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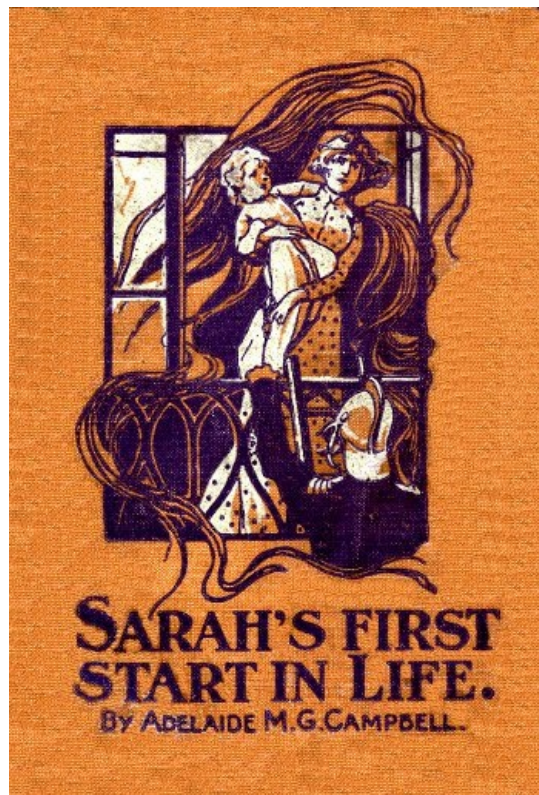
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SARAH'S FIRST START IN LIFE.

BY ADELAIDE M. G. CAMPBELL.

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"LET HIM DOWN, MISS; IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW."

SARAH'S FIRST START IN LIFE.

"Now, Sarah, just you make haste with that kettle, and we will have a nice cup of tea for dad when he comes in."

"Dad's" real name was David Brown, and Sarah was his only child, just turned eighteen. The Browns were a happy family, though poor, and they put their trust in God, and did not worry about the morrow. Sarah had just been telling her mother of a situation as kitchen maid that she had been inquiring about, and had almost decided to take, but her father's permission was still wanting. Mr. Brown was a cab driver, and found it sometimes very hard work to make both ends meet, especially in the winter time, when coals were a necessity and dear at best.

This conversation took place on Christmas Day, and Brown had promised to be home for tea, knowing how disappointed his wife and Sarah would feel if he stayed out until his usual hour, which was half-past ten. Soon the kettle was singing away merrily on the hob, and Sarah was toasting some bread in front of a small bright fire, when a knock was heard, the door opened, and a man about twenty-four came in. He was evidently not unexpected, as four places were prepared at the table.

Dick Bream was one of a large family, and very much devoted to Sarah; they had told each other how they would work hard to earn some money and set up house together, and Sarah was now longing to tell him about her future situation. Dick was a footman, and had a very comfortable place in Belgrave Square—he was getting on well, and his master had promised to help him to get a place as upper servant in a year or two. He and Sarah kissed each other heartily under the mistletoe, which was over the door, and Dick shook hands with Mrs. Brown, and they were beginning to talk about Sarah's future when Mr. Brown's cheerful voice was heard calling her to hold the horse, while he got down from the box. Up sprang Sarah, out she ran and stood at Bobby's head, patting and soothing him in his impatience to get to the warm stable and clean hay. Mr. Brown took the horse and harness to the stable, and Sarah held the lantern whilst he wiped down Bobby.

"Well, father," said Sarah, "tea is ready, your slippers are by the fire, and I have some news to tell you; but you shan't hear it till you have drunk a hot cup of tea and eaten one of my best baked cakes."

The father patted her cheek, kissed his wife, and, drawing off his coat, sat down at the head of the table.

After the grace was reverently said by Sarah, Mr. Brown said—

"Well, what is this wonderful news?"

Sarah looked across the table at Dick, whom Mrs. Brown had told about the situation, and smiled, whilst her mother began telling the father about Sarah's plan. Mr. Brown looked grave, and slowly shook his head when he heard that a departure was meditated.

"Nay, nay, I won't have my girl going out into the world and becoming independent and looking down on her old dad, when she sees the way fine folk treat one another;" so said Brown, and he evidently thought the discussion was at an end, as he got up, pulled out his pipe and invited Dick to take a turn.

But Sarah had set her heart on helping her family, and was not thus to be set aside.

"Oh, dad," she exclaimed, "how can you think such dreadful things about me? Can I ever forget how you and mother have worked for me since I was a baby? I only wish to help you, and mother is willing if you agree."

Mrs. Brown was silently wiping away a few tears with her apron, and Dick was comforting her with promises to do what he could to smooth matters.

"Well," said Mr. Brown, "I'll talk it over with your mother, and tell you to-morrow what we think." With this scanty comfort Sarah was obliged to content herself. Meanwhile Mr. Brown and Dick went outside to smoke, and naturally they began talking about Sarah's plan.

"I don't think my girl is fitted for service," said Mr. Brown; "she ought to stay at home and help her mother."

"But," interrupted Dick, "Sarah is a big girl now, and you cannot expect her always to stay at home; and what could she do if she were left without the experience service is sure to give her?"

Mr. Brown saw this, but was still undecided as to what should be done; but at last, after a little more persuasion, he agreed to let Sarah try service for a year. In saying good night Dick just whispered to her to be quite easy, as it was all right; so, like a wise girl, she went to bed, and in her prayers asked God to bless her future career and comfort her father. The next day at breakfast, which was at 6.30, Mr. Brown began by solemnly announcing that he had a thing or two to tell his family; so, with expectant eyes fixed on him, he said that Sarah might take the situation for a year, and went on to tell her of all the temptations and troubles she would meet with in service, and his parting advice was, "Honesty is the best policy."

After Mr. Brown had left for his day's work, and Sarah had cleared away the breakfast things and cleaned their three rooms, she put on her neatest dress and went off to ask when she might go into her situation and begin her new work. She took an omnibus to Sloane Square, and from there walked to Eaton Place, and went up to a big house, where she rang the bell, where, after the door was opened, she was shown into a little anteroom. After waiting half an hour a messenger was sent to conduct her to Lady James, her future mistress. Sarah felt very nervous, as, although she had already had an interview, this was the final one, and much depended on it. Lady James was busy writing letters, but when she saw Sarah, she put down her pen and turned to her with a bright smile and a few kind words of encouragement. After ten minutes had been passed in asking and answering questions, Lady James told Sarah she thought she would suit, and wished her to begin her work in three days. Poor Sarah thought this was rather too quick, but said she would certainly try and be ready; so she went out of the house feeling very important at the idea of at last going into service.

