it, that I'd walk the streets and beg before I'd go back to it again!' An' she would; Mabel's lively yet, if she has been married ten years and got three children.

"But by this time o' year—arter bein' three months or more in the hurly-burly of Boston, I'm *de*-lighted to git into the country. Ye see, city folks keep dancin' about so. They're always on the go. They ain't no rest for a body."

"But you ain't got ter go because other folks dooes, Miz' Petrie," suggested old lady Scattergood. "Now, when I go ter see my son-in-law at Skunk's Holler, I jest sit down an' fold my hands, an' *rest*." [Pg 266]

"Skunk's Holler!" murmured one of the other women. "To hear Miz' Scattergood talk, one 'ud think she was traveled, too. An' she ain't never been out o' sight o' this lake, I do believe."

"If ye don't go yourself, you feel's though you had," said Mrs. Petrie, with good nature. "So much bustle around you—yes. An' so I tell my daughters. I git enough of it b'fore spring begins."

"But," said the minister's wife, timidly, "after all, there isn't so much difference between Poketown and Boston, excepting that Boston is so very much bigger. People are about the same everywhere. And one house is like another, only one's bigger—"

"Now, that's right foolish talk, Miz' Middler!" exclaimed the lady so recently from the Hub. "The people's just as different as chalk is from cheese; and there ain't a church in Boston—and there's hundreds of 'em—that don't make our Union Church look silly."

"But, Miz' Petrie," cried one inquiring body. "Just what is it that makes Boston so different from Poketown? After all, folks is folks—and houses is houses—and streets is streets. Ain't that so?"

"Wa-al!" The traveled lady was stumped for a moment. Then she burst out with: "There! I'll tell ye. It's 'cause there's some order in the city; ev'rything here is haphazard. Course, there's poor sections—reg'lar *slums*, as they call 'em—in Boston. But the poor, dirty buildings and the poor, dirty streets, are in sort of a bunch together. They're in spots; they ain't dribbled all through the town, mixed up with fine houses, and elegant squares, and boulevards. Nope. Cities know how to hide their poor spots in some ways. Boston puts its best foot forward, as the sayin' is. [Pg 267]

"But take it right here in Poketown. Now, ain't the good and the bad all shoveled together? Take Colonel Pa'tridge's fine house on High Street, stuck in right between Miner's meat shop and old Bill Jones' drygoods an' groceries—an' I don't know which is the commonest lookin' of the two."

"There you air right, Miz' Petrie," agreed the Widow Beasely. "Miner's got so dirty—around his shop I mean—that I hate to buy a piece of meat there."

"But the other butcher ain't much better," cried another troubled housewife. "And the flies!"

"Oh, the awful flies!" chorused several.

"Them critters is a pest, an' that's a fac'," declared Mrs. Scattergood. "Talk about the plagues o' Egypt—"

"But Miz' Petrie was tellin' us how Boston was different—"

"My soul and body!" gasped Mrs. Beasely. "I reckon she's told us enough. It's a fac'. Poketown is all cluttered up—what ain't right down filthy. An' I don't see as there's anything can be done about it." [Pg 268]

"Why—Mrs. Beasely—do you believe there is anything so bad that it can't be helped?" queried Janice, slowly and thoughtfully. It was the first time her voice had been heard amid the general clatter, since she had come to sit down. Her nimble fingers were just as busy as any other ten in the room; but her tongue had been idle.

"They say it's never too late to mend," quote 'Rill Scattergood; "but I am afraid that Mr. Miner, and Mr. Jones, and some of the rest of the storekeepers are too old to mend—or be mended!"

"Ain't you right, now, Amarilla!" sniffed her mother.

"'Tain't only the storekeepers," declared Mrs. Petrie, taking up the tale again. "How many of us—us housekeepers, I mean—insist upon having things as clean as they should be right around our own back doors?"

"Wa-al," groaned Aunt 'Mira, "it takes suthin' like an airthquake to start some of the men-folks ___"

"Why wait for *them*?" interposed the demure Janice again, knowing that her aunt would not object if she interrupted her. "Can't we do something ourselves?"

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"I'd like to know what you'd *do*?" exclaimed the helpless Mrs. Middler.

"Why, we could have a regular 'Clean-Up Day' in Poketown, same as they do in other places."

"Good Land o' Goshen!" ejaculated Mrs. Scattergood. "What's *that*, I'd like to know, Janice Day? You *do* have the greatest idees! I never heard of no 'Clean-Up Day' in Skunk's Holler."

"Perhaps they didn't need any there," laughed Janice, for she was used to the old lady's sharp tongue and did not mind it.

"Seems to me I—I've heard of such things," said Mrs. Petrie, rather feebly. She did not wish to be left behind in anything novel.

"Why, a 'Clean-Up Day'," explained Janice, "is justly exactly what it *is*. Everybody cleans up—yard, cellar, attic, streets, and all. You get out all your old rubbish, of whatsoever kind, and get it ready to be carted away; and the town pays for the stuff's being removed to some place where it can be burned or buried."

"My soul and body!" ejaculated Aunt 'Mira. "Jest the same as though the town was cleanin' house."

"That's it—exactly," said Janice, nodding. "And all at the same time, so that the whole town can be made neat at once."

"Now," declared Mrs. Petrie, giving her decided and unqualified approval, "I call that a right sensible idea. I'm for that scheme, hammer and tongs! This here Day girl, that I ain't never had the pleasure of meetin' before, has sartainly got a head on her. I vote we do it!"

