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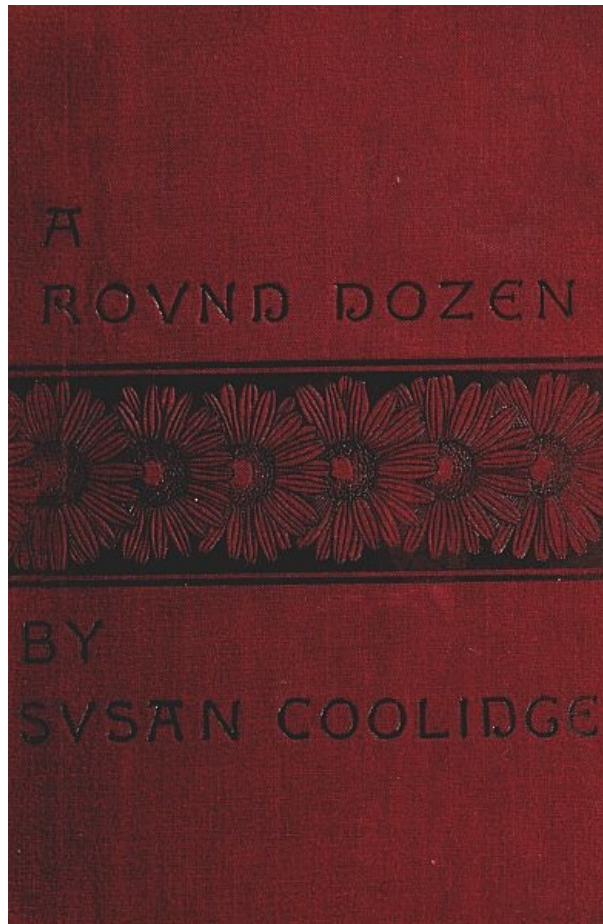
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A ROUND DOZEN.



TOINETTE AND THE ELVES.

Down on the ground beside her, a tiny figure became visible, so small that Toinette had to kneel and stoop her head to see it.—[PAGE 234.](#)

A ROUND DOZEN.

BY

SUSAN COOLIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "THE NEW YEAR'S BARGAIN," "WHAT KATY DID," "WHAT KATY DID AT SCHOOL," "MISCHIEF'S THANKSGIVING," "NINE LITTLE GOSLINGS," "EYEBRIGHT," "CROSS-PATCH," "A GUERNSEY LILY."



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*Five little buds grouped round the parent stem,
Growing in sweet airs, beneath gracious skies,
Watched tenderly from sunrise to sunrise,
Lest blight, or chill, or evil menace them.*

*Five small and folded buds, just here and there
Giving a hint of what the bloom may be,
When to reward the long close ministry
The buds shall blossom into roses fair.*

*Soft dews fall on you, dears, soft breezes blow,
The noons be tempered and the snows be kind,
And gentle angels watch each stormy wind,
And turn it from the garden where you grow.*

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THE LITTLE WHITE DOOR.

[9]



SUPPOSE that most boys and girls who go to school and study geography know, by sight at least, the little patch of pale pink which is marked on the map as "Switzerland." I suppose, too, that if I asked, "What can you tell me about Switzerland?" a great many of them would cry out, "It is a mountainous country, the Alps are there, Mont Blanc is there, the highest land in Europe." All this is true; but I wonder if all of those who know even so much have any idea what a beautiful country Switzerland is? Not only are the mountains very high and very grand, but the valleys which lie between are as green as emerald, and full of all sorts of wild flowers; there are lakes of the loveliest blue, rivers which foam and dash as merrily as rivers do in America, and the prettiest farmhouses in the world,—*châlets* the Swiss call them,—with steep roofs and hanging balconies, and mottoes and quaint ornaments carved all over their fronts. And the most peculiar and marvellous thing of all is the strange nearness of the grass and herbage to the snows. High, high up in the foldings of the great mountains on whose tops winter sits all the year long, are lovely little valleys hidden away, where goats and sheep feed by the side of glacier-fed streams; and the air is full of the tinkle of their bells, and of the sweet smells of the mountain flowers. The water of these streams has an odd color which no other waters have,—a sort of milky blue-green, like an opal. Even on the hottest days a chilly air plays over their surface, the breath, as it were, of the great ice-fields above, from whose melting snows the streams are fed. And the higher you climb, still greener grow the pastures and thicker the blossoms, while the milk in the *châlet* pans seems half cream, it is so rich. Delicious milk it is, ice cold, and fragrant as if the animals which produce it had fed on flowers. Oh, Switzerland is a wonderful land indeed!

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One day as I sat in a thicket of Alp roses in one of those lovely, lonely upper valleys, I happened to raise my eyes, and noticed, high in the cliff above, a tall narrow rock as white as snow, which looked exactly like a door set in the face of the gray precipice. An old shepherd came by, and I asked him about it. He said it was called "The Door," and that the valley was called "The Valley of the Door" by some folks because of it, but that its real name was "*Das Fritzethal*," or "Fritz's Valley," on account of a boy called Fritz who once lived there. I wanted to

know about the boy, and as the old man had a little time to spare, he sat down beside me and told this story, which I will now tell you.

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"It was many, many years ago," the shepherd said, "so many that no man now remembers exactly when it happened. Fritz's mother was a widow, and he was her only child. They were poor people, and had to work hard for a living. Fritz was a steady, faithful lad, and did his best. All day long he dug and toiled, and herded and milked and fed his goats; in the winter he carved wooden bowls for sale in the lower valley; but, work as he would, it was not always easy to keep the meal-bin full. What made it harder, were the strange storms which every few months swept the valley and damaged the crops. Out of the blue sky, as it were, these storms would suddenly drop. The sun would be shining one moment; the next, great torrents of rain would begin to fall and fierce winds to blow, flooding the crops and carrying drifts of sand and gravel across the fields. Then, at other times, no rain would fall for months together, and every green thing would be burned and dried up, while perhaps at the very same time the lower valleys had plenty of rain. This happened so often that people gave the Thal the name of "The Unlucky Valley," and it was accounted a sad thing to have to get a living there. The climate is very different now—praised be God.

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"You can see, madame, that Fritz's lot was not strewn with roses. Still he was a brave lad, and did not lose heart. He had no play-fellows, but sometimes in the long summer days when he sat to watch the herd, he would tell himself stories by way of amusement, and almost always these stories were about the White Door up there, which was as much a marvel then as now. At last, by dint of looking and dreaming, it grew to be so like a real door to him, that he resolved one day to climb up and see it closer."

"Up there!" I cried with horror.

"Yes, madame. It was very rash. Any ordinary boy would have been dashed to pieces, but Fritz was wiry, strong, and active as a mountain goat. There are no such boys left nowadays. One night, while his mother slept, he stole away, climbed as high as he dared by moonlight, took a wink of sleep under a shelving rock, and with the first dawn began to make his way upward, testing every foothold, and moving cautiously; for though he loved adventure, Fritz was by no means a foolhardy boy, and had no mind to lose his life if wit and care could keep it safe. But the climb was a terrible one. He had been on precipices before, but never on such as this. Only God's goodness saved him again and again. A hundred times he wished himself back, but to return was worse than to go on. So up and up he went, and at last, scaling that sheer brown cliff which you see there, and throwing himself breathless on a narrow ledge, he found himself close to the object of his desires. There, just before him, was the Little White Door.

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"The sight restored his energies at once. It was a real door—that he saw at a glance, for there was a latch and a keyhole and a knocker—all carved of white stone, and on the door a name in good German characters, 'Die Wolken.' I do not know the name in English."

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"It is 'Clouds,'" I told him.

"Ah, yes, 'die clouds.' Fritz could hardly believe his eyes, as you may imagine.

"Pretty soon he grew bold, and seizing the knocker he gave a loud rap. Nobody answered at first, so he rapped again, louder and louder, until the sound echoed from the rocks like thunder. At last the door opened very suddenly, and some one drew Fritz in and shut the door again quickly. All was dark inside, but he felt a cool touch on his wrist, and a hand he could not see led him along a rocky passage into the heart of the cliff.

"After a while a glimmering light appeared, and the passage turned suddenly into a large hall, which was full of people, Fritz thought at first; but then he saw that they were not people, but strange rounded shapes in white or gray, who moved and bounded, and seemed to be playing a game of some sort. It was like a game of bowls, but the things they rolled to and fro on the rocky floor were not balls, but shapes like themselves, only smaller and rounder, and of all beautiful colors, red and purple and yellow. The creatures liked to roll, it would seem, for they skipped and jumped as they went along, and laughed with a sort of crackling laughter, which echoed oddly back from the roof of the cave. The big shapes laughed

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Pretty soon he grew bold, and seizing the knocker he gave a loud rap.

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too in great booming tones. Altogether they made a great deal of noise. Still the damp little hand clasped Fritz's wrist, and looking down he saw that his guide was no other than one of those same small shapes which were the balls of the game. There was something so familiar in the pink-cheeked fleecy outline, that in his surprise Fritz forgot to be afraid, and spoke aloud, crying, 'Why! It's a cloud!'

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"To be sure. What did you suppose me to be, and why did you come to the clouds' house if you

didn't want to see clouds?' replied the thing.

"'Didn't you see our name on the door? Or perhaps you can't read, Stupid!' demanded a large white cloud, leaving the group of players and coming up to Fritz and his companion.

"'Yes, I can read, and I did see the name,' stammered Fritz; 'still I didn't—'

"'You did and you didn't; how intelligent you seem to be!' said the white cloud, with a toss and curl; while a big black thunder-cloud, pitching a little yellow one clear across the cave, shouted in sullen tones which echoed frightfully from the rocks overhead, 'What's that boy doing here spoiling our game? Cumulus, it's your roll. Turn that little beggar out. He has no business here, interfering with the sports of his betters!'

"Fritz trembled, but his small conductor faced the black cloud undauntedly.

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"'Hold your tongue!' he said. 'This boy is my visitor. I let him in, and you're not to bully him. I won't permit it.'

"'You, indeed!' blustered the thunder-cloud. 'Pray, what can you do about it, Little Pink? I shall say what I like, and do as I like.'

"'No, you won't,' cried all the small clouds together, rearing themselves up from the floor. 'We fair-weather clouds are not a bit afraid of you, as you know. We know very well how to drive you black ones away, and we will do it now if you are not civil.' Their voices though bright were threatening, and one little violet bit made a dash straight at the nose of the thunder-cloud, who shrank into a corner, muttering wrathfully.

"'Don't be at all afraid,' said Little Pink to Fritz, in a patronizing tone. 'He shan't do you any harm. That sort of cloud is always afraid to face us, because we are so many, you see, and can serve him as he deserves. Well, now, and what brought you up here, pray?'

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"'I didn't know who lived here, and I wanted so much to see,' replied Fritz, shyly.

"'You didn't? Didn't you know that this was our house?' demanded the little cloud, astonished.

"'No, indeed. I didn't even know that you had a house.'

"'What! Not know that? Pray, where did you suppose we were when you didn't see us in the sky?' cried Little Pink. 'A house! Of course we have a house. Everybody has one. You've got a house yourself, haven't you? Why, we've lived here always, all we clouds. Sometimes we have great family meetings, when we get together and indulge in all sorts of fun and frolic, never going out doors for weeks at a time.'

"'Oh, those must be the times when our fields all burn up, and the streams run dry, and the poor cattle low with thirst!' said Fritz, suddenly enlightened. 'So you are enjoying yourselves up here all the time, are you? I call that very unkind, and—' Suddenly recollecting where he was, he hung his head, abashed at his own daring.

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"Little Pink hung his head too, with a grieved face.

"'I never thought of that before,' he said penitently. 'It was pleasant for us, and the time went fast. I recollect now that the world has looked rather queer and yellow sometimes when we have come out again after a long absence, but it grew green presently, and I did not suppose any one minded—'

"All this while a strange growling sound had been going on in a room opening from the hall, across whose entrance stout bars were fixed.

"'What *is* that?' asked Fritz, unable longer to restrain his curiosity.

"'That? That's only the North Wind,' replied Little Pink, in an absent tone. 'We've shut him up, because he has no business to be abroad in the summer; and he's such a restless creature, and so violent, that he will break loose if he can, and do all manner of mischief. Last year, about this time, he got out and raised a great storm, and made a fearful mess of it down below.'

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"'I recollect. That was the storm that killed three of our sheep, and ruined the barley crop,' exclaimed Fritz. 'Oh, it was dreadful! We had to make half a loaf do the work of a whole one all winter long in consequence. It was hungry times in the valley, I can tell you. Oh, the evil Wind!'

"'You poor fellow!' cried the little cloud. 'Well, he's safe now, as you see. He can't get out and plague you this year, at least. But I'm so sorry you went hungry. It wasn't our fault, really it wasn't; still I should like to make it up to you somehow, if I could.' He reflected a moment, then he went forward and gave a call which collected all the other clouds around him. Fritz watched them consulting together; at last they moved toward him in a body.

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"'Now, Boy,' said Little Pink, who seemed to have elected himself spokesman, 'because you're a good boy and have had bad luck, and because you're the first boy who ever came up here and rapped on our door, we're going to propose a bargain. So long as you live in the valley below and are steady, and work hard and keep a kind heart in your bosom for people not so well off as yourself, so long we will look after your farm and befriend it. Water shall fall on it regularly, flood and tempest shall spare it, the grass shall never dry, nor the brook fail, nor the herds lack for food. We shall watch closely, and so long as you keep your word we will keep ours. Do you

agree?'

"'What! never any more droughts, never any floods,' cried Fritz, unable to believe such good news. 'Oh, how happy mother will be! Indeed, indeed I will do my best—pray believe that I will.'