Of course the next few days were very busy ones, as she had to make two new print dresses and neatly mend her clothes. Mrs. Brown was very unhappy at the idea of losing her only child, but tried to make the last few days cheerful, and took as much of the housework off her hands as possible. At last only the good-byes remained to be said. Poor Mrs. Brown was sobbing bitterly, and Mr. Brown was fussing over Sarah's box and bag, whilst Dick, who was going with her as far as the house, was busy harnessing Bobby. The good-byes were at last over, Mrs. Brown was all but kissed away, and Sarah jumped into her father's cab, which was to take her to Eaton Place. Dick and Sarah were not so sad as the mother and father, for they felt that this was at last a step towards getting on in life, and, after all, "nothing venture nothing have."

Eaton Place was soon reached, and Mr. Brown pulled up at the door of the house where Sarah was to begin her new duties. The bell was rung, and the door was opened by a footman in silk stockings and powdered hair. Of course Sarah was much too frightened to ask this grand man what she should do, so she made Dick ask him if he might take her box upstairs, and whilst Sarah and her father were saying the real good-bye, Dick and the footman went up to the attic with the box. Dick, who was a friend of his, told him a little about Sarah, that this was her first place, and that he and she were engaged, etc. Mr. Brown had just driven off when Dick arrived downstairs to take his departure also.

"Now, miss," said Charles the footman, "will you come downstairs and have a cup of tea and see all your future friends?"

"I should like to very much," said Sarah; "but I must take off my jacket, and where can I put it?"

"Oh!" said Charles, "we arn't too particular, leave it anywhere."

Now, Sarah had been brought up, quite properly, to think tidiness one of the greatest virtues; however, she said nothing, and trotted happily away with her jacket on her arm.

At the bottom of the dark staircase, her jacket was rather roughly taken from her by Charles and flung on the dresser. "Well," thought Sarah, "if this is the way my things are to be treated, they won't last me long, and how can I get others?" However, the sound of tea-cups and laughter soon drove such thoughts out of her head, and she was shown into a fairly large room, in which about five servants were talking very merrily, and altogether making rather an unnecessary noise. Directly the two appeared there was a dead silence, and one of the housemaids called out to Sarah to come and sit beside her. She took the offered place, and had only just seated herself when she was asked all sorts of questions, as *e.g.* "How long have you been in service?" "What wages did you get?" and many others of the same kind. Sarah at last found time to answer all these various questions, which she did with her usual good temper, and, during loud exclamations, managed to tell them a little about her former life. She did not quite like all this catechising, but not wanting to be thought disagreeable, made the best of it. When she had finished, Edith, the housemaid, began at once to tell Sarah some of the trials of their downstairs life.

She told her that the cook, who was then in the kitchen, was very cross, and would be sure to give her a lot to do, and as she did not like any kind of dirty work herself, the kitchen-maid had to do it all, and keep the kitchen spotless. Sarah was rather frightened by this account of the cook, and begged Edith to tell her more; but she had some work to do, and could not stop to chat any longer. In a few minutes in came Mrs. Ellis, the cook, and told Sarah to hurry up as there were some pots to wash, and poor Sarah had to gulp down her cup of tea and eat her bread and butter very fast.

"Please, ma'am, may I first go and take off this dress?" asked Sarah, in a timid little voice.

"No," said Mrs. Ellis; "can't you pin that one up? It ain't so grand, you need not take such care of it."

Now, it was Sarah's best dress, so she thought this was very unkind, and told the cook she had no better, and was afraid of spoiling the neatest she had.

"Well," said Mrs. Ellis, "go up, and make haste; I can't have you wasting your time, there's enough to be done without that."

Sarah flew upstairs, not forgetting to take up her jacket on the way, and before the cook had found time to grumble at her absence was down again, dressed in a neat cotton gown and apron. Mrs. Ellis showed her where to find the pots, pans, hot water, and washing-up cloths, and Sarah set to work with might and main; but it was not so easy as she expected. First, some of the spots on the coppers would not come off, then the cloths got so wet there was nothing to dry up with, and altogether when Sarah had cleaned a dozen she felt her arms ache as they had never ached before. All at once she heard Mrs. Ellis calling her, so she ran into the kitchen where she found a great fuss going on, as dinner was being dished up, and Mrs. Ellis had burnt her hand badly in pouring out the soup.

Sarah was very sorry about this accident, and anxious to do all she could to help; but being new, and not knowing the ways of the lower regions, she was not able to be of much use, but she was most helpful in carrying the dishes up to the dining-room door, and so saved a little of the footman's time, who was in consequence very grateful. She then went upstairs to brush her hair and make herself tidy, and when she came down found, to her surprise, that supper had been ready some time. Edith found room for her and saw she had all she wanted, and introduced her to the other servants, whom she had not seen at tea, and she was wished success in her new career. After supper was over Sarah hoped she would be able to go to bed, but found that all the dinner things had to be washed up and put into their proper places, so she began her work at once, and soon Edith good-naturedly offered to help her, both making great friends over the work.

At half-past ten all was finished, and Edith conducted her to the small but airy bedroom they were to share. Sarah now had to finish her unpacking—her father's, mother's, and Dick's photographs taking a most prominent position on the little chest of drawers. Edith naturally wanted to hear all about Dick, and Sarah was delighted to find so sympathetic a friend to discuss him with. Edith soon tumbled into bed, but Sarah folded her things tidily up on a chair, and then opened her Bible to read her chapter. Sarah's mother was a very religious woman, and knew that the Bible was always a friend in time of need, so she had made Sarah promise never to omit reading a few verses after her day's work was over. In her prayers, Sarah thanked God for giving her so comfortable a home, and asked Him to soften her temper, which she knew would often get the upper hand. The light was soon put out, and all was quiet, and she remembered nothing more till she saw Edith standing half-dressed by her bedside, telling her to hurry or else Mrs. Ellis would be grumbling at her the first day. Sarah found that last night's experience was but an instance of what her daily work would be.