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CHAPTER XXVII

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POKETOWN IN A NEW DRESS

That is just how it all began. If you had asked any of those sewing circle ladies about it, they would have said—"to a man!"—that Mrs. Marvin Petrie suggested Poketown's "Clean-Up Day." And they would have been honest in their belief.

For Janice Day was no strident-voiced reformer. What she did toward the work of giving Poketown a new spring dress, was done so quietly that only those who knew her well, and had watched her since she had come to Poketown, realized that she had exerted more influence than a girl of her age was supposed to be entitled to!

It was Janice who spoke with Mr. Cross Moore that very night, after the women had loudly discussed the new idea with their husbands and other male relatives at the supper table. Mr. Moore was to put the ordinance through at the next meeting of the Board of Selectmen, covering the date of the Clean-Up Day, and the amount of money to be appropriated for the removal of rubbish by hired teams.

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"Put a paragraph into the motion, Mr. Moore, making it a fifty-dollar fine for any taxpayer, or tenant, who puts rubbish out on the curb on any other day save the two mentioned in the main ordinance," Janice whispered to the selectman; "otherwise you will set a bad precedent with your Clean-Up Day, instead of doing lasting good."

"Now, ain't that gal got brains?" Moore wanted to know of Walky Dexter. "Huh! Mary Ann can't tell me that the Widder Petrie started this idea. It was that Day gal, as sure as aigs is aigs!" and Walky nodded a solemn agreement.

There was more to it, however, than the giving notice to the people of Poketown that they had a chance to get rid of the collection of rubbish every family finds in cellar, shed, and yard in the

spring. People in general had to be stirred up about it. Clean-Up Day was so far ahead that the apostles of neatness and order—those who were thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the thing and realized Poketown's need—had time to preach to most of the delinquents.

There were cards printed, too, announcing the date of Clean-Up Day and its purposes, and these were hung in every store and other public place. Janice urged the young people's society of the church into the work of getting the storekeepers to promise to clean up back rooms, cellars, sheds, and the awful yards behind their ancient shops.

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There were a few—like Mr. Bill Jones—who at first refused to fall in with the plans of those who had at heart the welfare of the old town. Mr. Jones had been particularly "sore" ever since he had been ousted from the school committee the year before. Now he declared he wouldn't "be driv" by no "passel of wimmen" into changing the order of affairs in the gloomy old store where he had made a good living for so many years.

But Bill Jones reckoned without the new spirit that was gradually taking hold upon Poketown people. One of his ungracious statements, when his store was well filled with customers, brought about the retort pointed from none less than Mrs. Marvin Petrie herself.

"Well, Bill Jones," declared that plain-spoken old lady, "we wimmen have made up our minds to clean out the flies, an' all other dirt, if we can. Poketown is unsanitary—so Dr. Poole says—and we know it's always been slovenly. There ain't a place, I'll be bound, in the whole town, that needs cleaning up more'n this, your store!"

"I ain't no dirtier than anybody else!" roared Jones, very red-faced.

"But you aim to be. So you say. When other folks all about you are goin' to clean up, you say you won't be driv' to it. Wa-al! I'll tell you what's going to happen to you, Bill Jones: We wimmen air goin' to trade at stores that are decently clean. Anyway, they're cleaner than this hovel of your'n. Don't expect me in it ag'in till I see a change."

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Mrs. Marvin Petrie marched out of the shop without buying. Several other ladies followed her and distributed their patronage among the other shops. Old Bill hung out for a few days, "breathing threatenings and slaughter." Then the steady decrease in his custom was too much for the old man's pocketbook. He began to bleed *there*. So he signified his intention of falling in with the new movement.

There were householders, too, who had to be urged to join in the general clean-up of Poketown. Dr. Poole wrote a brief pamphlet upon the house-fly and the dangers of that pest, and this was printed and scattered broadcast about the town. To the amazement of a good many of the older members, like Elder Concannon, Mr. Middler read this short treatise from the pulpit and urged his hearers to screen their pantries, at least, to "swat the fly" with vigor, and to remove barns and stables so far away from the dwellings that it would be, at least, a longer trip for Mr. Fly from the barnyard to the dining-table and back again!

The Board of Selectmen, stirred by Mr. Cross Moore and others, cleaned the gutters of High Street and used the scraper on the drive itself fully two months earlier than usual. Sidewalks were rebuilt, and many painted tree boxes appeared along the main street to save the remainder of the tree trunks from the teeth of crib-biting horses.

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Before most of the shops—the general stores particularly—were hitch-rails. Many of these were renewed; some even painted. Store fronts, too, were treated to a coat or two of paint. Show windows were cleaned and almost every store redressed its display of goods.

Trees were trimmed, and some of the tottering ones cut down entirely. There were still plenty of shade trees on the steep High Street.

It was Janice who urged Hopewell Drugg to refurbish his store—painting it inside and out, rebuilding the porch, and erecting a long hitch-rail to attract farmers' trade.

"Of course you cannot afford it, Mr. Drugg," said the girl. "That is, it seems as though every dollar you spend is putting Lottie back. But 'nothing ventured, nothing gained.' You must throw out sprats to catch herring. To get together the money that specialist demands to treat Lottie's eyes, you must endeavor to increase your trade. Make the store just as attractive as possible. That's business, I believe. Daddy would say so, I am sure."

Hopewell allowed himself to be convinced. There was not a store in town as attractive as Drugg's, after Clean-Up Day. The whole of Poketown, indeed, was in a new dress. The trees were just budding out nicely, there was a breath of lilac in the air, and the lawns were raked clean and showed a velvety, green sheen that was delightful to the eye.