"'The proof of the pudding,' began Cumulus, but Little Pink silenced him with a wave of his hand. [23]

"'Very well, you do your best and we will do ours,' he said in a cheery tone. 'Now about getting you home. Do you know how late it is?'

"'No,' said Fritz, who had forgotten all about time.

"'It is just noon.'

"'Really? Oh, how frightened the mother will be!' cried Fritz, his heart sinking as he thought of the terrible cliffs which he must descend.

"'He never can go home as he came,' declared a rainbow, craning its long curved neck like a giraffe's over the heads of the others.

"'I'll tell you, let us all carry him down on our shoulders,' suggested Little Pink.

"'So we will,' shouted the clouds in a chorus; and jostling and laughing they all crowded into the narrow passage, bearing Fritz in their midst. As the door swung open, in swept fresh visitors, a crowd of tiny scurrying shapes, and some one behind, whipping them along with a lash of many-colored air. [24]

"'Why, where are you all going?' demanded the new-comer, in a breezy voice. 'I've collected these stray lambs from hither and yon, and now I'm in for the day. What takes you out, pray?'

"'We'll not be gone a minute. We're only going to carry this boy home,' answered the rest; while Little Pink whispered in Fritz's ear, 'That's the West Wind. He's a great favorite with us all.'

"'Hallo! A boy! Why, so it is,' cried West Wind. He pounced on Fritz as he spoke, kissed him, ruffled his hair, boxed his ears softly, all in a minute. Then, with a gay, whooping laugh he vanished into the passage, while the clouds, raising Fritz, floated downward like a flock of white-winged birds. Little Pink lay under his cheek like a pillow. Softly as thistle-down touches earth they landed on the valley floor, laid Fritz on a bed of soft grass, and rose again, leaving him there. He looked up to watch them rise, bright and smiling. Little Pink waved a rosy hand. Higher and higher sailed the clouds, then they vanished into the door, and the door was shut." [25]

I am telling the story, as you see, rather in my own words than in those of the old shepherd, but you won't mind that. The truth is, I cannot remember the exact language he used, but so long as I keep to the main points of the history it doesn't much matter, does it?

"In a few minutes Fritz recovered his wits and made haste home, for he feared his mother might be alarmed at his long absence. She was not, however, for she supposed that he had risen early, as he sometimes did, and taking a piece of bread in his hand, had followed the goats up the valley, breakfasting by the way. She met him, full of wonder at a strange thing that had happened.

"'Such a queer mist filled the valley just now,' she said, 'I could not see the sun at all. I feared a storm was coming, but presently it rolled away all in a minute, and left the day as fine as ever. Did you notice it? I never saw anything like it before.' [26]

"Fritz let his mother wonder, and held his peace. She would think that he had fallen asleep and dreamed it all, he was sure; in fact, after a little he himself began to believe that it was a dream.

"But, dream or no dream, the strange thing was that it came true! From that time on, the climate of the Unlucky Valley seemed to change. Years passed by without a single drought or inundation. When the pastures below were parched with thirst, rain fell on Fritz's fields, keeping them green as emerald. All his crops succeeded; his goats and sheep gave double share of milk, and little by little he grew rich.

"'The Lucky Valley,' people now called the once unlucky spot, while to Fritz they gave the name of 'The Favored of the Saints.' Year after year his gains went on increasing. Gradually all the land in the valley became his, except one tiny strip, there at the upper end, which belonged to a widow, poor as Fritz's mother once had been. This strip Fritz desired to buy, but the widow refused to sell, though he offered a large price. She had come there a bride, she declared, with the myrtle-crown on her head, and there she wished to die and be buried when her time should come. The memory of his own poor mother, who had died some time before, should have made Fritz pitiful to this lonely woman, but his heart had grown hard with continued prosperity, and it angered him to be opposed. So when after many attempts she persisted in her resolution, he tried harsher means. The widow had debts. These he bought up, and when she could not pay he brought the pressure of the law to bear, and turned her from her home. [27]

"The very night after he had watched her depart, weeping and broken-hearted, as he lay on his bed, feeling at last that the valley was all his own, the Little White Door opened on the cliffs far above, and out came the clouds. [28]

"Not pink and purple now, smiling and full of good will, but black and wrathful. Like a flock of

dark vultures they swooped at the sleeping valley. Floods of rain fell, fierce winds tore and raved, the river rose and burst its bounds, carrying all before it; and Fritz, awakened by the fearful roar, had just time to escape from his bed and gain the nearer hillside, when the waters struck the *châlet* and bore it away in ruins down the valley, as though it were no more than a bubble of foam. The crops were swept off, the flocks drowned in the fields. Fritz clung to a tree-trunk through that fearful night, listening to the hiss and rush of the flood, and the bleatings of the drowning sheep; and ever and anon it seemed as if shapes, dimly seen through the darkness, swooped at and buffeted him, while voices cried in his ear, 'Promise-breaker! Widow-spoiler! Is *this* the way you keep faith with the clouds?'

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"When morning dawned it revealed a scene of ruin. Not a blade of barley remained in the meadows, not a blade of grass in the fields. The labor of years had vanished in a single night."

"It served him right," said I.

"Ah, my lady," replied the old shepherd, "God is more merciful to sinners than we men can be. Fritz was not wicked at heart. He saw his fault now in the light of his misfortune, and was sorry for it. Gladly would he have made amends, but he was now poor as the poorest, for the waters lay over the earth, and did not run off as waters generally do. The fertile valley was become a lake, into which points of land, fringed with broken and battered trees, pushed themselves. It was a sad sight.

"News of the disaster reached the lower valleys, and the kindly peasants flocked to help. But what could they do till the water receded? Nothing. They could only say comforting words and return to their homes, leaving Fritz to his fate.

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"He waited many days, then he formed a bold resolution. He determined to climb the cliff once more, knock at the Little White Door, and plead with the clouds for forgiveness."

"That was bold indeed," I said.

"It was a much harder task than it had been years before, when he was a boy and his joints were supple," continued the old shepherd. "Only desperation carried him upward, but at last he did reach the door. He knocked many times without answer, and when at length the door opened, it was not a merry little cloud which appeared, but a tall, gloomy white one, which looked like a sheeted ghost. No game was going on in the great hall. The clouds, dressed in black, each with his thunder-cap on, sat side by side, and frowned on Fritz as he stood in the midst and made his plea.

"'I have sinned,' he said sadly, as he ended, 'I have sinned grievously, and I am justly punished. I forgot my promise to you, *meine Herren*, and I cannot complain that you broke yours to me. But give me one more chance, I implore you. Let me atone for my fault, and if I fail again, punish me as you will.'

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"It seemed to him that the clouds grew a little less gloomy as he spoke, and their voices were gentle as they replied, 'Very well, we will consider of it. Now go.' There was no offer to carry him this time. Exhausted and weary he groped his way down at peril to life and limb, and more dead than alive crept into the miserable shed which had replaced his home, with no assured hope as to what the clouds might elect to do.

"But lo, in the morning the waters had begun to fall. He hardly dared believe his eyes, but day by day they slowly grew less. By the end of a fortnight the ground was left bare. Such land! Rough, seamed, gullied by the flood, covered with slime from the mountain side and with rocks and gravel,—it seemed a hopeless task to reclaim it again into pasture.

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"But Fritz was a strong man and his will was good. Little by little the rocks were removed, the fields resown, and the valley restored to its old fruitfulness. The soil seemed richer than ever before, as if the mud and slime which had lain so long on the surface were possessed of some fertilizing quality. Another *châlet* in time arose, in place of the old one. By the end of fifteen years Fritz again was a rich man, richer than before. But his hard heart had been drowned in the flood, and the new heart which he brought back from the Little White Door was soft and kind. As soon as he could, he sought out the poor widow and restored to her all she had lost, land and home and goats. Later on he wedded her niece, a good and honest maiden, and they took the widow to live under their own roof, and were to her as a son and daughter. So the last years of Fritz were his best years, and his name, 'The Favored of the Saints,' stuck to him for the rest of his life. And it is from him that this valley is named *Das Fritzetthal*, my lady."

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"And is the story really a true one?" I asked.

"Ah, who knows?" said the old shepherd, shaking his head wisely. "The world has so many liars in it that no one can be sure." Then he took off his odd pointed hat, made a bow, called to his goats, and went his way down the valley, followed by the herd with their many-keyed tinkling bells.

I looked up. The Little White Door shone out of the face of the cliff all rosy pink with sunset. It was time for me to go also.

"At least," I thought, "if the story is not all true, if it has changed and grown a little during the course of the years,—at least it is a good story, and I am glad I heard it."



THE cottage in which little Karen lived stood high up on the hillside, close to the edge of a great forest. It was a strange, lonely place for a young wife, almost a girl, to be so happy in; but Karen was not afraid of the forest, and never thought her home lonely, not even when the strong winds blew in winter-time, and brought the far-off baying of wolves from the mountains beyond. Her husband, her boy, her housewifely cares, her spinning-wheel, and her needle kept her busy all day long, and she was as cheerful as busy. The cottage was not large, but it was strongly built of heavy beams and stones. Its low walls seemed to hug and clasp the ground, as if for protection in time of storm. The casement windows, with their very small panes of thick glass, let in little sun, but all summer long they stood open, and in winter, what with the crackling fire, the hum of the wheel, and Karen's bright face, the living-room never looked dark, and, for all its plainness, had an air of quaint comfort about it. Fritz, Karen's husband, who was skilful with tools, had ornamented the high-backed chair, the press for clothes, and the baby's oaken cradle, with beautiful carving, of which little Karen was exceedingly proud. She loved her cottage, she loved the great wood close by; her lonely life was delightful to her, and she had not the least wish to exchange it for the toy-like village in the valley below.

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But Karen was unlike other people, the neighbors said, and the old gossips were wont to shake their heads, and mutter that there was a reason for this unlikeness, and that all good Christians ought to pity and pray for the poor child.

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Long, long ago, said these gossips,—so long that nobody now could remember exactly when it was,—Karen's great-great-great-grandfather, (or perhaps *his* grandfather—who could tell?) when hunting in the high mountains, met a beautiful, tiny maiden, so small and light that a man could easily carry her in the palm of one hand. This maiden he fell in love with, and he won her to be his wife. She made a good wife; kept the house as bright as new tin; and on her wheel spun linen thread so fine that mortal eye could hardly see it. But a year and a day from the time of her marriage she went out to walk in the wood, and never came back any more! The reason of this was, that she was a gnome,—daughter of one of the forest gnomes,—and when her own people encountered her thus alone, they detained her, and would not suffer her to return to her husband. The baby she left in the cradle grew to be a woman,—bigger than her gnome mother, it is true, but still very small; and all the women of the race have been small since that time. Witness little Karen herself, whose head only came up to the shoulder of her tall Fritz. Then her passion for woods and solitary places, her beautiful swift spinning, her hair, of that peculiar pale white-brown shade,—all these were proofs of the drops of unearthly blood which ran in her veins. Gnomes always had white hair. This was because they lived in holes and dark places. Even a potato would throw out white leaves if kept in a cellar,—everybody knew that,—and the gossips, ending thus, would shake their heads again, and look very wise.

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Karen had heard these stories, and laughed at them. No fairy or gnome had ever met her eyes in the woods she loved so well; and as for hair, Rosel Pilaff's, and Gretchen Erl's too, was almost as pale as hers. Fair hair is common enough in the German mountains. Her little boy—bless him!—had downy rings which promised to become auburn in time, the color of his father's beard. She did not believe in the gnome story a bit.

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But there came a time when she almost wished to believe it, for the gnomes are said to be wise folk, and little Fritz fell ill of a strange disease, which neither motherly wisdom nor motherly nursing was able to reach. Each day left him thinner and weaker, till he seemed no more than half his former size. His very face looked strange as it lay on the cradle-pillow, and Karen was at her wits' end to know what to do.

"I will go to the village and ask Mother Klaus to come and see the child," said Fritz. "She may know of a remedy."

"It will be of no use," declared Karen, sadly. "She went to the Berards' and the baby died, and to Heinrich's and little Marie died. But go, go, Fritz!—only come back soon, lest our angel take flight while you are away!"

She almost pushed him from the door, in her impatience to have him return.

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A while after, when the baby had wailed himself to sleep, she went again to the door to look down the path into the valley. It was too soon to hope for Fritz, but the movement seemed a relief to her restlessness. It was dusk, not dark,—a sweet, mild dusk, with light enough left to show the tree-branches as they met and waved against the dim yellow sky. Deep shadows lay on the moss-beds and autumn flowers which grew beneath; only a faint perfume here and there told of their presence, and the night was very near.

Too unhappy to mind the duskiess, Karen wandered a little way up the wood-path, and sat down on the root of an old oak, so old that the rangers had given it the name of "Herr Grandfather." It was only to clear her brimming eyes that she sat down. She wiped them with her kerchief, and, with one low sob, was about to rise, when she became aware that somebody was standing at her side.

This somebody was a tiny old woman, with a pale, shadowy, but sweet face, framed in flossy white hair. She wore a dark, foreign-looking robe; a pointed hood, edged with fur, was pulled over her head; and the hand which she held out as she spoke was as white as the stalk of celery.

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"What is the matter, my child?" she asked, in a thin, rustling voice, which yet sounded pleasantly, because it was kind.

"My baby is *so* ill," replied Karen, weeping.

"How ill?" inquired the old woman, anxiously. "Is it cold? Is it fever? Do its eyes water? My baby once had a cold, and her eyes—" She stopped abruptly.