After she had been a month in her place, she ventured to ask Mrs. Ellis whether she might go and see her mother, and the cook, who had grown quite fond of her for her cheerful and helpful ways, willingly gave her the required permission. If only people would learn how a little oil of cheerfulness eases the wheels of life surely they would cultivate it more. Troubles come quite readily enough without making them, and the sunshine of a bright countenance often remedies what no earthly doctor can cure. Sarah finished all her work, put on her hat, her neat black dress

and jacket, and went off in great spirits to see her home.

She found a great difference in her mother, who had evidently only just got up, as her hair was not done, and the room, although fairly tidy, was not so neat as Sarah had been accustomed to see it. Mrs. Brown told her that she had been very poorly ever since her departure, and really if it had not been for Mrs. Carrol, she would never have managed to get on as well as she had.

Sarah was very distressed at this account, and was just beginning to tell her mother about her life, when in came Mrs. Carrol to get tea ready.

She was not at all Mrs. Brown's style, being very rough and dictatorial, and had not learnt that the power of gentleness is irresistible. Mrs. Carrol was a widow, her husband having been killed down a coal-mine in Wales, she had not married again, but was very fond of both Mrs. and Mr. Brown, probably finding in them the qualities most missing in herself, *e.g.* gentleness and humility. Mrs. Carrol did not seem best pleased at finding Sarah with her mother.

"Mrs. Brown, you know you ought not to be out of bed. Why didn't Sarah make you lie down again? What's the use of a daughter if she don't take care of her mother?"

Poor Sarah was so surprised at this onslaught that she could not find words to defend herself—so, wisely, said nothing.

Mrs. Brown went meekly back to bed whilst Mrs. Carrol made her a nice cup of tea and Sarah prepared the toast. Soon mother and daughter were left alone again, and Sarah began talking about her situation and her hopes of soon being able to send her mother a little money. Mrs. Brown was quite delighted at having her daughter near her again, and they had so much to tell each other that when Sarah next looked at the old cuckoo clock in the corner it was almost eight, and time to return to Eaton Place. She gave her mother a good hug, and told her to be sure and write if she got worse.

Unfortunately Mr. Brown had not yet come home from his work, so poor Sarah had to go back without having been able to inquire from him about her mother's health.

Sarah was often made uneasy by the very casual way in which Sunday was regarded. Sometimes she was able to induce Edith to go to church with her, but generally she went alone, and she knew that few, if any, of the servants thought it necessary to attend. Sarah looked forward from Sunday to Sunday; she forgot all her petty troubles in church, and always found some golden word of comfort to help her through the week.

Six months had passed and she was still in the same place, having made great friends with the other servants, and earned a golden opinion from Mrs. Ellis, which naturally pleased her mistress, Lady James, very much.

Mrs. Brown had been steadily getting weaker and weaker, till one day when Sarah was, as usual, washing up, the footman came to tell her that she was wanted in the servants' hall. She was surprised at this summons, and still more so when she found Dick waiting for her, especially as she had seen him only a week ago.

"Well, Dick, whatever is the matter?" asked Sarah. "Why do you look so sad? Make haste and tell me."

Poor Dick, who had come to tell Sarah of her mother's death, did not quite know how to begin, so he asked how long it was since she had seen her, and was told a fortnight.

"Well," said Dick, "Mrs. Brown was taken suddenly worse, and——" Here poor Dick broke down, and naturally Sarah had little difficulty in supplying the rest, which Dick was obliged to tell her was only too true. Sarah was in great distress, and really did not know what she was saying. She kept reproaching herself for having omitted to write oftener, also, for ever having left her mother, and especially for not having tried to see more of her.

Dick told her all he could, assuring her that Mrs. Carrol had been very kind, and had done all that was possible to ease her mother in the household affairs.

"Now, Sarah," said Dick at last, "can you get your things and come home for a bit, as your father will want you sadly?" Sarah went to her friend the cook, told her of her trouble, and asked for two days absence. Mrs. Ellis went upstairs to see if she could find her mistress, and having done so, obtained not only a day or two, but a week. Sarah was crying so very bitterly she could hardly pack the few necessary things; but, with Edith to help her, she and Dick went off to Mr. Brown's home. There they found all in great confusion, neighbours whispering outside the house, and women trying to keep the children from screaming and making a noise.

When Sarah and Dick appeared, there was a general silence, and as she went into the house many of her former friends tried to say a few sympathetic words and press her hand.

Sarah tried to thank them, but only tears would come, and she hurried upstairs to comfort her unhappy father. Mr. Brown silently held out his hand in welcome and sobbed bitterly, whilst Dick remained below, not knowing whether to go in or stay outside. However, he at last went into the house and found, as he expected, Sarah and her father taking their last silent farewell at their loved one's bedside.

The days that followed were naturally very sad, and Sarah was thankful there was so much to be

done, knowing that there would be only too much time for brooding afterwards.

The funeral took place three days after Sarah's return home, and, although Sarah followed the beautiful service as attentively as she was able, her heart was too sorrowful to receive so much comfort from it as is possible. A great many of the neighbours attended to show this last mark of respect to their dead friend. Mrs. Carrol had offered on the way back to help Sarah to tidy the house, and she gladly accepted the offer, as, having been so long away, she did not know where the things had been kept, although she did not quite like the thought of anybody touching her mother's things except herself. Mr. Brown was going to take his cab out the next day as usual, to see if he could earn a little money, as the six months' illness had made a great hole in his earnings, but Sarah besought him to stay and talk to her a little, which, after some demur, he was willing to do, and they sat down to breakfast, not trusting themselves to speak of yesterday's sad events. The week soon passed, and Sarah had to return once more to her work, but this time she had great doubts in her mind as to whether she ought not to stop and take care of her father; but Mr. Brown told her so plainly that it helped him more to know that she was comfortable and earning some money, that for the time being she gave up the idea.

All the servants were glad to have her among them again, and tried to tell her how much they felt for her, and Lady James sent for her to say that if she would like to go twice a week to see Mr. Brown she might take an hour off her work, for which kindness Sarah was very grateful.