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The old Town Hall had been repainted. Had it not been for the opposition of Elder Concannon, the young folks would have collected money for the repainting of the Union Church. However, they cleaned everything around it—yard and all—till it was as spick and span as it could be. And the burial ground in the rear of the church was made beautiful, too. The edges of the paths were trimmed, the paths themselves raked, and all the tottering headstones were set up straight.

Gates were rehung and fences straightened all over town. A smell of fresh paint rivaled the scent of the bursting lilac blooms. Never had Poketown been so busy.

The cleaning-up process went on inside the houses as well as out. Of course, among pure-blooded

New English housewives, such as the majority of Poketown matrons were, there were few drones. They prided themselves on their housekeeping.

Earlier than usual the carpets went out on the lines, the curtains at chamber and sitting-room windows were renewed, there was a smell of soap and water in every entry, as one pushed the door open, and altogether Poketown was generally turned out of doors, aired, dusted, and brought back again into thoroughly clean rooms.

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The old Day house had its "ridding up," too. Janice gave her aunt considerable help; but Mrs. Day was not the slovenly housekeeper she had been when first the girl had come to Poketown. Even Uncle Jason kept himself more neatly than ever before. And he went to the barber's at frequent intervals.

Janice once went down to the dock to see the *Constance Colfax* come in. There was the usual crowd of loafers waiting for the boat—all perched along the stringpiece of the wharf.

"But I declare!" thought Janice, her eyes dancing, "somebody certainly *has* 'slicked 'em up,' as Mrs. Scattergood would say. Whoever would believe it! Walky has got a new shirt on—and straw cuffs, too—and a necktie! My goodness me! And the hotel keeper really looks as though his wife cared a little about his appearance. And Ben Hutchins wears whole boots now, and has washed his face, and had a shave.

"I must admit they don't look so much like a delegation from the poorfarm as they did the day. I came in on the *Constance Colfax*. There has been a change in Poketown—there most certainly *has* been a change!" and the girl laughed delightedly.

It was marked everywhere. It even seemed to Janice as though people whom she met on the street stepped quicker than they once had!

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Janice knew she had given her own folks—Uncle Jason, and Aunt 'Mira, and Cousin Marty—a push or two in the right direction. She had helped Hopewell Drugg, too; and maybe she had instigated the waking up of several other people. But not for a moment did she realize—healthy, thoughtless girl that she was—how much Poketown owed to her on Clean-Up Day.

That was one great occasion in the old town. Although the selectmen had allowed two days in which the farmers' wagons were to cart away the rubbish for the householders, the removal men had hard work to fill their contract.

Some curbs were piled shoulder high with boxes of ashes, old bedsprings, broken furniture, decayed mattresses, yard rakings, unsightly pots and pans hidden away for decades in mouldy cellars—débriis of so many kinds that it would be impossible to catalogue it!

For two days, also, hundreds of rubbish fires burned, and the taint of the smoke seemed to saturate every part of Poketown. Janice declared that all the food on the supper table at the Day house seemed to have been "slightly scorched."

"By jinks!" declared Marty, gobbling his supper with an appetite that never seemed to lag. "I bet I burned three wagon-loads of stuff 'sides what I set outside on the street for 'em to take away. No use talkin', Dad, you got ter build a new pen and yard for the shoats."

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"Whuffor?" demanded his father, eyeing him slowly.

"'Cause the old boards and rails was so rotten that I jest burned 'em up," declared his son. "You know folks could see it from the street, an' it looked untidy."

"Wa-al," drawled Uncle Jason, with only half a sigh.

Janice could scarcely keep from clapping her hands, this so delighted her. She compared this with some of the conversation at the Day table soon after the time she had arrived in Poketown!

CHAPTER XXVIII

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"NO ODOR OF GASOLINE!"

During the winter now passed, Janice had watched the progress of the new school under Nelson Haley's administration with growing confidence in that young man. Nelson was advancing, as well as his pupils and the school discipline. Educators from other towns in the state—even in neighboring states—had come to visit Poketown's school.

Janice could not help having a thrill of pride when she learned of these visitations and the appreciation shown by other educators of Nelson Haley's work. She did not so often see the young man in a situation where they could talk these wonders over; for Nelson was very, very busy and gave both his days and evenings to the work he had set for himself the fall before.

The girl might no longer honestly complain of Nelson's lack of purpose. He had "struck his gait" it seemed; it was as though he had suddenly seen a mark before him and was pressing onward to that goal at top speed.

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When he and Janice met as they did, of course, at church and occasionally at evening parties, the teacher and the girl were the very best of friends. But tête-à-têtes were barred. Was it by Janice herself? Or had Nelson deliberately changed his attitude toward her?

Sometimes she tried to unravel this mystery; but then, before she had gone far in her ruminations, she began to wonder if she *wanted* Nelson to change toward her? That question frightened her, and she would at once refuse to face the situation at all!

Once Nelson told her that a small college in middle Massachusetts offered a line of work that he believed he would like to take up—if he was "doomed to the profession of teaching, after all."

"And does the doom seem so very terrible?" she asked him, laughingly.

"I admit that I can *do* things with the scholars," he said, gravely. "I have just begun to realize it. It seems easy for me to make them understand. But the profession doesn't give one the freedom that the law does, for instance."

Janice had made no further comment, nor did Nelson advance anything more regarding the work offered by the college in question.