"His eyes do not water," said Karen, who felt singularly at home with the stranger. "But his head is hot, and his hands; he sleeps ill, and for these ten days has hardly eaten. He grows thinner and whiter every hour, and wails whenever he is awake. Oh, what am I doing? I must go back to him." And, as she spoke, she jumped from her seat.

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"One minute!" entreated the little old woman. "Has he pain anywhere?"

"He cries when I move his head," said Karen, hurrying on.

The stranger went too, keeping close beside her in a swift, soundless way.

"Take courage, Liebchen, child to her who was child of my child's child," she said. "Weep not, my darling. I will send you help. Out of the wisdom of the earth shall come aid for the little dear one."

"What *do* you mean?" cried Karen, stopping short in her surprise.

But the old woman did not answer. She had vanished. Had the wind blown her away?

"How could I wander so far? How could I leave my baby? Wicked mother that I am!" exclaimed Karen, in sudden terror, as she ran into the cottage.

But nothing seemed disturbed, and no one had been there. The baby lay quietly in his cradle, and the room was quite still, save for the hiss of the boiling pot and the fall of an ember on the hearth. Gradually her heart ceased its terrified beating; a sense of warmth and calm crept over her, her eyes drooped, and, seated at the cradle-foot, she fell asleep in her chair.

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Whether it was an hour or a minute that she slept, she never knew. Slowly and dimly her waking senses crept back to her; but though she heard and saw and understood, she could neither stir nor speak. Two forms were bending over the cradle, forms of little men, venerable and shadowy, with hair like snow, and blanched, pale hands, like her visitor of the afternoon. They did not look at Karen, but consulted together above the sleeping child.

"It is *here*, brother, and *here*," said one, laying his finger gently on the baby's head and heart.

"Does it lie too deep for our reaching?" asked the second, anxiously.

"No. The little herb you know of is powerful."

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"And the crystal dust *you* know of is more powerful still."

Then they took out two minute caskets, and Karen saw them open the baby's lips, and each drop in a pinch of some unknown substance.

"He is of ours," whispered one, "more of ours than any of them have been since the first."

"He has the gift of the far sight," said the other, lightly touching the closed eyes, "the divining glance, and the lucky finger."

"I read in him the apprehension of metals," said the second old man, "the sense of hidden treasures, the desire to penetrate."

"We will teach him how the waters run, and what the birds say—yes, and the way in and the way out!"

"Put the charm round his neck, brother."

Then Karen saw the little men tie a bright object round the baby's neck. She longed to move, but still she sat mute and powerless, while the odd figures passed round the cradle, slowly at first, then faster and faster, crooning, as they went, a song which was like wind in branches, and of which this scrap lodged in her memory:—

[44]

"Eyes to pierce the darkness through,
Wit to grasp the hidden clew,
Heart to feel and hand to do,—
These the gnomes have given to you."

So the song and the circling movement went on, faster and more fast, and round and round, till Karen's head swam and her senses seemed to spin in a whirling dance; and she knew no more till roused by the opening of the door, and Fritz's voice exclaiming: "Come in, Dame Klaus—come in! Karen! Where are you, wife? Ah, here she is, fast asleep, and the little man is asleep too."

"I am not asleep," said Karen, finding her voice with an effort. Then, to her husband's surprise,

she began to weep bitterly. But, for all his urgings, she would not tell the cause, for she was afraid of Dame Klaus's tongue.

The dame shook her head over the sick baby. He was very bad, she said; still, she had brought through others as bad as he, and there was no telling. She asked for a saucepan, and began to brew a tea of herbs, while Karen, drawing her husband aside, told her wonderful tale in a whisper.

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"Thou wert dreaming, Karen; it is nothing but a dream," declared the astounded Fritz.

"No, no," protested Karen. "It was not a dream. Baby will be well again, and great things are to happen! You will see! The little men know!"

"Little men! Oh, Karen! Karen!" exclaimed Fritz.

But he said no more, for Karen, bending over the cradle, lifted the strange silver coin which was tied round the baby's neck, and held it up to him with a smile. A silver piece is not a dream, as every one knows; so Fritz, though incredulous, held his tongue, and neither he nor Karen said a word of the matter to Mother Klaus.

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Baby *was* better next day. It was all the herb-tea, Mother Klaus declared, and she gained great credit for the cure.

This happened years ago. Little Fritz grew to be a fine man, sound and hearty, though never as tall as his father. He was a lucky lad too, the villagers said, for his early taste for minerals caught the attention of a rich gentleman, who sent him to the school of mines, where he got great learning. Often when the mother sat alone at her wheel, a smile came to her lips, and she hummed low to herself the song of the little old men:—

"Eyes to pierce the darkness through,
Wit to grasp the hidden clew,
Heart to feel and hand to do,—
These the gnomes have given to you."

HELEN'S THANKSGIVING.

[47]

"MAMMA, would you mind *very* much if I should learn to make pies?"



This request sounds harmless, but Mrs. Sands quite started in her chair as she heard it. She and Helen were sitting on either side of a wood-fire. The blinds had been pulled down to exclude the chill November darkness, and the room was lit only by the blazing logs, which sent out quick, bright flashes followed by sudden soft shadows, in that unexpected way which is one of the charms of wood-fires. It was a pretty room, in a pretty house, in one of the up-town streets of New York, and the mother and daughter looked very comfortable as they sat there together.

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"Pies, my dear? What *do* you mean?"

"I'll tell you, mamma. You're going to Grandmamma Ellis for Thanksgiving, this year, you know, and papa and I are going up to Vermont, to Grandmother Sands?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't remember grandmother much, because it is so long since she was here, but the one thing I do recollect is how troubled she was because I didn't know anything about housekeeping. One day you had a headache, and wanted some tea; and you rang and rang, and Jane was ever so long in fetching it, and at last grandma said, 'Why don't you run down and see to it, Helen?' And when I told her that I wasn't allowed to go into the kitchen, and beside that I didn't know how to make tea, she looked so distressed, and said, 'Dear me, dear me! Poor little ignorant girl! What a sad bringing up for you in a country like ours!' I didn't understand exactly what she meant, but I have never forgotten it, and do you know, mamma, just that one speech of grandma's has made me want to do ever so many things. I never told you, but once I made my bed for more than a week,—till Bridget said I was 'worth my salt as a chambermaid,' and I used to dust the nursery, and sweep. And the other day it came into my head suddenly how pleased grandmother would be if I carried her a pumpkin-pie that I had made myself; so I asked Morrison, and she said she'd teach me, and welcome, if you didn't mind. Do you mind, mamma?"

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"You know, dear, I don't like to have you about with the servants, and I never wanted you to become a drudge at home, as so many American girls are. Then you have your lessons to attend to besides."

"Yes, mamma, I know, but it will only take one morning, and I'll not begin till school closes, if you'd rather not. I really would like to so much, mamsie?"

Helen's pet name for her mother was coaxingly spoken, and had its effect. Mrs. Sands yielded.

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"Very well, dear; you may, if you like, only I wish you could wear gloves."

"O mamma! nobody makes pies in gloves. But I needn't put my hands in at all, except for rolling the paste, Morrison says so."

Mrs. Sands was not so silly a woman as she sounds. Born and bred in the West Indies, the constant talk about servants and housekeeping, that met her ears when she came to New York, a young married woman, so puzzled and annoyed her that she somewhat rashly decided that her child should never know anything about such matters. Morrison, the good old cook, had lived with her since Helen was a baby, and all had gone so smoothly that there had never seemed occasion for interference from anybody. And Helen would have grown up in utter ignorance of all practical matters, had not a chance remark of her thrifty New England grandmother piqued her into the voluntary wish of learning.

It was with a good deal of excitement, and a little sense of victory as well, that Helen went downstairs, a few days later, to take the promised lesson. The kitchen looked very cheerful and neat, and Morrison was all ready with her spice-box, eggs, pie-dishes, and great yellow bowl full of strained pumpkin; likewise a big calico apron to tie over Helen's dress. First they made the crust. It was such good fun pinching the soft bits of lard into the nice, dry-feeling flour, that Helen would willingly have prolonged the operation, but Morrison objected. Pastry didn't like to be fingered, she said; and she made Helen wash her hands, and then mix in the ice-water with a thin-bladed knife, cutting and chopping till all was moistened into a rough sort of dough. Next, she produced the rolling-pin, and showed her how to beat the dough with dexterous strokes, up and down, and cross-ways, till it became a smooth paste, which felt as soft as velvet, and then how to roll it into a smooth sheet, lay on the butter in thin flakes, fold and roll again.

"Now wrap this towel all round it, and I'll set it into the ice-chest till we want it," she said. "It'll puff the minute it goes into the oven, never fear; I can always tell. You like it,—don't you,—Miss Helen dear?"

"Yes, indeed, ever so much. I *hope* the pies will be good; grandmamma will be so pleased."

"They'll be good," pronounced Morrison, confidently. "Now sift in plenty of sugar, miss."

So Helen put in "plenty" of sugar, and then, as directed, grated lemon-peel, lemon-juice, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, melted butter, a pinch of salt, beaten eggs, a dash of rose-water, and then a little more sugar, and "just the least taste of cinnamon," till Morrison pronounced the flavor exactly right, and Helen declared that for all she could see, pumpkin-pies were made of anything in the world except pumpkins. Last of all went in a great pour of hot milk; then the pie-dishes were lined, filled, and set in the oven, after being ornamented with all manner of zigzags and curly-queues of paste round their edges; and Helen rushed upstairs to tell her mother that pie-making was "just lovely," and she would like to be a cook always, she thought. By Morrison's advice she wrote the whole process down in a book while it was fresh in her mind, and she was glad afterwards that she had done so, as you will see.

That same afternoon Mrs. Sands went on to Philadelphia, and next morning early Helen and her father started for their journey to Vermont. It was gray, blustering weather, but neither of them cared for that. Papa was in high spirits, and full of fun as a school-boy. Their baggage comprised, besides two valises, a big hamper full of all sorts of nice things for grandmother, game and fruit and groceries, and Helen carried a flat basket in her hand, in which, wrapped in a snowy napkin, reposed one of the precious pies.

"Bless me, how raw it is! It looks as though it were going to snow," said Mr. Sands, as he came in from a walk up and down the platform of one of the little stations at which the train stopped; and five minutes later Helen, with a little scream of surprise, cried out, "Why, papa, it *is* snowing!" Sure enough it was,—in fine snow-flakes, which before long thickened into a heavy fall.

"It will only be a squall," Mr. Sands said; but the conductor shook his head, and remarked that up there so near the mountains there was no calculating on weather. It might stop in half an hour, or it might go on all night: no one could pretend to say beforehand which it would do.

By the time they reached Asham, their stopping-place, the ground was solid white. The wind, too, had risen, and was drifting the snow in all directions. The tavern-keeper at Asham, to whom Mr. Sands went for "a team," advised them to stay all night, but this both Helen and her father agreed was not to be thought of. It was only fourteen miles. Grandmamma was expecting them, and must not be disappointed. So, well wrapped in carriage blankets and buffalo robes, they set out in a light covered rockaway, with a stout horse, their baggage packed in behind them.

Fourteen miles may seem a very short distance or a very long one, according to circumstances. Before they had gone half-way both of them began to think it an extremely long one. The road lay up hill for the greater part of the way. Night was coming on fast, and every moment the drift grew thicker and more confusing. Mr. Sands in his secret heart repented that he had not taken the tavern-keeper's advice, and stayed at Asham. At last the horse, which had halted several times and been urged on again, came to a dead stop. Mr. Sands touched him with the whip, but he would not stir. He jumped up to see what was the matter, and found the poor animal up to his chest in snow. He had wandered from the road a little and plunged into a drift. Mr. Sands tried to turn him toward the road, when, lo, a loud and ominous crack was heard, and Helen gave a scream. One of the shafts had snapped in two.

Matters now looked serious. Mr. Sands undid the harness as fast as possible, for he feared the horse might flounder to release himself, and upset the carriage. Then he climbed into the

rockaway again, and stood up to see if he could anywhere see the light of a house. No; a twinkling beam was visible farther up the hill, about a quarter of a mile away.

"Helen," he said, "I'll have to ask you to sit here quietly for ten minutes or so, while I ride on to a house which I see up there, and get some one to help us. Will you be afraid to be left alone? It's only for a little while."

"N-o; but O papa! must you go? I'm so afraid the horse will kick, or you'll tumble off."

"Never fear,"—trying to laugh,—"I really must go, dear; it's our only chance of getting out of this scrape. Promise me to sit perfectly still, and on no account to leave the carriage." [57]

It seemed much longer than ten minutes before papa got back, but there he was at last, with another man carrying a lantern, both of them white with snow up to their waists.

"All right, Helen," he cried cheerily. "Wrap all the blankets round your shoulders; I'm going to set you on the horse, and Mr. Simmons and I—this is Mr. Simmons, my dear—will walk on either side and hold you on; we'll have you up the hill in a trice."

Helen did not like it at all. The horse felt dreadfully *alive* under her, and jerked so, as he plunged up hill through the snow, that she was constantly afraid of tumbling off. It did not last long, however. In five minutes her father had lifted and carried her in, and set her down in a kitchen, where a woman with a candle in her hand stood waiting for them.

"This is Mrs. Simmons," he said. "She is so kind as to say that she will keep us till to-morrow morning, when perhaps the snow will have stopped, and, at all events, we shall have daylight to find our way with. Mr. Simmons and I are going back now to fetch up the luggage. The rockaway will have to take care of itself till to-morrow, I fancy." [58]

Left alone, Helen looked curiously about her. The kitchen was a bare-looking place to her eyes. There was a stove with a fire in it, a rocking-chair covered with faded "patch," some wooden chairs, a table, and a sort of dresser with dishes. A large wheel for spinning wool stood in one of the windows. Everything was clean, but there was an air of poverty, and to Helen it seemed a most dismal place. She could not imagine how people could live and be happy there.