After this permission, Sarah went very often to see her father, and found that Mrs. Carrol made him so comfortable and cheered him so much that she really need have no compunction about having left him. The house always seemed to be tidy and clean, and although nobody seemed to think this at all extraordinary, Sarah sometimes felt an uneasy sensation creeping over her; but Mrs. Carrol was always so kind that she put these thoughts away from her, as being disloyal to her father.

One day her mistress had taken her three boys, aged six, seven, and eight, to the Zoological Gardens in honour of Sir Alfred's birthday, and Sarah was given a whole day's holiday. She had written to Dick to ask whether he could get a day off and take her for a walk, and, as he bore a very good and steady character, his master let him have the day, knowing he was engaged to Sarah.

At eleven o'clock they started for their trip, and Dick suggested going in a penny steamer down the Thames, to which Sarah joyfully agreed. The day was very fine and warm, and when they landed at Greenwich they bought some ginger beer and buns, and had quite a feast on the grass under some shady trees.

They naturally had a great deal to tell each other, and discussed many plans for the future. Dick told Sarah that his master was thinking of taking a house in the north of Scotland for a year, and he wanted Dick very much to go with him. Sarah was very distressed about this, as she thought a year a very long time, and in her heart of hearts she was afraid Dick might get to like some one else better than herself.

Dick read her thoughts fairly accurately, and assured her she need never think he would forget her, as he felt certain there was no nicer or prettier girl all the world over, and Sarah was too pleased at this speech to think of further objections. At last they had to turn homewards, and on the steamer they spoke but little, each wondering when and where they should meet again, little thinking how much was to happen before a year was over.

Walking down the Embankment towards Westminster Sarah all at once met her father, who was so deep in conversation with his companion, Mrs. Carrol, that he did not see Sarah till they were close to each other.

"Oh, father," she said, "I am very glad to see you, and really you look quite well and cheery again."

Mr. Brown was equally surprised to see Sarah, and rather stammered out his welcome. The girl turned to Mrs. Carrol and said—

"Well, Mrs. Carrol, how are you; thank you so much for looking after my father so well. I really don't know what he would have done without you."

Mr. Brown here interrupted Sarah by saying: "Yes, she has indeed earned our thanks, and she has promised I need never do without her again—in fact, we were married this morning, and we were on our way to see you and ask for your congratulations."

Sarah could hardly believe her ears, and showed very plainly that such was the case, whilst Dick stood by in shocked silence.

"Oh, father!" cried Sarah, "do you mean to say you have already forgotten my dear mother? Why, it is barely four months since we lost her. I don't think you have behaved well to me in this matter. Surely I ought to have been told before this last step was taken."

Mr. Brown gazed in silence at Sarah's flushed and angry face, not knowing what to say. He managed at last, however, to get in a few words of excuse between her breathless expostulations.

"Well, Sarah, you seem to forget how lonely I have been all this time, and if I choose to marry again I need not first ask my daughter. I always knew this idea of going out to service would do

you no good."

Mrs. Carrol, who must now be called Mrs. Brown, had up to the present said nothing, but she told Sarah she hoped to make her and her father comfortable, and that in time they would be good friends. Sarah answered that she did not think this was very likely, as she did not like underhand ways, and she was in fact getting so angry that Dick thought it high time to take her away, in which effort he was at last successful.

"Well, really, Sarah," said Dick, "I do think you have spoken rather too unkindly to your father. Surely if he chooses to marry again so soon it is his own business. Of course, I perfectly understand your feelings, but you must not forget that he is still your father, and you should never forget to show respect to him. You did not show the Christian spirit I hoped to see, and you have certainly done no good by losing your temper."

Sarah had been feeling very sad and angry during Dick's little lecture, and as she still considered herself quite in the right, she would not confess even to Dick that she had behaved hastily.

"Well," said Sarah, "you needn't begin to scold me; you won't have me much longer to scold, and I do think father ought to have told me first."

Now, Dick saw quite well that it was no use arguing with her when she was in this mood, so when they arrived at Lady James's house he bade her rather a cold farewell, and promised to come and see her for the last time on Sunday, before he went to Scotland.

Sarah went straight up to her room, and throwing herself on her bed wept bitterly. She felt very lonely, and, now that even Dick was vexed with her, she began to think that her behaviour was not all it should have been. She knew she had quite lost her temper and behaved badly, and although we may say she had some excuse, it is always a silly thing to do. Nobody will respect a person who gives way to their evil passions, and Sarah felt that for the time being she had estranged her father and Dick and greatly lowered herself in their opinion. She fell on her knees and begged God with might and main to forgive her, and rose in a few minutes feeling calmer and happier.

The servants' supper-bell had rung, but Sarah did not feel inclined to talk and laugh with the others, so she stayed where she was and occupied herself with her thoughts, which were anything but happy ones. The next day was very wet and gloomy and quite in accordance with Sarah's feelings, as the more she thought over the previous day's events the angrier she felt with herself, knowing that, after all, it did not much matter to her if her father were married, as she was always in service, and hoped soon to be married herself.

She also could not help remembering how, in spite of herself, she had been struck by Mrs. Carrol's much softened voice and manner, and she really began to think that, after all, it might be for the best.

The days dragged slowly on, till at last Sunday arrived, and Sarah had decided to make her peace with Dick, not liking him to go on his journey feeling unhappy about her. Six o'clock was the hour he generally came, and she rushed upstairs to see that her hair was tidy, and had taken the opportunity of pinning some geraniums into her dress, which had been sent downstairs from the drawing-room to be thrown away. Seven o'clock came, but did not bring Dick, and Sarah was tortured with melancholy thoughts as to whether he had decided he would not see her till she had made her peace with her father. At last she was obliged to give up all idea of his coming, as it was now ten o'clock, and very miserable were her feelings when she crept into bed and sobbed herself to sleep.

At the end of the week Sarah, who generally distributed the servants' letters, was much surprised at finding one for herself.