She had her own intense interests, now and then. Clean-Up Day was past but its effect in Poketown was ineradicable. Janice was satisfied that there were enough people finally awake in the town to surely, if slowly, revolutionize the place. [Pg 282]

How could one householder drop back into the old, shiftless, careless manner of living when his neighbors' places on either hand were so trim? The carelessly-kept shop showed up a hundred per cent. worse than it had before Clean-Up Day. Even old Bill Jones kept in some trim, and the meat markets began to rival each other in cleanliness.

The taxpayers began to speak with pride of Poketown. When they visited Middletown, or other villages that had previously looked down on the hillside hamlet above the lake, they were apt to say:

"Just come over and see our town. What? You ain't been in Poketown in two years? No wonder you don't know what you're talking about! Why, we put it all over you fellows here for clean streets, and shops, and nice-lookin' lawns and all that—and our school!"

Poketownites were proud of the reading-room, too, although Mr. Massey's store was becoming a cramped place for it now. The shelves devoted to the circulating library were well crowded. The state appropriation had been spent carefully, and the new, well-bound books looked "mighty handsome" when visitors came into the place. [Pg 283]

But the original intention for the place had never been lost sight of. It had been made for the boys and young men of Poketown. They had fully appreciated it, and, Elder Concannon's prophecy to the contrary notwithstanding, the reading-room was never the scene of disorderly conduct.

Janice hoped the day would come when the reading-room association should have a building of its own,—not an expensive, ornate structure for which the taxpayers would be burdened, and the upkeep of which would keep the association poor for years; but a snug, warm, cheerful place which would actually be a club for the boys, and offer all the other benefits of a free library.

She knew already just where the building ought to stand. There was a certain empty lot on High Street which would give a library a prominent site. This lot was owned by old Elder Concannon.

"There've been miracles happened here in Poketown during the last year or so; if I have patience and wait to strike when the iron's hot, maybe *that* miracle will come to pass," Janice told herself.

Elder Concannon had already begun to treat Janice in a much more friendly way than he had at one time. She believed that secretly he was interested in the library and reading-room. Sometimes he spent an hour or so there of an evening—especially if one of the boys would play checkers with him. [Pg 284]

"He's an old nuisance," growled Marty to his cousin, on one occasion. "He keeps some of the fellers out; they see him in there, with his grizzly old head and flapping cape-coat, and they stay out till he goes home. And, by jinks! I'm gittin' tired of being the goat and playin' draughts with him."

"Marty," she said to him, with some solemnity, "if you saw that through the Elder's coming there and your entertaining him a bit, the institution would in the end be vastly benefited, wouldn't you be *glad* to play the goat?"

Marty's eyes snapped at her. He drew a long breath, and exclaimed: "Hi tunket! You don't mean that you've got the old Elder 'on the string' for us, Janice?"

"It's very rude of you to talk that way," said Janice, smiling. "I don't know what you mean by having the dear old gentleman 'on a string.' But I tell you in secret, Marty, that I *do* hope he will be so much interested in the reading-room and library that some day he will give the association something very much worth while. He can afford it, for he hasn't chick nor child in the world."

"Ye don't mean it?" gasped Marty.

"But I *do* mean it. Why not? Do you suppose the old gentleman comes into the reading-room without being interested in it?"

"Say!" drawled her cousin. "I'll be the goat all right, all right!"

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Janice was indeed cultivating the old Elder's acquaintance. She would not have done it to benefit herself in any way; but to help the library—

"You young folks need a balance wheel," Elder Concannon once said to Janice. "Youthful enthusiasm is all very well; but where's your balance?"

"Then why don't you come in with us and supply the balance?" she rejoined, briskly. "Goodness knows, Elder, we'd be glad to have you!"

Then came a red-letter day for Janice Day. She had almost lost hope of getting her "heart's desire"—the little motor car that Daddy had spoken of. Although his letters had been particularly cheerful of late, he had said nothing more about his promise.

Marty brought her home a thick letter from the post office and gave it to her at the dinner table. When she eagerly slit the flap of the envelope and pulled out the contents, there was flung out upon the tablecloth a queer-looking certificate.

"Hullo! what's this?" demanded Marty, with all the impudence of a boy.

"Put that down, Marty," commanded his mother.

"By jinks! What's this in the corner?" he yelled. "A thousand dollars? *A thousand dollars!* Janice Day! you're as rich as cream!"

"Hi tunket, boy!" ejaculated his father. "Le's see that? It can't be!"

"It is!" shrieked Janice, jumping up and dancing around the room. "It's for my gasoline runabout! I'm going to have it—I certainly *am!* Hurray! hurray!" and she kissed her aunt heartily and then danced another war dance with Marty around the table.

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"Wal, I snum!" exclaimed Uncle Jason, still staring at the bit of paper, which was a Wells-Fargo express check for the sum named.

Janice could scarcely eat any dinner, she was so excited. What was mere eating to the possession of this check and the knowledge that all was going well once more with dear Daddy? Her most particular friends must share the joy with her.

She hurried into her jacket and hat, and ran across town to see Miss 'Rill; for, after all, the little spinster was her dearest and closest friend in Poketown.

But was this Miss 'Rill—this frantic, wild-eyed creature, hatless and with her hair flying, who came running down High Street just as Janice reached the corner of the street on which Hopewell Drugg's store was situated? *Could* it be 'Rill Scattergood?

"Oh, Janice! Janice! have you heard about it? They just sent for me," gasped the little spinster lady.

"What do you mean, 'Rill? *Who* sent for you?" Janice demanded.

"It's poor little Lottie!" cried the other, dragging Janice along with her. "She's fallen. I've been expecting it. She moves so quickly, you know, in spite of her blindness. And now she's fallen into the cellar——"

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"Whose cellar? Oh! is she very, very badly hurt?" cried Janice, equally anxious.