Mrs. Simmons herself looked very ill and tired.

"I enjoy such poor health," she explained to Helen, as she took some plates and bowls down from the dresser. "I got the ague down to Mill Hollow, where we lived, and we moved up here, hoping to get rid of it. I am some better, but it took me powerful hard yesterday, and I suppose I'll have it bad again to-morrow. Mr. Simmons, he's got behindhand somehow, and it's hard work trying to catch up in these times. What with one thing and another, both of us have felt clean discouraged this fall. Glory, fetch the milk." [59]

"Yes, mother." And out of the buttery came a girl of about Helen's age, with a pan in her hands. She had apparently tumbled out of bed to help in the entertainment of the strangers, for her hair was flying loose, and she looked only half dressed; but she had pretty brown eyes and a bright smile.

"I feel real bad to think I'm out of tea," said Mrs. Simmons. "Father, he was calculating to get some later on, when he'd finished a job of lumber-hauling. And the hens have 'most stopped laying, too; I hain't but four eggs in the house."

"Oh, don't give us the eggs!" cried Helen; "you'll want them yourself for Thanksgiving, I'm sure." [60]

"Thanksgiving! Dear me, so it is!" said Mrs. Simmons. "I'd forgot all about that. Not that it'd have made much difference, any way. You can't make something out of nothin', and that's about what we've come to."

"I've got a pie," cried Helen, with a sudden generous impulse, but feeling a little pang meanwhile, as she recalled her vision of putting the pie into grandmamma's own hands. But where was the pie? She recollected now,—the basket was in her lap when papa lifted her out of the carriage. It must have fallen out, and probably was now buried deep in snow.

A great stamping of boots just then announced the entrance of the two men with the valises and hamper. Mrs. Simmons renewed her apologies about the tea. Hot milk, a little fried pork, two of the eggs, and a loaf of saleratus bread were all she had to offer, but it was very welcome to the hungry travellers. There was some choice tea in grandmother's hamper, but Mr. Sands very rightly judged it better to say nothing about it just then, as it might have seemed that he and Helen were not satisfied with their supper. They ate heartily, and soon after went to bed in two chilly little lofts upstairs, where all the buffalo robes and blankets from the carriage could not *quite* keep them warm. [61]

Helen lay awake a long time, thinking of her own disappointment and grandmamma's, but more still about the Simmons family. How hard and melancholy their life seemed, struggling with poverty and ague up here among the lonely hills, with no doctor near them, and no neighbors! A great sympathy and pity awoke in her heart. Her first impulse, when she roused next morning, was to hurry to the window. It was still snowing, and the drifts seemed deeper than ever! "Oh, dear!" she thought, "we shall have to stay in this forlorn place another day, I am afraid." A more generous thought followed: "If it seems so hard to me to have to spend one day here, what must [62]

it be to live here always?" And she made up her mind that, if they were forced to stay, she would do all she could to make Thanksgiving a little less forlorn than it seemed likely to be to Mrs. Simmons and Glory.

It did look forlorn downstairs in the bare little kitchen. Mrs. Simmons's chill was coming on. She was up and dragging herself about, but she looked quite unfit to be out of bed. Two little children, a boy and a girl, whom Helen had not seen the night before, clung close to her dress, and followed wherever she moved, hiding their shy faces from the strangers. They got over their shyness gradually as Helen laughed, and coaxed them, and by the time breakfast was over had grown good friends.

"Now," said Helen, gayly, after a last glance at the window, which showed the snow-storm still raging, "I am going to propose a plan. You shall go to bed, Mrs. Simmons,—I'm sure you ought to be there at this moment,—and Glory and I will wash the dishes, and we will cook the Thanksgiving dinner." [63]

"Oh, dear! there ain't nothing worth cooking," sighed poor Mrs. Simmons, but she was too ill to make objections. So Glory, or Glorvina, put the kitchen to rights with Helen's help, and then the two girls sat down to consult over dinner.

"Could you roast a turkey, do you think?" asked Helen.

"There ain't no turkey to be roasted," objected Glory.

"Yes, but could you if there were? Because I think there's one in the hamper, papa, and I know grandmamma would let us have it if she knew."

"Why, of course she would. Use everything in the hamper if you like; grandma would never think of objecting, and there's plenty more to be had where those came from," said her father. [64]

So the hamper was unpacked, and the turkey extracted, and a package of tea and another of lump sugar, and a tumbler of currant jelly; and Helen filled a big dish with oranges and white grapes, and the preparations went merrily on. There proved to be half a squash in the cellar, and Glory, wading out in the snow, fetched in a couple more eggs from the barn, so pies were possible. Helen produced her recipe-book.

"Now I'm going to show you just how to make pies," she said; "I only learned myself day before yesterday." And she thought, "How lucky it is that I did learn, for now I can show Glory, and she'll always know. But wouldn't Morrison open her eyes if she could see me?"

The spices and lemons came out of the hamper, of course, and the crust had to be made of salt butter and no lard; but the pies turned out very good, for all that, and no one was in the least disposed to find fault with their flavor. Really, the little dinner was a great success. Glory's potatoes were a little underdone, but that was the only failure. The children ate as though they could never be satisfied. Mr. Simmons cheered up and cracked one or two feeble jokes; and even Mrs. Simmons, propped high in bed to survey the festive scene, called out that it "looked something like," and she didn't know when there had been so much laughing going on in their house before. [65]

The clock struck three just as the last nicely washed plate was set away on the dresser. Helen quite jumped at the sound. How short, after all, the day had seemed which promised to be so long and dismal! And just then a bright yellow ray streamed through the window, and, looking out, she saw blue sky.

"Papa," she screamed, "it has cleared up! I do believe we shall get to grandmamma's to-night, after all!" [66]

And so they did. Mr. Sands, with Mr. Simmons's assistance, fitted the rockaway on to a pair of old sledge-runners, and, with many warm good-byes from the whole family, they drove off. Just at sunset they reached Morrow Hill, and grandma was so glad to see them, and they so glad to get there, that it was easy to forget all their disappointment and delay. In fact, after a little while Helen convinced herself that the whole thing was rather a piece of good fortune than otherwise.

"For, don't you see, papa," she exclaimed, "we had all Thanksgiving evening with grandmother, you know, and she had it with us, so we only lost part of our pleasant time? But if it hadn't been for the snow and the breakdown, the poor Simmonses wouldn't have had any Thanksgiving at all—not a bit; so it really was a great deal better, don't you see that it was, papa?"

AT FIESOLE.

 [67]

FIESOLE is a quaint old town which perches on a hill-top above the valley of the Arno and the city of Florence. You must not pronounce it as it is spelt, but like this—Fee-es-o-lee. From the Florence streets people catch glimpses of its bell-towers and roofs shining above the olive orchards and vineyards of the hillside. A white road winds upward toward it in long, easy zigzags, and seems to say, "Come with me and I will show you something pretty."

Not long ago there were two girls in Florence to whom, plainly as road could speak, the white road seemed to utter these very words. Pauline and Molly Hale were the names of these girls. It was six months since they had left America with their father and mother, and it seemed much longer, because so much had happened in the time. First, the sea voyage, not pleasant, and yet not exactly unpleasant, because papa got better all the way, and that made mamma happy. Now papa would be quite well at once, they thought. His people (for papa was a clergyman) had sent him away for that purpose. They were not a rich people, but each gave a little, and all together it made enough to carry the pastor and his family across the sea and keep them there one year, with very prudent management. The Hales, therefore, did not travel about as most people do, but went straight to Italy, where they hoped to find that sun and warm air which are an invalid's best medicines.

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"Going straight to Italy" means, however, a great many pleasant things by the way. Molly was always reminding Maria Matilda, her doll, of the sights she had seen and the superior advantages she enjoyed over the dolls at home.

[69]

After this mention of a doll, what will you say when I tell you that Molly was almost thirteen? Most girls of thirteen scorn to play with dolls, but Molly was not of their number. She was childish for her years, and possessed a faithful little heart, which clung to Maria Matilda as to an old friend whom it would be unkind to lay aside.

"First, there was Paris," Molly would say to her. "No, first there was *Deep*, where the people all talked so queerly that we couldn't understand a word. That was funny, Matilda, wasn't it? Then, don't you recollect that beautiful church which we saw when we went past *Ruin*?" (Molly meant Rouen, but I am sorry to say her pronunciation of French names was rather queer.) "And Paris too, where I took you to walk in the gardens, and papa let us both ride in a whirligig. None of the home dollies have ever ridden in whirligigs, have they? They won't understand what you mean unless I draw them a picture on my slate. Then we got into the cars, and went and went till we came to that great dark tunnel. Weren't we frightened? And you cried, Matilda—I heard you. You needn't look so ashamed, though, for it *was* horrid. But we got out of it at last, though I thought we never should; and here we are at the padrona's, and it's ever so nice, only I wish papa would come back."

[70]

For Florence had proved too cold, and papa had joined a party and gone off to Egypt, leaving mamma and the children to live quietly and cheaply at Signora Goldi's boarding-house. It was a dingy house in the old part of Florence, but for all that it was a very interesting place to live in. The street in which the house stood was extremely narrow. High buildings on either side shut out the sun, the cobblestone pavement was always dirty, but all day long a stream of people poured through it wearing all sorts of curious clothes, talking all sorts of languages, and selling all sorts of things. Men with orange-baskets on their heads strolled along, crying, "Oranges, sweet oranges!" Others, with panniers of flowers, chanted, "Fiori, belli fiori!" Pedlars displayed their wares or waved gay stuffs; boys held up candied fruits, wood-carvings, and toys; women went to and fro bearing trays full of a chocolate-colored mixture dotted with the white kernels of pinecones. This looked very rich and nice, and the poor people bought great slices of it. Pauline once invested a penny therein, but a single taste proved enough; it was sour and oily at once, and she gave the rest to a small Italian girl, who looked delighted, and gobbled it up in huge mouthfuls. Whenever they went out to walk, there were fresh pleasures. The narrow street led directly to a shining sunlit river, which streamed through the heart of the city like a silver ribbon. Beautiful bridges spanned this river, some reared on graceful arches, some with statues at either end, one set all along its course by quaint stalls filled with gold and silver filigree, chains of amber, and turquoises blue as the sky. All over the city were delightful pictures, churches, and gardens, open and free to all who chose to come. Every day mamma and the children went somewhere and saw something, and, in spite of papa's absence, the winter was a happy one.

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[72]

Going to and fro in the city, the children had often looked up the Fiesole hill, which is visible from many parts of Florence, and Pauline had conceived a strong wish to go there. Molly did not care so much, but as she always wanted to do what Pauline did, she joined her older sister in begging to go. Mamma, however, thought it too far for a walk, and carriage hire cost something; so she said no, and the girls were forced to content themselves with "making believe" what they would do if ever they went there,—a sort of play in which they both delighted. None of the things they imagined proved true when they did go there, as you shall hear.

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It was just as they were expecting papa back, that, coming in one day from a walk with Signora Goldi, Pauline and Molly found mamma hard at work packing a travelling-bag. She looked very pale, and had been crying. No wonder, for the mail had brought a letter to say that papa, travelling alone from Egypt, had landed at Brindisi very ill with Syrian fever. The kind strangers who wrote the letter would stay with and take care of him till mamma could get there, but she must come at once.

"What *shall* I do?" cried poor Mrs. Hale, appealing in her distress to Signora Goldi. "I cannot take the children into a fever-room, and even if that were safe, the journey costs so much that it would be out of the question. Mr. Hale left me only money enough to last till his return. After settling with you and buying my ticket, I shall have very little remaining. Help me, padrona! Advise me what to do."

[74]

Signora Goldi's advertisement said, "English spoken," but the English was of a kind which English people found it hard to understand. Her kind heart, however, stood her instead of language, and helped her to guess the meaning of Mrs. Hale's words.

"Such peety!" she said. "Had I know, I not have let rooms for week after. The signora said 'let' and she sure to go, so I let, else the *piccoli* should stay wiss me. Now what?" and she rubbed her nose hard, and wrinkled her forehead in a puzzled way. "I have!" she cried at last, her face beaming. "How the *piccolini* like go to Fiesole for a little? My brother who dead, he leave Engleis wife. She lady-maid once, speak Engleis well as me!—better! She have *pensione*—very small, but good—ah, so good, and it cost little, with air *si buono, si fresco!*"

The signora was drifting into Italian without knowing it, but was stopped by the joyous exclamations of the two girls. [75]

"Fiesole! Oh, mamma! just what we wanted so much!" cried Pauline. "Do let us go there!"

"Do, do!" chimed in Molly. "I saw the padrona's sister once, and she's so nice. Say yes, please, mamma."

The "yes" was not quite a happy one, but what could poor Mrs. Hale do? No better plan offered, time pressed, she hoped not to be obliged to stay long away from the children, and, as the signora said, the Fiesole hill-top must be airy and wholesome. So the arrangement was made, the terms settled, a carriage was called, and in what seemed to the girls a single moment, mamma had rattled away, with the signora to buy her ticket and see her off at the station. They looked at each other disconsolately, and their faces grew very long.