Now, everybody likes to receive letters from their friends, and for Sarah, who had never had many, the excitement was great; in fact, she quite forgot all about her father's sudden marriage and Dick's departure, as well as the week's misery, and, getting into a corner by herself, she opened the letter and began to read, and this is what she read—

"MY DEAR SARAH,

"I am afraid you must be very angry with me for not having turned up on Sunday, but on Friday night master told me he wanted me to pack up everything as we were to go on Saturday by the night mail to Scotland, so I really could not get a minute to go and see you. I hope this will find you well as it leaves me, and happier than when I saw you last. I am very happy here, and it is a beautiful place, but a long way off from you. Write to me soon, as I will also to you.

"Your affectionate friend,

"DICK."

Sarah was very much relieved by the contents of this letter, and decided that she would go and see her father as soon as she could. This opportunity soon occurred, and Sarah found him and her stepmother having their supper together. Mr. Brown looked rather sheepishly at his daughter, not quite knowing in what frame of mind she intended to make this visit, but he soon saw that she really was doing her best to set matters straight again.

Mrs. Brown offered her some tea, which Sarah gladly accepted, and they all three talked cheerfully about future plans and past events, not touching, however, on the two chief changes in the family.

At last she left them alone together, and the door had hardly closed behind her when Sarah was on her knees by her father's chair, asking him to forgive and forget all the unkind speeches she had made about his marriage. Mr. Brown was delighted at the reconciliation, as he loved his daughter most dearly, and they spent one of the happiest hours together they had ever passed.

Sarah went with a light heart back to her work, feeling that certainly peace was better than strife, and wondering how she had managed to keep up the disturbance for so long.

Many weeks elapsed with no noteworthy events, and Sarah felt quite happy and established in her situation, knowing that she was earning enough money to prevent her from being any sort of burden to her father or stepmother.

Lady James was at this time rather delicate, having had a bad attack of rheumatic fever, from which she had, however, almost recovered.

One day there was to be a large dinner-party in the house, and Edith, Sarah's friend, the housemaid, was going to look over the staircase at all the smart dresses, and had promised to tell Sarah, who could not be spared, all about them. Eight o'clock arrived, and Edith ran upstairs to watch the ladies come, and go down to dinner. She had never seen so many grand-looking people, and her heart was filled with longing desire to possess only one dress half as beautiful as the ones she saw. There was her mistress looking lovely in deep pink satin, her wonderful hair crowned by a tiara of diamonds and pearls.

When the dining-room door had shut them off from Edith's eyes, she went downstairs into the drawing-room, and, putting all thoughts of dresses and diamonds out of her head, busied herself in smoothing the covers, shaking up the cushions, and putting chairs and sofas straight again.

When her work was over, she joined the others downstairs, not at all objecting to taste some of the dishes which came down from the dinner party.

At half-past eleven all the visitors had left, and Sarah was lazily sitting down chatting away to the other servants, who all felt that they deserved a little rest after such a busy evening. At last Sarah and Edith took up their candles to go to bed, leaving the others still talking. On the way Sarah heard Sir Alfred and Lady James going upstairs to their rooms, so she told Edith she was going to have one look at her beautiful mistress, and Edith had better come too, so they went up by the back staircase and peeped through the swing door.

Sir Alfred was behind his wife, when suddenly Edith gave a loud cry, and rushed downstairs again before Sarah had time to see what had happened.

Sir Alfred flung open the door and demanded an explanation of this singular conduct, when again a cry was heard, and this time it was clearly that of "fire." Sir Alfred, grasping the situation in a minute, bade his wife fly down to the bedroom, off the drawing-room, rouse their two boys, who slept there, and tell the women-servants to leave the house instantly, as he already judged the fire to be of considerable dimensions. He, meanwhile, would rush upstairs to fetch Charlie, who slept in the nursery.

Sir Alfred very soon found this to be utterly impossible, as when he opened the door he was met by volumes of smoke, and found the nursery to be one mass of flames. In a minute all was confusion, men-servants rushing about trying to save what valuables they could from the bedrooms, which were still untouched. The inmates were now assembled in front of the house, gazing horror-struck at the flames, as they illumined the darkness and filled the upper windows with their glare. Of course the whole neighbourhood was roused, and the wildest excitement prevailed.

The policemen were shouting directions, which were as far as possible obeyed, and the suspense was at last broken by the cry of, "Out of the way; here come the fire engines." The horses dashed up, panting and foaming, and all was instantly discipline and order, the walls in a minute were swarming with firemen, and water was flooding the street. But who can describe the feelings of Sir Alfred, who dared not tell his wife of his unsuccessful attempt to rescue Charlie. Hardly master of his senses, he rushed madly from room to room in the vain hopes of discovering the child, until with difficulty, for the whole staircase was now rapidly becoming one mass of flames, he escaped into the street.

Suddenly there was a universal murmur, and a voice shouted out, "Hold on, miss. Don't look down; we'll get you."

These words were addressed to Sarah, who had suddenly appeared on the drawing-room balcony, with Charlie peacefully sleeping in her arms.

Suddenly he awoke and began to cry, but poor Sarah was in no state of mind to comfort him. What ages it seemed! How slowly help came towards her, and how very heavy Charlie was getting!

Her brain seemed reeling, and her thoughts surged up, reproaching her for many a thing she had never thought twice about.

She uttered a prayer for help, and clenched her teeth, determined to hold out till relief came; and relief came but slowly. At last, when she felt it impossible to hold this heavy burden any longer, a man's voice called out to her, "Let him down, miss; it's all right now." But Sarah would not let Charlie out of her arms, fearing the effects which the awful sight of the flames might have on his already highly excitable brain; so she clutched him tighter, and the only thing to be done was to lift them over the balcony down together.

The crowd—for where is there ever a greater crowd than near a fire?—cheered loudly; but Sarah had fainted away, and never heard how heartily it sympathized.

Sir Alfred, who had gazed up horror-struck at the brave girl, was jealously holding the boy in his arms, evidently looking for the marks of fire which he was certain must be upon him. Charlie was, however, quite unhurt, and after giving him to a friend to hold, he knelt down by Sarah, who was still insensible, and began trying to restore her. A neighbour offered to take her into their house, and gratefully accepting this kindness, Sir Alfred and a fireman carried her indoors.