"Hopewell had the trap door open. She came running into the shop and went straight down on her poor little head! Oh! she's all cut and bruised——"

Miss 'Rill could say no more. Nor did Janice need to ask, for they were at the store and pushing through the little group of helpless but sympathizing neighbors. Dr. Poole was already there. They had Lottie in bed, all bandaged and white.

"Just a bad cut over the forehead—right across the crown," Dr. Poole assured the waiting neighbors. "She's had a bad shock, but she's in no particular danger. Only——"

He looked at Janice and shook his head. Then he whispered to her: "It's a terrible shame Hopewell can't send the poor little thing to a specialist and have her eyes fixed up. My soul and body, girl! If I'd only been able to go in for surgery myself—If I'd only learned to use the knife!" and he groaned, shook his head, did this old-school family practitioner, and departed.

Janice did not remain long. Miss 'Rill would sit by the child for the remainder of the afternoon; and even her mother was anxious to help and promised to come over and stay all night at Hopewell's.

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"I ain't got nothin' ag'in the poor child, that's sure," Mrs. Scattergood told Janice. "It's only Hopewell that's so triflin'—he an' his fiddle. Jest like his father before him!"

But the storekeeper's fiddle was silent a good deal of the time now; only when Miss 'Rill or Janice urged him did the man take up the instrument that had once been so much his comfort—and little

Lottie's delight.

But now, on this sorrowful afternoon, Janice went back slowly toward home with a very serious mind indeed. On the way she met Nelson Haley coming from school.

"Congratulations—and then some!" he cried, shaking hands with Janice.

"Whatever are you talking about?" she asked, puzzled.

"Marty has been telling everybody the great and good news!" he said, staring at her. "Why! what makes you so solemn? Do you mean to say that you can't decide what kind of an auto to buy, and that is what has soured our Janice's usually sweet disposition?"

"Oh, Nelson!" gasped the girl, suddenly clinging to his arm, for she really felt a weakness in her knees.

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"Hold on! hold on! bear up! What's the matter?"

"I forgot about poor Daddy's check. Of course—that's the way out."

"What's the way out?" he demanded.

"Haven't you heard about poor little Lottie?"

"What's happened to her?" he asked, anxiously.

She told him swiftly. Then stopped. He demanded:

"What's that got to do with the auto, Janice?"

"Don't you see it has *everything* to do with it, Nelson?" she returned, gravely. "Of course, I could not buy a car when Lottie needs some of my money so much. She shall start for Boston just as soon as she is well enough to go—and of course Miss 'Rill will go with her. Hopewell cannot leave the store. Lottie shall go to the specialist, Nelson."

For a minute the school-teacher was silent. He looked at the girl's shining, earnest face in a way she had never noticed before. But at last he only smiled a little queerly, and said:

"Why—Well, Janice Day, there's no odor of gasoline about *that!*"

CHAPTER XXIX

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JANICE DAY'S FIRST LOVE LETTER

In a week, although little Lottie's head was still bandaged, she was driven over to Middletown with Miss 'Rill, Walky Dexter being the driver, of course, and took a train for Boston.

Before the day of departure Janice Day had a good deal to contend with. It *did* seem too bad that one could not spend one's own money without everybody trying to talk one out of it!

Not every one, however! Nelson Haley never said a word to discourage the girl's generosity. But, beginning with Hopewell Drugg himself, almost everybody else had something to say against it.

"I can never in this world pay you back, Miss Janice," said the storekeeper, faintly, after the girl had told him her plans fully.

"Who wants you to? I am giving it to Lottie," Janice declared. "Would you refuse to let her take it from me, when it means a new life to Lottie? You can't be so cruel!"

"Had you *ought* to do it, dear Janice?" asked Miss 'Rill, herself. "It seems too much for one person to do——"

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"You're going to pay your own expenses, aren't you?" demanded Janice. "Why should you do *that*? Just because you love Lottie, isn't it?"

"Ye-es," admitted the other, but with a little blush.

"Well, let *me* show some love for her, too."

"Good Land o' Goshen!" cried old Mrs. Scattergood. "Somebody ought to take and shake you, Janice Day! I don't see what your folks can be thinking of. All that money just thrown away—for like enough the man can't help the poor little thing at all. It is wicked!"

"We sha'n't pay for the operation if it is not successful. That is the agreement Dr. Sharpless always makes," said Janice, firmly. "But, oh! I hope he *is* successful, and that the money will do him a lot of good."

"I declare for't! you are the strangest child!" muttered Mrs. Scattergood. "I thought you was one o' these new-fashioned gals when I first seen ye—all for excitement, and fashions, and things like that. I've been wonderfully mistaken in you, Janice Day."

Oddly enough the old lady made small objection to her daughter's going to Boston with the child. "Anyhow," she grumbled to Janice, "she won't be runnin' into Hopewell's all the time if she ain't here."

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"There will be no need of *that*, mother, if little Lottie is away," Miss 'Rill said, gently.

At home—Ah! that is where Janice had the greatest opposition to meet.

"I declare to goodness!" snarled Marty Day. "If you ain't the very craziest girl there ever was, Janice! Givin' all that good money away! And goin' without that buzz-wagon you've been talking about so long!"

"Well, I've only been *talking* about it, Marty," laughed Janice. "I couldn't really believe it was coming true—"

"And it ain't come true, it seems," snapped her cousin.