"We're just like orphans in a book," sobbed Pauline at last, while Molly watered Matilda's best frock with salt tears. The signora had a specially nice supper that night, and petted them a great deal, but they were very homesick for mamma, and cried themselves to sleep. [76]

Matters seemed brighter when they woke up next morning to find a lovely day, such a day as only Italy knows, with sunshine like gold, sky of clearest blue, and the river valley shining through soft mists like finest filtered rainbows. By a happy chance the Fiesole sister-in-law came to Florence that morning, and drove up to the door in a droll little cart drawn by a mouse-colored mule, with a green carrot-top stuck over his left ear and a bell round his neck. She gladly agreed to lodge the children, and her pleasant old face and English voice made them at once at home with her. There was just room in the cart for their trunk, and about five in the afternoon they set out, perched on the narrow bench in front, one on each side of their new friend, and holding each other's hands tightly behind her ample back. Signora Bianchi was the sister-in-law's name, but "padrona" was easier to say, and they called her so from the beginning. [77]

The hill-road was nowhere steep, but each winding turn took them higher and higher above Florence. They could see the curvings of the river, the bridges, the cathedral dome, and the tall, beautiful bell-tower, which they had been told was the work of the great artist Giotto. Further on, the road was shut in between stone walls. Over the tops of these hung rose-vines, full of fresh pink roses, though it was early March. Pauline and Molly screamed with pleasure, and the padrona, driving her mule close under the wall, dragged down a branch and let them gather the flowers for themselves, which was delightful. She would not stop, however, when, a little later, they came to fields gay with red and purple anemones, yellow tulips, and oddly colored wild lilies so dark as to be almost black; there were plenty of such on top of the hill, she said, and they must not be too late in getting home. The black lilies were *giglios*,—the emblem or badge of the city of Florence; the children had not seen them before, but they remembered the form of the flower in the carved shields over the door of some of the old buildings. [78]

The road ended in a small paved *piazza*, which is the Italian name for an open square. All about it stood old buildings, houses and churches, and a very ancient cathedral with a dirty leather curtain hanging before its door. Passing these, the mule clattered down a narrow side-street, or rather lane. The streets in Florence had seemed dark and dirty; but what were they compared with this alley, in which the wheels of the little cart grazed the walls on either side as it passed along? Rickety flights of outside stairs led to the upper stories of the buildings; overhead, lines of linen, hung out to dry, were flapping in the wind. An ill-smelling stream of water trickled over the rough cobble-stone pavement. Jolt, jolt, jolt!—then the mule turned suddenly into a dark place which looked like a shabby stable-yard. It was the ground-floor of the padrona's house, and this was the place where Pauline and Molly were to stay! They looked at each other with dismayed faces. [79]

But the padrona called them to follow, and led the way up one stone staircase after another till they came to the third story. Here things were pleasanter. It was plain and bare; the floors were of brick, there were no carpets, and the furniture was scanty and old, but the rooms were large and airy, and through the open casement bright rays of sunshine streamed in. Pauline ran to the window, and behold, instead of the dirty lane, she saw the open piazza, and beyond, a glimpse of the blue hills and the Florence valley! She called Molly, and, perched on the broad sill, they watched the sunset and chattered like happy birds, while the padrona bustled to and fro, preparing supper and spreading coarse clean linen on the beds of a little chamber which opened from the sitting-room. The padrona's kitchen was about the size of an American closet. The stove was a stone shelf with two holes in it, just big enough to contain a couple of quarts of charcoal. It was like a doll's kitchen, Molly thought; and Pauline stared when she saw the padrona produce a palm-leaf fan and begin to fan the fire, as if it were faint and needed to be revived. But as she gazed, the charcoal was coaxed into a glow, the little pots and pans bubbled, and hey, presto! supper was ready, with half the trouble and a quarter the fuel which would have been needed to set one of our big home ranges going. It was a queer supper, but very good, the children thought; [80]

their long drive had made them hungry, and the omelette, salad, and *polenta*, or fried mush, tasted delicious. Everything was nice but the bread, which was dark in color and had an unpleasant sour taste. The padrona smiled when she saw them put aside their untasted slices, and said that she too used to dislike Italian bread, but that now she preferred it to any other.

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The padrona was delighted with her young visitors. She had long been a widow. One of her sons was in the army, and seldom at home; the other helped her about the house and tilled a little meadow which belonged to them. She had no daughter to keep her company, and the sweet, bright-faced American girls pleased her greatly. She helped the sisters to undress, and tucked them into their beds as kindly as any old nurse, and they fell asleep with her pleasant voice in their ears: "Good-night and good dreams, little miss."

The morrow brought another fine day, and the girls improved it for a ramble about the quaint town. It seemed to them the very *oldest* place they had ever seen—and, in fact, Fiesole is older far than Florence, of which it was first the cradle and afterward the foe. They stood a long time before the windows of the straw-shop, choosing the things they would like to buy *if* they had any money! Pauline fell in love with a straw parasol, and Molly hankered after a work-basket for mamma. Both of them felt that it was dreadful to be poor, but there was no help for it. Then they climbed to an upper terrace and sat a long time looking on the fine view it commanded, and talking in gestures to some brown little children who came up to beg from them. After that, they lifted the curtain over the cathedral door, and stole quietly about the ancient church. It was dark and shabby and worm-eaten; but as they wandered to and fro they came upon beautiful things,—tombs of sculptured marble with figures of saints and madonnas, wreaths of marble flowers, bits of old carved wood as black as ebony. It was strange to find such treasures hidden away in the dust and gloom, and to think that there they were, dusty and gloomy and old, before Columbus discovered the very new continent which we call America! A queer smell breathed about the place, a smell of must and age and dried-up incense. Pauline and Molly were glad to get away from it and feel the fresh air and the sunshine again. They rambled on to the western slope of the hill, and a little way down, where the land descends in terraces to the wooded valley below, they came upon the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre. They had never seen an amphitheatre before, but they guessed what it was from a picture which mamma had shown them. On the ledges which once were seats, where spectators seated in rows had watched the lions and the gladiators fight, crowds of purple violets now lifted their sweet faces to the sky.

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After that, the amphitheatre became their favorite walk, and they went back every day. The padrona warned them against sitting long on the ground or staying out till the sunset dew fell, but they heeded what she said very little; it seemed impossible that so pleasant a spot could have any harm about it. But at last came a morning when Pauline recollected the padrona's warnings, with a great frightened heart-jump, for Molly waked up hot and thirsty, and, when she lifted her head from the pillow, let it fall back again, and complained of being dizzy. The padrona made her some tea, and after a while she felt better and got up. But all that day and the next she looked pale, and dragged one foot after the other as she went about, and the third day fever came upon her in good earnest. Tea did no good this time, and she lay still and heavy, with burning hands and flushed cheeks. The padrona tried various simple medicines, and Pauline sat all day bathing Molly's head and fanning her, but neither medicine nor fanning was of use; and as night came on, and the fever grew higher, Molly began to toss and call for mamma, and to cry out about her pillow, which was stuffed with wool and very hard.

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"I don't like this pillow, Pauline—indeed I don't, it makes my neck ache so! Why don't you take it away, Pauline, and give me a nice soft pillow, such as we used to have at home? And I want some ice, and some good American water to drink. This water is bad. I can't drink it. Make the ice clink in the tumbler, please—because if I hear it clink I shan't be thirsty any more. And call mamma. I must see mamma. Mamma!"

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And Molly tried to get up, and then tumbled back and fell into a doze, while poor Pauline sat beside her with a lump in her throat which seemed to grow worse every moment, and to bid fair to choke her entirely if it didn't stop. She did not dare to sob aloud, for fear of rousing Molly, but the tears ran quietly down her cheeks as she thought of home and mamma. Where was she? How was papa? Why didn't they write? And, oh dear! what should she, should she do, if Molly were to be very ill in that lonely place, where there was no doctor or any of the nice things which people in sickness need so much? No one can imagine how forlorn Pauline felt—that is, no one who has not tried the experiment of taking care of a sick friend in a foreign land, where the ways and customs are strange and uncomfortable, and the necessaries of good nursing cannot be had.

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Nobody in the world could be kinder than was the padrona to her young invalid guest. Night after night she sat up, all day long she watched and nursed and cooked and comforted. Pauline clung to this friend in need as to the only helper left in the wide world. Beppo, the padrona's son, walked into Florence and brought out a little Italian doctor, who ordered beef-tea, horrified Pauline by a hint of bleeding, and left, promising to come again, which promise he didn't keep. Pauline was glad that he did not; she felt no confidence in the little doctor, and she knew, besides, that doctors cost money, and the small sum which mamma left was almost gone. Day after day passed, Molly growing no better, the padrona more anxious, Pauline more unhappy. It seemed as if years and years had gone by since mamma left them,—almost as if it were a dream that they ever had a mamma, or a home, or any of the happy things which now looked so sadly far away.

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Then came the darkest day of all, when Molly lay so white and motionless that Pauline thought

her dead; when the padrona sat for hours, putting a spoonful of something between the pale lips every little while, but never speaking, and the moments dragged along as though shod with lead. Morning grew to noon, noon faded into the dimness of twilight, still the white face on the pillow did not stir, and still the padrona sat silently and dropped in her spoonfuls. At last she stopped, laid down the spoon, bent over Molly, and listened. Was any breath at all coming from the quiet lips?

"Oh, padrona, is she dead?" sobbed Pauline, burying her face in the bedclothes.

"No, she is asleep," said the padrona. Then she hid her own face and said a prayer of thankfulness, while Pauline wept for joy, hushing herself as much as possible, that Molly might not be disturbed. [88]

All that night and far into the morning the blessed sleep continued, and when Molly awoke the fever was gone. She was very white, and as weak as a baby; but Pauline and the padrona were happy again, for they knew that she was going to get well.

So another week crept by, each day bringing a little more strength and appetite to Molly, and a little more color to her pale face, and then the padrona thought she might venture to sit up. They propped her up in a big chair with many pillows ("brickbats" Molly called them), and had just pulled her across the room to the window, when a carriage rattled on the stones below, somebody ran upstairs, and into the room burst mamma! Yes, the little mamma herself, pale as Molly almost, from the fright she had gone through; but so overjoyed to see them, and so relieved at finding Molly up and getting well, that there was nothing for it but a hearty cry, in which all took part, and which did them all a great deal of good. [89]

Then came explanations. Papa was a great deal better. The doctor thought the fever would do him good in the end rather than harm. But he was still weak, and mamma had left him to rest at the hotel in Florence while she flew up the hill to her children. Why didn't she write? She *had* written, again and again, but the letters had gone astray somehow, and none of the girls' notes had reached her except one from Molly, written just after they went to Fiesole. I may as well say now that all these missing letters followed them to America three months later, with a great deal of postage to be paid on them; but they were not of much use *then*, as you can imagine!

There was so much to say and to hear that it seemed as though they could never get through. Pauline held mamma's hand tight, and cried and laughed by turns. [90]

"It was dreadful!" she said. "It was just exactly as if you and papa and everybody we knew were dead and we were left all alone. And I thought Molly would die too, and then what would have become of me? The padrona has been so kind—you can't think how kind. She sat up nine nights with Molly, and always said she wasn't tired; but I knew she was. I used to think it must be the nicest place in the world up here at Fiesole, but I never want to see it again in all my life."

"Don't say that, for Molly has got well here. And the good padrona too! You ought to love Fiesole for her sake."

"So I ought. And I do love her. But you'll not ever go away and leave us *anywhere* again, will you, mamma?"

"Not if I can help it," replied mamma, speaking over Molly's head, which was nestled comfortably on her shoulder. There were tears in her eyes as she spoke. It had not been possible to help it, but the tender mother's heart felt it a wrong to her children that they should have been without her in sickness. [91]

It was another week before Molly could be moved. Mamma drove up twice during that time, bringing oranges and wine and all sorts of nice things, and the last time a parcel with a present in it for the children to give to the padrona. It was a pretty silk shawl and a small gold pin to fasten it. Pauline and Molly were enchanted to make this gift, and the padrona admired the shawl extremely; but Mrs. Hale sorrowfully longed to be richer, that she might heap many tokens of gratitude in the kind hands which had worked so lovingly for her little girls in their trouble.

"I can't bear to say good-bye," were Molly's last words as she leaned from the carriage for a parting hug. "Dear padrona, how I wish you would just come with us to America and live there. We would call you 'aunty' and love you so, and be so glad, you can't think! Do come!" [92]

But the padrona, smiling and tearful, shook her head and declared that she could never leave her boys and the hill-top and old neighbors, but must stay in Fiesole as long as she lived. So with many kisses and blessings the good-byes were uttered, and out of the narrow street and across the piazza rattled the carriage, and so down the hill-road to Florence.

Pauline and Molly are safe in America now. They tell the girls at school a great deal about what they saw and where they went, but they don't talk much of the time of Molly's illness; and when Matilda Maria, who lives in a drawer now, entertains the other dolls with tales of travel, she skips that. It is still too fresh in their memories, and too sad, for them to like to speak of it. But sometimes, after they go to bed at night, they put their heads on the same pillow and whisper to each other about the old church, the amphitheatre, the padrona, those days of fever, and all the other things that happened to them when mamma went away and left them alone at Fiesole.



PROMPTLY the bell tinkled for noon recess in the red school-house, and boys and girls came trooping out into the sunshine, which was warm as summer that day. Nobody stayed behind except Miss Sparks, the teacher. She turned the damper in the stove to make it warmer, and put on more wood; then took a roll of bread and butter and a large pickled cucumber out of her desk and sat down to lunch, and to read Young's "Night Thoughts," which somebody had told her was an "improving" book. The heat soon made her head ache, and "Night Thoughts" and the cucumber aiding, the children, had they only known it, were in a fair way to pass an extremely unpleasant afternoon.