The fire was, by now, gradually getting under control, and it only remained to house the inmates, who, having fortunately not gone to bed, were still in their everyday clothes, Lady James and her little one being the only exceptions. Everybody was anxious to do their best for the James family, who were great favourites with all who knew them, and, by half-past one, all were settled somewhere for the night.

Now we must go back to the origin of the fire.

Master Charlie, "Baby Charlie," as he was called, being the youngest, had determined to have a little fun; so, after dinner was served, and his nurse was safely downstairs at her supper, he got out of bed, lit a candle, and began reading a book his father had just given him, which was very exciting. Curiously enough he came to a part of the book where there had also been a dinner-party, and the children of the house had gone down to dessert. Charlie began thinking it was rather hard luck he had not been allowed to see something of the party, and he wondered in his little brain whether he could not manage it, so he put the candle and the book on the floor near the table, as he knew he was doing wrong, and did not want them to be seen, and crept stealthily downstairs.

He found to his surprise that the drawing-room door was open, and the room itself was empty, as Sir Alfred and Lady James, whose guests had just left, were playing a game of billiards in the billiard-room, so as he had no idea how late, or how early it was, he went behind a screen near the balcony window and sat down to wait. But it was in reality about eleven, all the ladies had left, and the servants were very busy downstairs. As it was long past Charlie's bedtime he fell soundly asleep. Now, the nurse, who had only been a short time in Lady James's family, was most unscrupulous, and when she came down for her supper, she found it so much more amusing than sitting alone in the nursery, that, trusting Charlie was sound asleep, she remained downstairs chatting quite happily with the servants. The fire had now been smouldering some time, and had been caused by the candle falling out of the candlestick on to the open book, which blazed up in a few minutes, and quickly set the tablecloth alight. Edith and Sarah were the first to go upstairs and to discover the flames. Sarah at once thought of the stone staircase which led up to Charlie's room, and which could not catch fire; but she had scarcely reached the top floor, when she saw the walls of the night nursery fall in, and, through a rift in the flames, saw, to her horror, that Charlie's bed was empty. Thinking that the child had got frightened by the flames, and had probably strayed into some of the lower rooms, she searched carefully into every cupboard and corner of the bedrooms and dressing-rooms. But all this took a long time, and the flames were gaining rapidly upon her. Sarah soon remembered that the stone staircase ended on the drawing-room floor, being continued in wood, which had already caught fire from the flames of the front staircase. She was still searching frantically in Lady James's boudoir, which was next to the drawing-room, for Charlie, when she saw, to her horror, that all exit from downstairs was now impossible. She bethought herself of the drawing-room balcony, which was of stone, and in opening the window which led on to it, she saw, to her mingled horror and relief, the form of little Charlie peacefully sleeping behind the big screen. Her thankfulness can better be imagined than described, and seizing the child in her arms she ran out, thankful to get in the air and to leave the suffocating rooms, now filled with smoke, behind her.

Poor Sarah was very ill for a week, but in reality it was more the shock which had upset her than the actual burns, although she had several rather bad ones on her arms. However, after these had been carefully dressed with lint and croton oil, she felt fairly like herself again.

Poor Lady James had suffered from the disaster terribly, and was obliged to go abroad for her health, which the doctor feared would only with great difficulty be re-established; so one day Sir Alfred sent for Sarah to come to his study, and when she had arrived, he began by telling her how unutterably grateful they were to her, and little Charlie, who was close at hand, thanked her also in his pretty childish manner. Sir Alfred then went on to say how sorry they all were to lose her, but as it was impossible to take her abroad with them she must look out for another place. Here poor Sarah, who had been very happy in their service, completely broke down. Sir Alfred soothed her as best he could, and assured her that their gratitude was much too great ever to allow them to forget her. He also gave her a purse with fifty pounds in it, forty of which he begged her to put at once into the savings bank, and he also promised to add one pound to it every Christmas.

Sarah was surprised and greatly overcome at this great generosity and gratitude, saying that anybody else would have done the same in her place. She said good-bye to her mistress, whom

she felt very sorry to see looking so ill, took a still sadder leave of her fellow-servants, and went for a few days to her father's home.

She soon received a letter from Lady James telling her that she had a friend who was going to Ireland, and being badly in want of a kitchen-maid had promised to take Sarah if she did not mind going so far off. Of course Sarah was only too delighted to go anywhere, not liking to be idle longer than was necessary, and really she had been so happy in her experience of service that she was quite anxious to begin work again. She went to see Mrs. Sinclair, who was a bright fashionable lady, but very unlike Lady James. She quite approved of Sarah, not really troubling herself much as to her character or abilities, so it was decided that they should start in two days.

Sarah wrote a long letter to Dick, telling him all about her adventures and forthcoming journey; but, not knowing what her address would be, she was unable to say where he should write to her.

The two days passed quickly, and Sarah went to Mrs. Sinclair's London house to make acquaintance with her fellow-servants, with whom she was to go over to Ireland immediately. She had not travelled much by train before, so the whole sensation was new to her, and when they arrived in the evening at Fleetwood, her excitement was very great. The luggage was all put on board, together with the young lady's bicycle, and she had a little time to look about her.

The sea was very rough, and Sarah, who had never been on it before, thought the waves looked mountains high. Sailors were rushing to and fro, and when Sarah heard the funnel blow out its signal of departure, she did not quite understand what had occurred or what was going to happen; but she soon felt the steamer rolling and pitching, and, in spite of the other servants trying to persuade her to go and lie down, Sarah stayed on deck much too excited to think of feeling ill. She sat down under cover, and presently one of the sailors came up to her. He looked very odd to her eyes, all done up in his oil-skins and huge boots, but he also looked so very jolly that she thought he must be nice. He asked her if she would like a rug; and Sarah, who was beginning to feel very cold, accepted his offer gladly. Away he staggered, for by this time the moon looked as if she was playing hide and seek with the ship, now looking full at Sarah and then shyly hiding her round face again. Back came the sailor quickly with a nice warm rug, and after having tucked Sarah up all round in it, he sat down and began to talk to her. Now, she did not quite like this, but as he had been so kind she could not exactly tell him to go, so they talked away for a good long time, and Sarah began telling Mike, as she found out his name to be, all about her first place, and how she was going to Ireland to begin life in another situation. Mike was very interested, and now became so friendly with her that she at last said she must go below, as she was beginning to feel rather ill. Mike would not believe this, and tried hard to prevent her; but Sarah was a very determined little person and would have her own way, so she went downstairs to join the other servants, but they were all suffering so much that she was obliged to look at a paper and not talk.