"No-o. Not exactly. But I had the surprise of getting Daddy's check, and it was just *dear* of him to send me such a lot of money."

"What do you suppose Broxton will say, girl, when he learns how you've frittered that thousand dollars away?" demanded Uncle Jason, sternly.

"He'll never say a word—in objection," she cried. "You can read right here in his letter how I am to use the money in just any way I please—and no questions asked!"

"But you've talked so much about your automobile, deary," said Aunt 'Mira, faintly. "Ain't you most disappointed to death, child?"

"Oh, no, Aunty," returned Janice, cheerfully. "You know, I could be just awfully selfish, *in my mind!* But when it came to running about the country in an automobile, with poor Lottie blind and helpless because of my selfishness—No, no! I could not have done it." [Pg 293]

"I don't suppose you could, child," sighed the large lady, shaking her head. "But whatever am I goin' to do with that auto coat and them veils I bought? They don't seem jest the thing to wear out, jogging behind old Sam and Lightfoot."

However, Mr. Day had a chance to trade the two old farm horses off that spring for a handsome pair of sorrels. They were good work horses as well as drivers. An old double-seated buckboard which had been under one of the Day sheds for a decade, was hauled out and repaired, painted and varnished, new cushions made, and on occasion the family went to drive about the country.

"For it does seem," Mrs. Day, with wondering satisfaction, more than once declared, "it does seem as though your Pa, Marty, has a whole lot more time to gad about now than he use ter—yet we're gettin' along better. I don't understand it."

"Huh!" grunted Marty. "See all the work *I* do. Don't ye s'pose that counts none?"

Janice merely smiled quietly as she heard this conversation. Uncle Jason was up and out to work now by daybreak, like other farmers. He smoked his after-dinner pipe by the back door; but it was only one pipe. He often declared that "his wimmen folk" made such a bustle inside the kitchen after dinner that he couldn't even think. He just *had* to go back to work "to get shet of 'em." [Pg 294]

The bacilli of *work* had taken hold of the Day family. Uncle Jason had begun to take pride in his fields and in his crops. Nobody in all Poketown, or thereabout, had such a garden as the Days this spring. Janice and Mrs. Day attended to it after it was planted. Mr. Day had bought a man-weight hoe and seeding machine, and the garden mould was so fine and free from filth that the "women folks" could use the machine with ease.

Yes, the Jason Days were more prosperous than ever before. And all their prosperity did not arise from that twenty dollars a month that came regularly for Janice's board.

"Sometimes I feel downright ashamed to take that money, Jason," Aunt 'Mira admitted to her spouse. "Janice is sech a help to me. She is jest like a darter. I shall hate to ever haf ter give her up. And some day soon, now, Broxton will be comin' home."

"Wal, don't ye worry. If Broxton is makin' money like he says he is—so's he kin give that gal a thousand dollars to throw to the birdies like she's done—why should we worry? I ain't sayin' but what she's been a lot of help to us."

"In more ways than one," whispered his wife.

"Right, by jinks!" admitted the farmer.

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"Look what this old place looked like when she come!"

"She sartainly has stirred us all up."

"An' look at Marty!"

"I got to give her credit," admitted Mr. Day. "She's made a man of Marty. Done more for him than the school done."

"But it was her started him to goin' to school ag'in."

"So I tell ye," agreed Mr. Day again. "Janice is at the bottom of everything good that's happened in Poketown for two years. I dunno as people realize it; but I'm proud of her!"

"Then, I tell you what, Jason. I'm going to save the board money for her," declared Aunt 'Mira, with a little catch in her breath. "You won't mind? Marty'll have the place an' all you kin save, when we are gone; but that dear little thing—Givin' her money to that blind child, and all—"

Mrs. Day broke down and "sniveled." At least, that is what her husband would have called it under some circumstances, and crying did not beautify Mrs. Day's fat face. But for some reason the old man came close to her and put his arms about her bulbous shoulders.

"There, there, 'Mira! don't you cry about it. You sartainly have got a good heart. An' I won't say nothin' agin' your savin' for the gal. Mebbe she'll need your savin's, too. Broxton Day is too free-handed, and he'll have his ups and downs again, p'r'aps. Anyhow, whatever you say is right, *is* right, 'Mira," and he kissed her suddenly in a shamed faced sort of way, and then hurried out.

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The good woman sat there in her kitchen, with shining eyes, blushing like a girl. She touched tenderly her wet cheek where her husband had laid his lips.

"He—he wouldn't ha' done that two year ago, I don't believe!" she murmured.

She picked up the ever-present story paper; but her mind was not attuned to imaginary romance that morning. And there were the breakfast dishes waiting—

She went about her work briskly, and singing. Somehow it seemed as though *real* romance had come into the old Day house, and into Aunt 'Mira's life!

The weeks rolled on toward summer. A fortnight after little Lottie and Miss 'Rill had gone to Boston a letter came from the specialist to Hopewell Drugg. The operation on the child's eyes had been performed almost as soon as she had arrived at the sanitarium; now he could announce that it was successful. Lottie could see and, barring some accident, would be a bright-eyed girl and woman.

Already, the doctor urged, she was fit to go into the school for the deaf and dumb in which such wonderful miracles were achieved for the afflicted. The good surgeon, learning from Miss 'Rill the circumstances of the child's being brought to him, had subscribed two hundred dollars toward Lottie's tuition and board in the school for the deaf and dumb.

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It was joyful news for both Hopewell and Janice. That evening the storekeeper got out his violin and played his old tunes over and over—especially "Silver Threads Among the Gold."