Luckily they did not know it, otherwise the pleasure of the recess would have been spoiled, which would have been a pity, for the recess was very pleasant. There was the sun for one thing; and real, warm, yellow sun is a treat in April, not always to be had. There were the woods, beginning to be beautiful, although not a leaf-bud was yet visible. Spring was awake, and busy at her silent work, varnishing brown boughs to glossy brightness, tinting shoots and twigs with pink and yellow and soft red colors, arranging surprises everywhere. The children could not have put into words the feeling which made the day so delightful, but all were aware of it, and each, in his or her way, prepared to enjoy the hour. One tiny snow-drift remained in a leaf-strewn hollow. The boys found it out, and fell to snow-balling with the zest of those who do not hope to see snow again for many a long month. Big girls, with arms about each other's waists, walked to and fro, whispering together. The smaller children cuddled into a sunny fence corner, and, like Wordsworth's village maid,

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"Took their little porringers,
And ate their dinners there."

A group of girls, not so big as those, nor so little as these, strolled off into the woods, talking as they went.

"Now you just hush up, Winnie Boker," said one. "It's no use, for we won't have her. She's been Queen ever so many times, and now it's somebody else's turn. There are other girls in town besides Blossom, I guess."

"Oh yes, Marianne; it isn't *that*," broke in Winnie, the words running out of her eager mouth so fast that they tumbled over each other. "It isn't that at all. You'd make a first-rate Queen, or so would Arabella or Eunice. But, don't you see, Blossom always *was* Queen, and now she's sick I'm afraid she'd feel badly if we chose somebody else."

"Dear me, what nonsense!" exclaimed Arabella, a tall girl in purple calico, with sharp black eyes and a Roman nose. "It wasn't fair a bit, ma says, to have Blossom always. Ma says other people have got rights too. You needn't be so fiery about that stuck-up Blossom, Winnie."

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"Oh, I'm not," began Winnie, peaceably, "but—"

"My father says that Blossom is the prettiest girl in the whole township," broke in Charlie Starr, excitedly; "and it's real mean of you to call her stuck-up. Don't you recollect how sweet she looked last year in her white dress, and what a pretty speech she made when George Thorne put the crown on her head? *She* never said unkind things or called anybody names! She's always been May-Queen, and I say it's a shame to leave her out just because she's sick."

"You're a goose," responded Arabella. "Who wants a sick Queen of the May? She'll never be well again, the doctor says; and as for her beauty, that's gone for good. Ma declares that it's absurd to call her Blossom any more. It isn't her real name, only her pa named her so when she was little, because he was so proud of her looks. Her real name's Sarah Jane, and I'm going to call her Sarah Jane always. So there now, Charlotte Starr!"

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"You bad girl!" cried Charlie, almost in tears. "How can you! Poor dear Blossom!"

"Stop quarrelling," said Laura Riggs, "and listen to my plan. Blossom can't be Queen, anyhow, don't you see, because she's too sick to come to the celebration. So what's the use of fighting about her?"

"I thought we could go to her, and put on the crown and all, and it would be *such* a surprise," ventured Winnie, timidly. "She'd be so pleased."

"I suppose she would," sneered Arabella, "only, you see, we don't mean to do it."

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"I propose that we call all the boys and girls together after school, and vote who shall be Queen," went on Laura. "Then to-morrow we can go a flower-hunting, and have the wreath all ready for next day. It's splendid that May-day comes on Saturday this year."

"I know who I shall vote for,—and I,—and I," cried the children.

Winnie and Charlotte did not join in the cry. They moved a little way off, and looked sadly at each other. To them, poor Blossom, sick and neglected, seemed still the rightful Queen of the May.

"I've thought of a plan," whispered Charlie.

"What?"

But the answer was so softly spoken that nobody but Winnie could hear.

Did I say *nobody*? I was wrong. Certain fine ears which were listening heard all, question and answer both. These ears belonged to a little hepatica, who had stolen up very near the surface of the ground to hearken, and, with a tiny leaf-hand curled behind her lilac ear, had caught every syllable. Whatever the secret was, it pleased her, for she clapped both hands and called out,—

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"Listen! listen! Hepsy, Patty, Violet,—all of you,—listen!"

"What is it—what?" cried the other flowers, crowding near her.

"Didn't you hear what those two little girls were saying,—Winnie and—what *is* her name—Charlie?"

"No, we heard nothing. We were listening to the tiresome ones who quarrelled. How horrid children are!"

"Go a flower-hunting indeed," tittered a bloodroot. "They are welcome to hunt, but they will find no flowers."

"Indeed they won't. I'd bite if they tried to pick me," said a dog-tooth violet.

"Ach! fancy their fingers at your stem," shuddered a pale wind-flower.

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"How little they guessed that we were listening to it all," laughed a white anemone.

"Ring-a-ling, ring-a-ling,
We'll be as late as we can this spring,"

sang a columbine.

"We know when to go and when to stay; when to open and when to shut," said a twin-flower.

"Where is Mamma Spring?" inquired the dog-tooth violet.

"On the other side the wood," replied the columbine. "But she can't be interrupted just now. She's very busy cutting out Dutchman's Breeches. There are five hundred pairs to be finished before night."

"All of the same everlasting old pattern," grumbled a trillium.

"But listen; you don't listen," urged the lilac hepatica. "*All* the children didn't quarrel. My two—the two I liked—were gentle and sweet, and they have a plan—a kind plan—about somebody named Blossom. They want to give her a surprise with flowers and a wreath, and make her Queen of the May, because she is ill and lies in bed. Let us help. I like them; and Blossom is a pretty name."

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"Are you quite sure they did not quarrel?" asked the wind-flower, anxiously. "It made me shiver to hear the others."

"No, they didn't quarrel. When the rest would not listen, they moved away and made their little plan in a whisper."

"And what was the plan?" inquired the bloodroot.

"Oh, they are wise little things. The others are going to have a 'celebration' on Saturday, with a great deal of pie and cake and fuss. I shall tell Mamma Spring to order up an east wind and freeze them well, little monsters! But my two are coming into the woods quietly to-morrow to search for flowers. I heard Charlie tell Winnie that she knew where the first May-flowers always come out, and they would look there. We know too, don't we? In the hollow behind the beech-wood, on the south bank."

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"They're not there yet," said the columbine, yawning.

"No, but they're all packed and ready," said the lilac hepatica. "Do let us telegraph them to start at once. I somehow feel as if I should like to please Blossom too."

So the trillium, who was telegraph operator, stooped down and dragged up a thread-like root, fine as wire.

"What is the message?" he asked.

"Be—in—flower—by—to-morrow—noon—for—Charlie—and—Winnie," dictated the hepatica. "Precisely ten words."

"All right," responded the bloodroot, with his fingers on the wire. Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap; the message was sent, and presently came an answering vibration.

"All right. We are off." It was the reply of the May-flowers.

"What a fine thing is the telegraph!" sighed a sentimental sand-violet, while the hepatica rubbed her little lilac palms gleefully, and exclaimed,—

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"I flatter myself that job is as good as done. Hurrah for Queen Blossom!"

The other girls did not notice Winnie and Charlie particularly next day as they stole from the rest and crept away almost on tiptoe to the south bank, where the arbutus *might* be in bloom. Drifted leaves hid the bottom of the hollow. At first sight there was no promise of flowers; but our little maids were too wise to be discouraged. Carefully they picked their way down, brushed aside the brown leaves, and presently a shriek from both announced discovery.

"Oh, the darlings!" cried Winnie.

There they were, the prompt, punctual May-flowers, so lately arrived that only half their leaves were uncurled, and the dust of travel still lay on their tendrils. For all that, they were not too tired to smile at the happy faces that bent over them as the little girls lifted the leaf blankets and gently drew them from their hiding-place. Pale buds winked and brightened; the fuller flowers opened wide pink eyes; all shook their ivory incense-bottles at once, and sent out sweet smells, which mixed deliciously with the fragrance of fresh earth, of moving sap, and sun-warmed mosses.

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"Shouldn't you think they had come out on purpose?" said Winnie, kissing one of the pinkest clusters.

"We did! we did!" cried the May-flowers in chorus. But the children did not understand the flower-language, though the flowers knew well what the children said. Flowers are very clever, you see; much cleverer than little girls.

Winnie and Charlie hid their treasures in a tin dinner-pail, pouring in a little water to keep them fresh, and carefully shutting the lid. They did not want to have their secret found out.

Going home, they met the others, looking somewhat disconsolate.

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"Where *have* you been?" they cried. "We looked everywhere for you."

"Oh, in the woods," said Winnie, while Charlie asked,—

"Did you find any flowers?"

"Not one," cried Arabella, crossly; "the spring is so late; it's a shame. Carrie Briggs is chosen Queen, and Miriam Gray is going to lend us some paper flowers for the crown. They will do just as well."

"Paper flowers!" began Charlie, indignantly; but Winnie checked her, and pretty soon their path turned off from that of the others.

"Come early to-morrow and help us make the throne," called out Marianne.

"We can't: we've got something else to do," called back Charlie.

"What?"

"We're going to see Blossom."

"Oh, pshaw! Do let that everlasting Sarah Jane alone, and come and have a good time," screamed Arabella after them.

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Winnie laughed and shook her head. The others went on.

Blossom lay in bed next morning. She always lay in bed now, and it was pitiful to see what a pale blossom she had become. Only a year before her cheeks had been rosier, her limbs more active, than those of any of the children who daily passed her window on their way to school. One unlucky slip on the ice had brought all this to an end, and now the doctor doubted if ever she could get up and be well and strong as she used to be. The pretty name, given in her days of babyhood, sounded sadly now to the parents who watched her so anxiously; but no name could be too sweet, her mother thought, for the dear, patient child, who bore her pain so brightly and rewarded all care and kindness with such brave smiles. Blossom she was still, though white and thin, and Blossom she would always be, although she might never bloom again as once she did, until set in the Lord's garden, where no frosts come to hurt the flowers.

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"Happy May-day," she said, as her mother came in. "I wonder what the girls are doing. Winnie didn't come yesterday. I don't even know who is to be Queen. Have you heard, mamma?"

"I shouldn't think they'd want to have any Queen on such a cold day as this," replied mamma. "Look how the boughs are blowing in the wind. It feels like March out doors."

"Oh, they're sure to want a Queen," said Blossom. "May-day is such fun. I used to like it better than any day in the year."

"Somebody wants to spake to ye, ma'am, if you pl'ase," said Norah, putting her head in at the door.

"Very well. Blossom, dear, you don't mind being left alone for a minute?"

"Oh no, indeed. I've such a nice book here." But Blossom did not open her book after mamma went away, but lay looking out of the window to where the elm-boughs were rocking in the wind. Her face grew a little sad.

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"How nice it used to be!" she said to herself.

Just then she heard a queer noise in the entry—drumming, and something else which sounded like music. Next, the door opened, and a procession of two marched in. Charlie was the head of the procession. She wore a pink-and-white calico, and tied about her neck with a pink string was Willie Smith's drum, borrowed for the occasion. Winnie, in her best blue gingham, brought up the rear, her mouth full of harmonica. Winnie also carried a flat basket, covered with a white napkin, and the two girls kept step as they marched across the room to Blossom's bedside, who lay regarding them with eyes wide open from amazement.

"Happy May-day, Queen Blossom," sang Charlie, flourishing her drumsticks.

"Happy May-day, Queen Blossom," chimed in Winnie, taking the harmonica from her mouth.

"Happy May-day," responded Blossom.

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"But—how funny—what do you call me Queen Blossom for?"

"Because you *are* Queen, and we have come to crown you," replied Charlie. Then she laid down the drumsticks, lifted the white napkin, and in a solemn tone began to repeat these verses, which she and Winnie—with a little help from somebody, I guess—had written the evening before.

Never mind who the others choose;
You are the Queen for us;
They're welcome to their paper flowers
And fuss.

We bring our Queen a wreath of May,
And put it on her head,
And crown her sweetest, though she lies
In bed.

These flowers, dear Blossom, bloomed for you,
The fairest in the land;
Wear them, and give your subjects leave to kiss
Your hand.

Charlie finished the verses with great gravity. Then, drawing the May-wreath from the basket, she put it on Blossom's head, after which, instead of kissing the royal hand, according to programme, she clapped both her own and began to dance about the bed exclaiming,—

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"Wasn't that nice? Aren't they pretty? We made them up ourselves—Winnie and I. Why, Blossom, you're crying."

In fact, Queen Blossom *was* crying.

It was only a very little cry—just a drop or two, with a rainbow to follow. In another minute Blossom had winked the tears away, and was smiling brightly.

"I didn't mean to cry," she exclaimed, "only I was so surprised. I thought you would all be busy to-day, and nobody would come. I never dreamed that I should be made Queen of the May again. How kind you are, dear Charlie and Winnie, and where *did* you get the flowers—real May-flowers? Nobody has begun to look for them yet."

"They came out on purpose for you," persisted Charlie; and the May-buds smiled and nodded approvingly as she said so.

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Next, Winnie opened her basket, and behold! a cake, with white icing, and in the middle a pink thing meant for a crown, but looking more like a cuttle-fish, because of the icing's having melted a little. Mrs. Boker had stayed up late the night before to bake and ice this May-day loaf. She, too, loved Blossom, and it pleased her that Winnie should plan for the enjoyment of her sick friend.

A knife was brought, and slices cut. Blossom lay on her pillows, nibbling daintily, as befits a Queen. Her subjects, perched on the bed, ate with the appetite of commoners. The sun struggled out, and, in spite of the east wind, sent a broad yellow ray into the window. Blossom's May-wreath made the air delicious; there could not have been found a merrier party.

"Please, dear Duchess, take off my crown for a minute," said Blossom, with a pretty air of command.