At last they arrived at Belfast, and Sarah was very glad, as she thought the cabin so stuffy, and Mike having been so tiresome, Sarah had not liked to go up on deck again, the consequence being that her head was aching violently. After landing, they all went to the Northern Counties Hotel, where a good breakfast was ordered, consisting of fresh herrings, coffee, eggs, fadge and honey. Sarah, who sat next the window, could hardly take her eyes off the street, filled as it was with a motley crowd of small fish carts, ragged newspaper boys, and factory girls hurrying to their work, with their bright shawls pinned carelessly over their heads, and their short skirts and bare feet all looking very different to any London crowd she had ever seen. Soon the time arrived to start for Ballycastle, which was their destination, and after two hours' journey by train they arrived.

The luggage was left at the station, where it would be well guarded till called for, and the servants all got up on outside jaunting cars, which were waiting for them. Sarah thought these cars looked very odd, as there was a kind of long box in the middle and two seats on either side, which, if you were a novice, were apt to jog you off. She mounted with some difficulty, and held on very tight. They drove at a very great pace, and, as Sarah thought, very recklessly round the corners. After a time, however, she quite enjoyed the motion, and was much surprised to see all the children with their feet quite bare, generally driving a fat pig or two; and when she, by chance, looked into the cabins and saw pigs and fowls happily making themselves quite at home, her astonishment knew no bounds, but on asking the other servants, she was told this was quite usual, and nobody thought it even extraordinary.

They passed a great many bogs on their way, and Sarah had no idea what these were till she was told, and even then she thought they looked very dull and dirty, and did not understand how people could use the peat, which was piled up in large stacks to keep it dry, in any way. At last they turned in at the avenue gate, and came up to a very pretty house which was covered with creepers, the lawn in front being bright with flower-beds, where masses of geraniums, begonias, mignonette, etc., were blooming, as flowers only can bloom on Irish soil. Behind the lawn was a long row of tall scarlet pokers, "tritomas," as the footman was very proud of calling them when he told Sarah that in October he had counted as many as four or five thousand in bloom. The green fields and trees behind making a most beautiful background.

Of course, during the next few days there was a great deal to do, and Sarah had not only her kitchen work, but was also asked to help the housemaid, who was a cheerful Irish girl, whose peculiar brogue amused her very much. Sarah's mistress was most of the time lying on a sofa in the drawing-room, as she still felt the effects of the journey from London, and her only daughter was bicycling all over the country visiting her various friends. Any spare time that Sarah had she

spent in exploring the beautiful neighbourhood of Ballycastle, which lies near the sea.

Several months passed, during which time Sarah was very happy in her beautiful home; she wrote to Dick every fortnight, and told him how she was getting on, and he answered her letters regularly. One day he wrote saying that he had a great piece of news to tell her, which was, that his master had given him a place as upper servant, and had also raised his wages. His letter was written in great spirits, and Sarah only felt sorry she was not on the spot to tell him at once how delighted she felt. His letter went on to say that his master was thinking of paying some shooting visits in the north of Ireland, and Dick hoped they might meet, as he was to be valet for the occasion. Sarah was greatly excited at this prospect, and could only relieve her feelings by taking a good walk along the headlands. Sarah was one of those people who cannot do without sympathy, and she knew that great joy likes to be shared to make it complete, therefore she felt very sad at not being able to talk over every detail of this great excitement with Dick, as a letter seemed to her quite inadequate for the occasion.

Mrs. and Miss Sinclair were going to pay a few visits in the country, and had told the housekeeper to give the servants a day's outing in Belfast. After their departure the house was very quiet, and there was naturally not much work to do, but Sarah felt that with such a beautiful garden and such perfect scenery, she could never be dull.

One morning she went down to bathe, a thing she had never done before; at first she would only let the water ripple over her feet, then come up to her knees, which she thought very brave of her, but Peggy, the housemaid, who was also there, laughed so heartily, that she ventured quite in, and enjoyed herself so much that she determined to repeat the operation whenever she had time.

At last the housekeeper announced in a very grand manner that in two days the servants might go to Belfast for their trip. They were all very much pleased, and the maids busied themselves in mending their dresses and putting new ribbons on their hats. They were determined to enjoy themselves, and knew that a smart appearance would greatly help this object. The day soon came, and at an early hour everybody was assembled in the hall waiting for the cars which Mrs. Sinclair had kindly ordered for them. This time Sarah had no difficulty in seating herself, and enjoyed the drive in the fresh morning air and lovely sunshine very much.

Arrived at the station, they only just had time to take their tickets and jump into their places, when the train was off, they laughed a great deal, and were all very light-hearted when Belfast was reached. At first they were not sure what they would do, but Sarah unconsciously solved the difficulty by exclaiming, "Oh, I *am* hungry!" so they all trooped off for breakfast at an inexpensive hotel.

Mrs. Sinclair had given the footman a letter to the manager of a flax mill, and they thought they would go there after they had finished their meal. The manager sent his foreman to show them over the mill, and Sarah had as much as she could do to hear his explanation of the various processes used for spinning flax. The noise was terrible, and quite deafened Sarah, who could not help feeling very thankful that she was not one of the poor factory girls, whose pallid faces predicted an early death. She said something about this to Peggy, who told her that they seldom lived long, as the air being full of dust atoms, which they inhaled all day, gradually affected their lungs. Sarah came away feeling very sad, but she had not much time to think, as she was again hurried on to some new sight.

They spent a very happy day, and ended up with a good tea of scones, oat-cake, bread and butter and jam.

At the station they still had half an hour to wait for the train, so they sat down on one of the benches and talked. Suddenly Sarah uttered a half cry, but on seeing Peggy looking at her, she quickly gained her composure. Near a train which had just arrived, stood two girls and a man. The man was very like Dick, and as he half turned round, Sarah saw that it was really he. One of the girls, who was very pretty, was talking to him with her hand on his arm, and Sarah thought he looked at her very affectionately. They chatted and laughed for some little time till the guard came round for the tickets, then the pretty girl, to Sarah's horror, gave Dick a kiss which he seemed fully to expect, and she jumped into the train, waving her handkerchief repeatedly to him.