"But it sounds more like a hymn of praise to-night," Nelson Haley whispered in Janice's ear, as they sat on the front porch of the little shop and listened to the violin.

A week later the little spinster came home. Her visit in Boston seemed to have done her a world of good. She brought a great trunk packed full of things to wear, or goods to be made up into pretty dresses and the like.

"I declare for't!" ejaculated her mother. "Looks like you had been buyin' your trossoo—an' old maid like you, too!"

But Miss 'Rill was unruffled, and parried her mother's suspicion.

When the lake boat, the *Constance Colfax*, began to run on her summer schedule after Decoration Day, many more summer tourists than usual got off the boat at Poketown to look about. The dock was so neat, and the surroundings of the landing so attractive, that these visitors were led to go further up into the town.

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There was the pleasant, rambling, old Lake View Inn, freshened with paint that spring, and with a green grass plot before it, and wide, screened verandas.

"Why, it's only its name that is against it!" cried the wondering tourists. "It's not *poky* at all."

These remarks, repeated as they were, made the merchants of the village stop and think. Ere this a board of trade had been formed, and the welfare of the town was eagerly discussed at the meetings of the board. Mr. Massey, the druggist, who was active, of course, got another idea from Janice.

He began to delve into the past history of Poketown. He learned how and when it had been settled—and by whom. People had mostly forgotten (if they ever had known) the true history of the town.

A pioneer named Cyrus Polk had first built his cabin on the heights overlooking this little bay. He had been the first smith in this region, too, and gradually around "Polk's Smithy" had been reared the nucleus of the present town.

Through the years the silent "l" in the original settler's name had been lost entirely. But the post office agreed to put it back into the name, and a big signboard was painted and set up at the dock:

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"POLKTOWN."

"It sartain sure looks a hull lot diff'rent, even if ye *do* pernounce it the same," admitted Walky Dexter.

So much was happening these balmy June days! The school year—the first in the new schoolhouse—was going to end in a blaze of glory for Nelson Haley, Janice was sure. Elder Concannon had promised in writing to give his lot upon High Street for the site of a library building, whenever the association should have subscribed twelve hundred dollars toward the building itself.

Then came the first love letter that Janice Day had ever received! Such a letter was it that she treasures it yet and will always do so. It was one that she could proudly show to anybody she chose, without betraying that intimacy that the ordinary love letter is supposed to contain.

News had come regularly to Hopewell Drugg from the teachers at the school where little Lottie had taken up her abode. Because the child was naturally so bright, and because of the fact that before she lost her eyesight she had learned the alphabet and some primary studies, and had not forgotten it all, Lottie was making marvelous progress the teachers declared.

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A much-bethumbed envelope, addressed in crooked "printed" characters to "Mis Janis Day, Pokton," enclosed in a teacher's letter to the store-keeper, was the cover of Janice's love letter. Inside, the child said:

"Dear Janis, jus' to think, I can see reel good, and my techur what I luv says maybe I will heer reel good bymeby.

"Deer Janis, I no I cante spel good yet, and my ritin aint strate on the paper. But I want you shud be the firs to get leter from me I luv yu so.

"Deer Janis, you got me the muneys for the docker. And he was soo good himself, he never hardly hurt me a tall.

"Deer Janis, I luv yu mos of all, cos if yu hadn ben yu I wudn never seen no moar. An it was so dark all times. Thats wy I feld down cellar. An now I am goin to heer they say.

"Deer Janis, see if my echo is thar. Yu no my echo—that is the way techur says to spell it. If my echo is waitn tell it I am comin' to heer it again.

"And I luv you lots and lots, deer Janis. I will show you how much when I com home to father and Pokton. no moar at prasens, from your little Lottie."

Janice read the pitiful little scrawl through the first time on the store porch. Then, tear-blinded, she started down the hill toward the old wharf at the inlet where she had first seen Hopewell Drugg's unfortunate child.

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She was halfway down the hill before she heard a quick step behind her and knew, without turning, that it was Nelson Haley.

CHAPTER XXX

[Pg 302]

WHAT THE ECHO MIGHT HAVE HEARD

"What's your hurry, Janice?" demanded the young teacher, coming to her side, smiling. Then he saw her wet lashes and exclaimed: "My dear girl! you are crying?"

"Not—not now," said Janice, shaking her head and her voice catching a little as she spoke.

"Tell me what is the matter?" begged Nelson. "Who's hurt you?"

"They're not those sort of tears, Nelson!" she cried, with a quivering little smile. "Oh, I ought to be just the very happiest girl alive!"

"And in tears?"

"Tears of joy, I tell you," she declared.

"Not weeping over the lost motor car, then?"

"Oh, my goodness! No! How could one be so foolish with such a dear, dear letter as I've got here. A regular *love* letter, Nelson Haley!"

The young man's face changed suddenly. It looked very grim, and he caught at her hand which held little Lottie's letter.

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"What's that?" he demanded, so gruffly that Janice was quite astonished.

"Why, Nelson Haley! What's the matter?" she asked, looking at him with wide-open eyes.

"Who's been writing to you, Janice?" he asked, huskily.

"I will show it to you. It is too, too dear!" exclaimed the girl, again half sobbing. "Read it!"

The teacher spread out the crumpled page. The look of relief that came into his face when he saw Lottie's straggling pen-tracks was not at all understood by Janice.

He read the child's letter appreciatively. She saw the tears flood into his own eyes as he gently folded the letter and handed it back.

"Why, Janice," he said, at last. "What's a motor car to *that*?"