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The Duchess, otherwise Charlie, obeyed, and laid the wreath on the coverlet just under the royal nose.

"How lovely, lovely, lovely it is!" said Blossom, with a long sigh of delight.

"The sun is streaming exactly into your eyes, dear," said her mother.

She opened the window to close the shutter. A sharp, sudden gust of wind blew in, and mamma pulled the sash down quickly lest Blossom should be chilled. Nobody noticed that one of the May-flowers, as if watching its chance, detached itself from the wreath, and flew out of window on the back of the interloping wind. But it did.

The wind evidently knew what was expected of it, for it bore the May-flower along to the

woods, and laid it on the brown earth in a certain sunny spot. Then, like a horse released from rider, it pranced away, while the flower, putting her pink lips to the ground, called in a tiny voice,—

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"Hepatica—Hepsy dear, are you there?"

"Yes; what is it?" came back an answering voice, which sounded very close. It was the voice of the lilac hepatica. She and her companions were much nearer the surface than they had been two days before.

"It has all gone off so nicely," went on the May-blossom. "We were there in time, and I must say I never saw nicer children than that Winnie and Charlie. They picked us so gently that it scarcely hurt at all. As for Blossom, she's a little dear. Her eyes loved us, and how tenderly she handled our stems. I really wanted to stay with her, only I had such a good chance to go, and I thought you would all want to hear. It was the nicest May-day party I ever saw."

"More—tell us more," said the underground flowers.

"There is no more to tell," replied the May-flower, faintly. "It is cold out here, and I am growing sleepy. Good-night."

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After that there was silence in the woods.

Winnie and Charlie never knew how the dear little flower-people had conspired to make their May-day happy. Perhaps Blossom guessed, for when she laid aside her wreath that night she kissed the soft petals, which had begun to droop a little, and whispered gently,—

"Thank you, darlings."

A SMALL BEGINNING.

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LITTLE ground-floor room, a little fire in a small stove, burning dully as fires are apt to do at times when their blaze might be worth something in the way of cheer; out doors the raw gray of a spring thaw; on the window-seat two girls crouched together and looking out with faces as disconsolate as the weather. Such was the picture presented at No. 13 Farewell Street, three years ago last March.

Farewell Street was so named because of its being the customary route of exit from the old cemetery, the point where mourners were supposed to turn for a last look at the gates which had just shut in the newly buried friend; and this association, as well as the glimpse of tall cemetery fence, topped with mournful evergreens which bounded the view, did not tend to make the sad outlook any the less sad on that dismal day. For it was only a fortnight since Delia and Hetty Willett, the girls on the window-seat, had left within those gates the kind old grandmother who for years had stood to them in the stead of father and mother both.

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"The Willetts," as the neighbors called them, using the collective phrase always, were twins, and just eighteen years old. Bearing to each other even a stronger personal likeness than twins customarily possess, they were in other points curiously unlike. Delia was soft and clinging, Hetty vigorous and self-reliant. Delia loved to be guided, Hetty to guide; the former had few independent views and opinions, the latter was brimful of ideas and fancies, plans and purposes; some crude, some foolish, but all her own. Yet, oddly enough, it was Delia, very often, who gave the casting vote in their decisions, for Hetty's love for her slender twin was a sentiment so deep and intense that she often yielded against her own better sense and judgment, simply for the pleasure of yielding to what Delia wished. Delia in return adored her sister, waited on her, petted, consoled, "exactly as if she were Hetty's wife," Aunt Polly said, "and the worst was they suited each other so well that no one else would ever suit either of them, and they were bound to die old maids in consequence!"

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But eighteen can laugh at such auguries, and there was no thought or question of marriage in the minds of the sisters as they crouched that afternoon close together on the old window-seat.

A very different question absorbed them, and a perplexing one; how they were to live, namely, and to keep together while doing so, which meant pretty much the same thing to them both. Grandmother's death had left them with so very, very little. Her annuity died with her. There was the old house, the plain, worn furniture to which they had been accustomed all their lives, and about a hundred dollars a year! What could they do with that?

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"If one of us only happened to be clever," sighed Delia. "If I could paint pictures, or you had a talent for writing, how easy it would be!"

"I don't know as to that," responded Hetty. "Seems to me I've heard of people who did those things, and yet didn't find it so mighty easy to get along. Somebody's got to buy the pictures after they're painted, you know, and read the books, and pay for them." She spoke in an absent tone, and her brow was knitted into the little frown which Delia knew betokened that her twin was puzzling hard over something.

"Don't scowl, it'll spoil your forehead," she said, smoothing out the objectionable frown with her fingers.

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"Was I scowling? Well, never mind. I'm trying to think, Dely. You can't paint and I can't write. The question is, What can we do?"

"That *is* a question," said a voice at the door. It was Aunt Polly's voice. She managed on most days to drop in and "give a look to them, the lonely little creeturs," as she would have expressed it.

"You're consultin', I see," she said, taking in the situation at a glance: the dismal room, the depressive and tearful cheeks of the two girls, the lack of comfort and cheer. She twitched open the stove door as she passed, threw in a stick of wood, twirled the damper, and gave a brisk, rattling shake to the ashes,—all with a turn of her hand as it were,—attentions to which the stove presently responded with a brisk roar. "Well, it's time you did. I was planning to have a talk with you before long, for you ought to settle to something. Pull the blind down, Dely, and, Hetty, you light the lamp, and come to the fire, both of you, and let's see what we can make of it. It's a tangled skein enough, I don't deny it; but most skeins are that, and there's always a right end somewhere, if the Lord'll give us sense enough to get hold of it and keep on pulling out and winding up."

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Presently the girls were seated close to Aunt Polly's rocking-chair. The room looked more cheerful now with the lamplight and the yellow glow from the stove, and both were conscious of a sense of hopefulness.

"Now—what *can* you do?" demanded Aunt Polly, whirling round in her chair so as to face them.

"We hadn't got so far as that when you came in," replied Hetty; "I suppose we must do what other people do in the same circumstances."

"What's that?"

"Teach something, or sew, I suppose."

"Sewing's slow starvation, in my opinion, unless you've got a machine, which you haven't, and not much better then. What do you know that you can teach?"

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"Not much," replied Hetty, humbly, while Delia added hesitatingly, "We could teach children their letters, perhaps."

"I presume you could," responded Aunt Polly, dryly. "But, though you mayn't know it, perhaps, there are about fifty women in this town can do the same, and who mean to do it, what's more. And most of 'em have got the start of you in one way or another, so what's your chance worth? No, girls, sewing and teaching are played out. They are good things in their way, but every woman who's got her living to earn thinks of them the very first thing and of nothing else, and the market is always overstocked. My advice to you is, to *think up something you can do better than other people*—that's what gives folks a real chance! Now, what is there?"

"There isn't anything I can do better than other people," cried the dismayed Delia. "Nor Hetty either—except make gingerbread," she added, with a faint little laugh. "Hetty beats everybody at that, grandmother always said."

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"Very well; make gingerbread then. That's your thing to do," said Aunt Polly.

Hetty looked at her with incredulous eyes.

"You're not in earnest, are you?" she said.

"I am. In dead earnest."

"But, Aunt Polly, *gingerbread!* Such a little thing as that! Who ever heard of a girl's doing such a thing?"

"All the better if they never did. A new trade has a double chance. As for the 'little,' great things often come from small beginnings. Fortunes have been made out of gingerbread before now, I'll be bound, or if not that, out of something no bigger. No, Hetty, depend upon it, if your gingerbread is *best*, folks will want it. And if your teaching or sewing is only second best, they won't. It's the law of human nature, and a very good law, too, though it cuts the wrong way sometimes, like all laws."

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"Aunt Polly, you're a genius!" cried Hetty, warmed into sudden glow by this vigorous common sense. "I *can* make good gingerbread, and it's just as you say, neither of us know enough to teach well, and we are both poor hands at sewing, and we should have a much better chance if we tried to do what we can and not what we can't. Why shouldn't I make gingerbread? Dely'd help me, and if folks liked our things and bought them, we could live and keep together. We could make a kind of shop of this room, couldn't we? What do you think?"

"Tisn't a bad place for such a trade," said Aunt Polly, slowly, measuring the room with her eyes. "Being on a corner is an advantage, you see; and there's that double winder on the street gives a first-rate chance to show what you've got to sell. I never did see no use in that winder before. My father, he had it cut for a kind of a whim like, and we all thought it was notional in him; but, as they say, keep a thing long enough and a use'll turn up. It's a sort of a gain for you,

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too, having the house so old-fashioned. Folks has a hankering for such things, nowadays—the Lord knows why. I hear 'em going on about it when I'm out tailorin', calling ugly things 'quaint,' and lovely, because they're old. Hetty,"—with sudden inspiration,—“here's an idea for you, be 'quaint'! Don't try for a shop, keep the room a room, and make it as old-fashioned-looking as you can, and I'll bet a cookie that your gingerbread'll be twice as popular with one set of folks, and if it's first-rate gingerbread, the other set who don't care for old things will like it just as well.”

What a bracing thing is a word in season! Aunt Polly's little seed of suggestion grew and spread like Jack's fabled bean-stalk.

"Your light biscuits always turn out well," said Delia.

"And my snaps. Grandmother liked them so much. And you're a good hand at loaf bread, you know. Aunt Polly—I seem to smell a fortune in the air. We will begin at once, just as soon as I can get a half-barrel of flour and put an advertisement in the paper." [125]

Hetty had a ready wit, and Aunt Polly's hint as to "quaintness" was not lost upon her. The advertisement when it appeared the next day but one ran thus:—

"After Monday next, the Old-Time Bakery, corner of Farewell and Martin Streets, will be prepared to furnish, to order, fresh bread, buns, biscuits, and grandmother's gingerbread, all home-made."

People smiled over the little notice, but the odd wording stuck in their memories as odd things will, and more than one person went out of his way during the next week to take a look into the wide, low window, within which, on a broad, napkin-covered shelf, stood rows of biscuits, light and white, buns, each glazed with shining umber-brown, and loaves of gingerbread whose complexion and smell were enough to vouch for their excellence. Acting on Aunt Polly's suggestion, Hetty had set forth her wares on plates of the oldest and oddest pattern which could be found in grandmother's closet. A queer, tall pitcher flanked them on either side, and round the window-frame she had twined the long, luxuriant shoots of a potted ivy. Altogether the effect was pretty, and no one need be told that the pitchers had for years been consecrated to the reception of yeast and corks, or that the plates had long since been relegated to kitchen use as too shabby for better occasions. [126]

"Hain't ye no white chany?" inquired their first customer, an old woman, as she slowly counted out the pennies for half a dozen biscuit. "It would kind of set your cakes off."

"We used what we had," replied Hetty, diplomatically. "But I hope your biscuits'll taste just as good as if they came off a white plate."

This old woman, two others, and a little boy were the only customers that first day. [127]

"'Tisn't a bit a good beginning," declared Delia, pouring the money received out of an old-fashioned china tea-caddy which Hetty had unearthed in an up-stairs closet and brought down to serve as a till. "Two dozen biscuits, that's twenty-four cents, a loaf of gingerbread, and about half the buns. That's fifty-three cents in all. What did you say the materials cost?"

"About seventy cents. But then we have our supper and breakfast out of them, and nearly half the stock to sell at a reduced rate to-morrow. We shan't lose anything, I reckon, but we shan't gain much either."

"Rome wasn't built all in a minute. You'll do yet," remarked Aunt Polly, who had dropped in to hear the result of the first day's sales.

But two days—three—a week, went by, and still trade did not materially improve, and it took all Aunt Polly's wise saws and hopeful auguries to keep their spirits up. Each day showed the same record, no loss, but almost no gain. Toward the end of the second week matters mended. Mrs. Corliss, the wife of a wealthy manufacturer, having an errand in Farewell Street, happened to pass the little window, and her bric-a-brac-loving eyes were caught at once by its unusual appearance. She stopped, studied the whole arrangement from the ivy wreath to the old pitchers; a recollection of the droll little advertisement over which she had laughed a few days previously, came over her. "I declare, this is the very place," she said to herself; and opening the door she entered, precisely as Hetty came from the kitchen through the opposite door, a handkerchief tied over her shiny hair, a white apron with a little ruffled waist protecting her print gown, her cheeks flushed rosy pink with heat, and in her hands a tray full of crisp, delectably smelling ginger-snaps. [128]

"A real study—like a Flemish picture," Mrs. Corliss said afterward. She fell in love at once with the quaint room, the pretty sisters, the old china, stayed twenty minutes nibbling ginger-snaps and looking about her, bought a dollar's worth of everything, "on trial," as she said, and swept out, leaving a wake of rose-colored hope in the air—and Delia and Hetty executing a wild waltz behind her back, for joy and gratulation. [129]

"Luck has turned—I know, I feel it," declared Hetty.

Luck *had* turned. Mrs. Corliss raved to everybody she knew about the room, the twin-sisters, and the excellence of the gingerbread. It became a fashion to go to Farewell Street for buns and biscuits. Hetty and Delia had to work early and late to fill their orders, but what was that "to sewing their fingers off for a bare living"? Hetty said; and toil was sweetened now by a gradually

increasing profit. At the end of the first six months they had not only "lived and kept together," but had a little sum laid by, which, as Aunt Polly advised, was treated as "business capital," part of it being invested in the purchase of an awning for the window and an extra stove to increase their baking capacity. Very rarely were there any stale things left now to be sold next day at half-price, the regular orders and chance custom consuming all.

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"We shall have to hire a boy to carry things round, I actually believe," declared Hetty. "Mrs. Malcomb and Mrs. Sayres both said that they would order our bread regularly if we could send it home."