Dick and his companion now left the station, and, passing close to Sarah, she heard her say, "My! how fond you two are of each other, she certainly is very pretty, just your style." Sarah meanwhile was choking with rage, hardly believing her ears, and feeling beside herself with jealousy.

In a few minutes she asked Peggy to take a turn outside the station, as they still had ten minutes before their train left. Sarah did not feel inclined to talk, and Peggy, being Irish, was only too glad to use this opportunity of letting her tongue run on. After they had gone some little distance they retraced their steps, when Sarah suddenly saw Dick and his friend, who had left the station by another way, coming towards them. He saw her some distance off, and quickened his steps, when, to his astonishment, Sarah blankly looked at him, and, half bowing, passed over to the other side of the road. Dick was dumb with surprise, and would have followed her, but seeing that she was determined to avoid him, he changed his mind.

Now, Dick had no idea that Sarah had been in the station, and could not imagine what had happened, but he expected some letter of explanation, and thought he would wait.

Sarah meanwhile had taken a corner seat in the train, and was tormenting herself with all sorts of uncomfortable thoughts.

The return journey was very different for the whole party from the morning one, the others finding her very much of a wet blanket. Arrived home, she felt as miserable as possible, and did not know what to do to get at the rights of the matter.

Meanwhile Dick, who was very proud, determined to wait for Sarah's explanation, and she had made up her mind to act in the same way, so the estrangement seemed likely to go on indefinitely.

"Oh, Peggy," said Sarah one day, "what a sweetly pretty dress you are making! When are you going to wear it? Why, I shan't know you when you have it on."

"Oh," said Peggy, "this is not for myself, it is for a great friend, and, as she is very pretty, sure I am making her a pretty dress for Christmas."

The gown in question was pale blue, trimmed with black ribbons, and the sleeves were all tucked, so Sarah might well admire it.

"Well," she asked, "what is this beauty's name? Do tell me."

"No," said Peggy, "I shan't; it's a secret, and you might tell, as I believe you know her brother."

"Oh, I don't know anybody," cried Sarah, "as for a man, I only know one."

"Well, then," said Peggy, "I'll tell you; it is Maggie Bream, and she is in service near Belfast."

"What!" cried Sarah, "is her name Bream?"

"Well, and why shouldn't it be? I suppose you've no objection?"

"Oh no; but tell me more about her. Has she any sisters?"

"No, not one, nor half a one; but she has lots and lots of brothers, and she often tells me she is right glad there are no more girls in the family, as they are none too well off as it is. Of course, her eldest brother earns a power of money, as his master just thinks a heap of him; but there, he's engaged, so what's the use of him? He saves and stints just because he wants to marry soon."

Sarah was now all excitement, and could hardly command her voice to ask this wonderful brother's name, however, Peggy volunteered it by saying—

"Maggie has just met Dick in Belfast—in fact, they were there the same day that we were. Maggie wrote to tell me yesterday. I'm right sorry I missed her, but her train went just before ours."

Peggy noticed (for who so sharp as Peggy?) Sarah's restlessness and her flushed face, and wanted to know what was the reason.

"Well," said Sarah, "I am the girl Dick's engaged to, and I have made a horrible mistake."

Peggy naturally wanted to know what the mistake was; but Sarah would not tell her, as she now felt she had been very silly, and she did not want to be laughed at.

Sarah now thought the best thing she could do was to write to Dick and tell him why she had behaved in such an extraordinary way at Belfast. He was very glad to get this letter, as he had been thinking a great deal about her, trying to understand how he had offended her. He wrote off at once and asked if she could possibly get another outing, in order to arrange about their wedding, as he had now saved quite enough and would not wait any longer.

Sarah had to be patient till Mrs. Sinclair came back, and when her mistress heard why the day was wanted she gladly gave the required permission. Sarah wrote to her former mistress telling her that her marriage would soon take place, and she would have to leave her present situation. Lady James answered her letter most kindly, and said that she and Sir Alfred were thinking of returning to their Scotch home, and offered her the place of lodge-keeper and Dick that of butler.

Sarah was perfectly delighted, and not less so when she found in the envelope a present of ten pounds, with which to buy herself some nice wedding clothes. She then went up to Mrs. Sinclair and told her about the offer Lady James had made them, and gave a month's notice, which she said she was really sorry to be obliged to do, but as Dick had done the same to his master, she hoped Mrs. Sinclair would not blame her. She then went to Belfast and told Dick about all the plans suggested. He was quite delighted, and as he had already given his master a month's notice, felt no compunction in leaving.

Dick made her promise to marry him in a month, and they then went to see his sister, Maggie, who was to be bridesmaid, and wear the wonderful dress.

The month soon passed, and with Peggie's help, Sarah was able to make three new dresses, and various other things. Mr. Brown was very pleased to hear of his daughter's marriage, and was only sorry he was unable to be there himself, but he sent her six plated spoons and forks, and a small locket which her mother had left to her.

The servants were all sorry to lose Sarah, they gave her a silver tea-pot as a wedding gift, and

saw her off at the station.

Dick and Sarah met at the door of St. Anne's church on this auspicious day. She was dressed in a blue alpaca gown, trimmed with white lace, and a hat to match. After the service was over, Mr. and Mrs. Bream went away in a brougham Dick had ordered for the occasion, and they had their wedding breakfast in the same hotel where Sarah had spent part of that eventful day, when she and her fellow-servants had come to Belfast for their holiday.

They both had a very happy time and went straight across to England, where they were to spend a few days with Sarah's father and his wife, till Lady James arrived from abroad.

Mr. and Mrs. Brown met them at the door of her old home, her father having taken a holiday for the occasion. During the following week, Dick and Sarah were mostly out of the house, visiting the Crystal Palace, and many other places which Sarah had never been able to see. When the week was over, they went together to see Lady James, and finding that she wished them to begin work at once, they packed up their belongings and set off for Scotland, where we will now leave them with many good wishes for a long and happy life.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SARAH'S FIRST START IN LIFE ***

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