"That's what I say," she cried, and laughed. "Come on! let's tell it to Lottie's echo. We'll see if it is still lurking in the dark old spruce trees over yonder on the point."

She darted ahead of him and reached the ruined wharf where Lottie had stood when first Janice had seen her. In imitation of the child she raised her voice in that weird cry:

"He-a! he-a! he-a!"

Back came the imitation, shot out of the wood by the nymph:

"E-a! 'e-a! 'e-a!"

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"Ha, ha!" laughed the girl. "There's Lottie's echo."

"A!" laughed the echo. "Ere's Lottie's echo!"

Nelson, flushed and breathing rather heavily, reached the old dock.

"What a girl you are, Janice!" he said.

"And what a very, very old person you are getting to be, Nelson Haley," she told him. "Principal of the Polktown School! I saw your article in the State School Register. Theories! You write just as though you know what you were writing about."

"Oh—well," he said, rather taken aback by her joking.

"And it wasn't much more than a year ago that you turned up your nose at the profession of teaching."

"Aw—now!" he said, pleadingly.

"And *you* were the young man who wanted to get through life without hard work—or, so you said."

"Don't you know that it is only the fool who doesn't change his opinion—and change it frequently, too?" he bantered back at her.

"You must have changed a whole lot, Nelson Haley," she declared, with sudden gravity. "Don't—don't you feel awfully *funny* inside? It's a terrible shock, I should think, for one to turn right square around——"

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"I don't feel humorous—not a little bit," he interposed, seriously. "I have been working toward an end. I expect my reward."

"Oh, Nelson! The college? Are they really going to invite you to go there to teach?"

"That isn't the reward I mean," he said, shaking his head.

"For pity's sake! something bigger than *that*? My!" Janice cried, all dimpling again, "but you *are* a person with great expectations, aren't you?"

"I certainly am," he said, bowing gravely. "I have a great goal in view. Let me tell you——"

But suddenly she jumped up and walked along the edge of the inlet away from the dock. "Oh, do come along, Nelson. We don't want to sit there all day."

Nelson, flushed and only half rose. Then he settled back again and said, with some doggedness:

"I've got something to tell you myself. This is a good place to talk."

"Why, how serious!"

"It is serious business—for me," declared the young man.

"And you're a trifle ungallant," she accused, looking at him from under lowered lashes.

"This is no time for gallantry. This is *business*."

"What business?" she asked, tentatively approaching.

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"The business of living. The business of finding out what's going to happen to me—to *us*."

"My goodness!" murmured Janice. "You talk almost like a soothsayer."

"Come and hear what the astrologer has to say," urged Nelson, yet without his customary lightness of speech and look. He was still very serious.

"I don't know," she said, slowly, hesitating in her approach. "I am almost afraid of you in this

mood. Daddy says when a young man begins to act like he was really seriously grappling with life, look out for him!"

"Your father is right. I am not to be trifled with, Miss Janice Day."

"Why, Nelson! is something really wrong?" she asked him, and came a step nearer.

"As far as my future is concerned," said he, quietly, "it seems to be quite all right."

"Then the college——?"

"I have a letter, too," he said, pulling it out of his pocket.

This bait brought her to him. He thrust the letter into her hand, but he held onto that hand, too, and she could not easily pull away from him.

"What—what is it, Nelson?" she asked, looking at him for only a moment, and then dropping her gaze before his intense look.

"I've had a committee come to see me and look over my work at the Polktown School."



She just *had* to raise her eyes and look into his earnest ones. (See page 307.)

"Oh, Nelson!"

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"Now the secretary of the college faculty writes me the nicest kind of a letter. I've made good with them, Janice."

"I—I'm so glad!" she murmured, eyes still down, and trying ever so faintly to wriggle her hand out of his.

Suddenly Nelson Haley caught her other hand, too. He held them firmly and—for some reason—she just *had* to raise her eyes and look straight into his earnest ones.

"I've made good with them, Janice!" he cried—he almost shouted it. "But that's nothing—just nothing! The big thing with me now—the reward I want—is to hear you say that I've won out with you. Is it so, Janice—have I won out with *you*?"

The long lashes screened the hazel eyes again. She looked on the one hand and on the other. There really seemed no escape, this greatly metamorphosed Nelson Haley was *so* insistent.

So she raised her lashes again and looked straight into his eyes. What she whispered the echo might have heard; and she nodded her head quickly, several times.

They came up through the grassy lane in the gloaming. Mrs. Beasely would be waiting supper for her boarder; but Nelson scouted the idea that he should not see Janice home first.

Lights had begun to twinkle in the sitting-rooms of the various houses along the street. But there was a moon. Indeed, that was the excuse they had for remaining so late on the shore of the inlet. They had stopped to see it rise.

Through the thick trees the moonlight searched out the side porch of Hopewell Drugg's store. The plaintive notes of the storekeeper's violin breathed tenderly out upon the evening air:

"Darling, I am growing old—
Silver threads among the gold"

sighed Janice, happily. "And that is Miss 'Rill beside him there on the porch—don't you see her?"

"I see," said Nelson. "Mrs. Beasely is helping 'Rill make her wedding gown. Little Lottie is going to have a new mamma."

"And—and Hopewell's been playing that old song to her all these years!" murmured Janice. "They are just as happy——"

"Aren't they!" agreed Nelson, with a thrill in his voice. "I hope that when we're as old as they are, we'll be as happy, too. Do you suppose——"

Nobody but Janice heard the rest of his question—not even the echo!

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Illustrations in colors by Oliver Kemp. Design and decorations by Ralph Fletcher Seymour.

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