"I've been expecting that would be the next step," remarked Aunt Polly, "and I guess I've got just the boy you want, in my eye. It's Widow McCullen's lad—Sandy, as they call him. He's a good little chap, and it'll be a real help to his mother to have him earning a trifle."

So Sandy McCullen was regularly engaged as "bread-boy," and business grew brisker still.

"Aunt Polly, we've got to another notch," said Hetty, at the end of the first year. "You don't happen to know of a girl, do you, who could help us in the baking? Delia and I can't keep up with the orders. She gets so tired every now and then that she can't sleep, and that worries me so that I lie awake, too."

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"That'll never answer; no, I don't know of any girl, but there's a nice kind of an oldish woman, if she'll do, that I'd like to recommend. Yes—I mean myself," she went on, chuckling at Hetty's amazed look. "It's come to me more than once lately that it'd be sort of good and restful to make a change, and not go on tailorin' forever, all the rest of my days. I used to be a master hand at bread and pie-crust, too, when I was your age, and I've a little saved up which can go with the business if it's needed; and, if you girls say so, we'll just make a kind of family firm of the thing. How does it strike you?"

"Oh, Aunt Polly, the very thing, only it seems too good to be true. Do you really mean it? We did so hate the idea of a raw girl to whom we should have to teach everything, and who would spoil half she made for the first month, and I've fought it off as long as I could. Why, it will be like having grandmother come back, to have you living with us. There's the west room all ready. Dear me! How delightfully things seem to turn out for us always!"

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"That wasn't your view always, it seems to me," rejoined Aunt Polly. "A year ago you was pretty down in the mouth, if I don't mistake. Gingerbread is good for something, you see."

"The Old-Time Bakery" still goes on in Farewell Street, but it has grown far beyond its original proportions. If you were to visit it to-day you would find a room double the size of the former, and which has been made by taking down a partition wall between the sitting-room and a spare bedroom and throwing them into one. There are two windows on the street now, one full of bread, biscuits, and buns, the other stored with Hetty's now famous gingerbread, and with delicious-looking pumpkin-pies and apple-tarts with old-fashioned flaky crust, which are Aunt Polly's specialty and have added greatly to the reputation of the establishment. Still it is not a shop. Hetty, with wary good taste, has scrupulously preserved the "quaint" look which first gave character to the little enterprise, and by judicious rummaging in neighbors' garrets has acquired sundry old-time chairs, bottles, jugs, and platters, which help in the effect. Everything is scrupulously clean and bright, as all things must be where Aunt Polly supervises; but the brightest things in the room are the faces of the twin sisters. They have tested and proved their powers; they know now what they can do, and they taste the happiness of success.

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I tell their little story, in which is nothing remarkable or out of the way, for the sake of other girls, who, perhaps, are sitting to-day with folded hands and puzzling and wondering, just as Hetty and Delia did, over what they are to do and how to set about it. I do not mean at all that these girls should all make gingerbread—that indeed would be "overstocking the market," as Aunt Polly would say, but only that they should hearken to her word of wisdom, "find out what they can do *best*, and do that," whatever it is, secure that good work, and hearty striving will win some measure of success soon or late, even if its beginnings are small and insignificant as a gingerbread loaf or a batch of biscuit!

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THE SECRET DOOR.

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NOWLE, in Kent, is an ancient manor-house. It stands knee-deep in rich garden and pasture lands, with hay-fields and apple-orchards stretching beyond, and solemn oak woods which whisper and shake their wise heads when the wind blows, as though possessed of secrets which must not be spoken.

Very much as it looks to-day, it looked two hundred and thirty years ago, when Charles the First was king of England. That was the Charles who had his head cut off, you may remember. Blue Christmas smokes curled from the twisted chimneys in 1645, just as they will this year if the world lasts so long as December. The same dinnery fragrance filled the air, for good cheer smells pretty much alike in all ages and the world over. A few changes there may be—thicker trees, beds of gay flowers which were not known in that day; and where once

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the moat—a ditch-like stream of green water covered with weeds and scum—ran round the walls, is now a trimly cut border of verdant turf. But these changes are improvements, and in all important respects the house keeps its old look, undisturbed by modern times and ways.

In the same nursery where modern boys and girls eat, sleep, and learn their A, B, C to-day, two children lived,—little Ralph Tresham and his sister Henrietta. Quaint, old-fashioned creatures they would look to us now; but, in spite of their formal dresses and speech, they were bright and merry and happy as any children you can find among your acquaintances. Ralph's name was pronounced "Rafe," and he always called his sister "Hexie."

Christmas did not come to Knowle in its usual bright shape in 1645. Gloom and sadness and anxiety overshadowed the house; and though the little ones did not understand what the cause of the anxiety was, they felt something wrong, and went about quietly whispering to each other in corners, instead of whooping and laughing, as had been their wont. They had eaten their Christmas beef, and toasted the king in a thimbleful of wine, as usual, but their mother cried when they did so; and Joyce, the old butler, had carried off the pudding with a face like a funeral. So after dinner they crept away to the nursery, and there, by the window, began a long whispering talk. Hexie had something very exciting to tell. [137]

"Nurse thought I was asleep," she said, "but I wasn't quite; and when they began to talk I woke up. That wasn't wrong, was it, Rafe? I couldn't sleep when I couldn't, could I?"

"I suppose not; but you needn't have listened," said Rafe, whose notions about honor were very strict. [138]

"I did pull the pillow over my ear, but the words would get in," went on Henrietta, piteously. "And it was so interesting. Did you know that there were such creatures as Bogies, Rafe? Dorothy thinks we have got one in our house, and that its hole is in the great gallery, because once when she was there dusting the armor, she heard a queer noise in the wall, and what else could it be? It eats a great deal, does the Bogie. That's the reason nurse is sure we have got one. It ate all the cold sheep's-head yesterday, and the day before half the big pasty. No victual is safe in the larder, the Bogie has such a big appetite, nurse says."

"I remember about the sheep's-head," said Rafe, meditatively. "Almost all of it was left, and I looked to see it come in cold; but when I asked, Joyce said there was none. Cold sheep's-head is very good. Do you remember how much Humphrey used to like it?"

"I don't remember exactly, it is so long ago," replied Hexie. "How long is it, brother?—since Humphrey went away, I mean. Won't he ever come back?" [139]

"I asked Winifred once, but she only said, 'God knew,' that nothing had been heard of him since the battle when the king was taken. He might be dead, or he might be escaped into foreign parts—and then she cried, oh, so hard, Hexie! Poor Humphrey! I hope he isn't dead. But, about the Bogie, how curious it must be to meet one! Oh, I say, let us go to the gallery now, and listen if we can hear any strange noises there. Will you?"

"Oh, Rafe! I'm afraid. I don't quite like—"

"But you can't be afraid if I'm there," said Rafe, valiantly; "besides, I'll put on Humphrey's old sword which he left behind. Then if the Bogie comes—we shall see!"

Rafe spoke like a conquering hero, Hexie thought; so, though she trembled, she made no further objection, but stood by while he lifted down the sword, helped to fasten its belt over his shoulder, and followed along the passage which led to the gallery. The heavy sword clattered and rattled as it dragged on the floor, and the sound was echoed in a ghostly way, which renewed Hexie's fears. [140]

"Rafe! Rafe! let us go back," she cried.

"Go back yourself if you are afraid," replied Ralph, stoutly; and as going back alone through the dim passage seemed just then worse than staying where she was, Hexie stayed with her valiant brother.

Very softly they unlatched the gallery door, and stole in. It was a long, lofty apartment, panelled with cedar-wood, to which time had given a beautiful light brown color. The ceiling, of the same wood, was carved, here and there, with shields, coats of arms, and other devices. There was little furniture: one tall cabinet, a few high-backed Dutch chairs, and some portraits hanging on the walls. The sun, not yet quite set, poured a stream of red light across the polished floor, leaving the far corners and the empty spaces formidably dusk. The children had seldom been in the gallery at this hour, and it looked to them almost like a strange place, not at all as it did at noonday when they came to jump up and down the slippery floor, and play hide-and-seek in the comers which now seemed so dark and dismal. [141]

Even Rafe felt the difference, and shivered in spite of his bold heart and the big sword by his side. Timidly they went forward, hushing their footsteps and peering furtively into the shadows. Suddenly Hexie stopped with a little scream.

Close to them stood a huge suit of armor, larger and taller than a man. The empty eye-holes of the helmet glared out quite like real eyes, and the whole figure was terrible enough to frighten any little girl. But it was not at the armor that Hexie screamed; the iron man was an old friend of

the children's. Many a game of hide-and-seek had they played around, and behind, and even inside him; for Humphrey had contrived a cunning way by which the figure could be taken to pieces and put together again; and more than once Rafe had been popped inside, and had lain shaking with laughter while Hexie vainly searched for him through all the gallery. This had not happened lately, for Rafe was hardly strong enough to manage by himself the screws and hinges which opened the armor; but he knew the iron man too well to scream at him, and so did Hexie. The object which excited her terror was something different, and so strange and surprising that it is no wonder she screamed.

Close by the armor, half hidden by a curtain of heavy tapestry, was an open door, where never door had been known to be. It stood ajar, and dimly visible inside was a narrow staircase winding upward.

"The hole of the Bogie!" gasped Hexie, clutching at Rafe's arm. He started, and felt for the sword. It rattled fearfully, and the sound completed Hexie's terror. She burst away, flew like a scared lapwing down the gallery, along the passages, and never stopped till she reached the nursery and her own bed, where, with two pillows and the quilt drawn over her head, she lay sobbing bitterly at the thought of Ralph left behind, to be eaten perhaps by the Bogie! Poor little Hexie!

Ralph, meanwhile, stood his ground. His heart beat very fast, but he would not run away,—that was for girls. It must be owned, however, that when a moment later the sound of muffled voices became audible down the stairs, he trembled extremely, and was guilty of the unmanlike act of hiding behind the curtain. He was only ten years old, which must plead his excuse with bigger boys who are confident that they could never, under any circumstances, hide themselves or be afraid.

The voices drew nearer, steps sounded, and two figures came out of the narrow doorway. Could there be two Bogies? No wonder they ate so much. But in another minute all thought of Bogies vanished from Ralph's mind, for in one of the figures he recognized his own sister Winifred.

Her companion was a man. There was something familiar in his form. It moved forward, and Ralph jumped so that the big sword rattled again. Bogie number two was his brother Humphrey, mourned as dead ever since the summer before, when so many brave gentlemen gave up their lives for King Charles at the battle of Naseby.

"What noise was that?" whispered Winifred, fearfully.

"Some sound from below," replied Humphrey, after listening a moment. "Must you go, Winnie?"

"I must, dear Humphrey. I dare not absent myself longer lest I be missed and suspected. Oh, if to-morrow were but over, and you safe on the French lugger and over the sea! I cannot breathe while this hiding and danger go on."

"I suppose I ought to be glad also," said Humphrey, ruefully; "but to me that French lugger means exile, and loneliness, and poverty, for the rest of my life, perhaps. Better have laid down my life with the rest at Naseby, in striking one last blow for the king."

"Don't, don't speak so!" protested Winifred, tearfully. "You are alive, thank God; and once these wars are over we may rejoin you, and have a happy home somewhere, if not in the land of our fathers. Now, dear Humphrey, have you all you need for the night?"

"Christmas cheer," said Humphrey, in a would-be cheerful voice. "Beef and ale,—what better fare could be? You are a gallant provider, my Winnie, and there is need, for since I have lain in that hole with nothing else to do, my appetite has raged like a wolf. That sheep's-head was wondrous savory. I say though, Winnie, what do the servants think of the famine I create in the larder?"

"Oh, the stupid things fancy that a Bogie has taken up his residence here. A very hungry Bogie, Joyce calls the creature!"

The brother and sister laughed; then they kissed each other.

"Good-night, dearest Winifred."

"Good-night, brother." And Humphrey vanished up the stairs. Winifred lingered a moment; then, as if remembering something, opened the door again and ran after him. Ralph marked that



Close by the armor, half hidden by a curtain of heavy tapestry, was an open door.—PAGE 142.

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she laid her hand on a particular boss in the carved wainscot, and pressed it in hard, whereon the door sprang open. He stole out, laid his hand on the same boss, and felt the spring give way under his touch. Some undefined idea of stealing in later, to make Humphrey a visit, was in his head; but he heard Winifred returning, and hurried out of the gallery. Putting back the sword in its place, he entered the nursery. No Hexie was visible, but a sobbing sound drew his attention to a tumbled heap on the bed.

"Is that you, Hexie? Why, what are you crying about?" pulling away the pillow, which she held tight. [147]

"Oh, Rafe! Then the Bogie didn't eat you, after all!" And Hexie buried her tear-stained face in his shoulder.

"Bogie! Nonsense! There are no such things as Bogies!"

"What was it, then, that lived up that dreadful stairs?"

"I can't tell you; only it was nothing at all dreadful. And, Hexie, don't say a word about that door to any one, will you? It might make great trouble if you did."

"I did tell Deborah, when she fetched the candle and asked why I cried, that I saw a strange door in the gallery," faltered Hexie, truthful, though penitent.

"Oh! Hexie, how could you? I don't like Deborah, and her father is a crop-eared knave. Humphrey said so one day. How could you talk to her about the door, Hexie?"

"I—don't know. I was frightened, and she asked me," sobbed Hexie. "Will it do any harm, Rafe?" [148]

"It may," said Rafe, gloomily. "But don't cry, Hexie. You meant no harm, at all events."

"Oh, don't speak so gravely and so like Joyce," said Hexie, much troubled. She cried herself to sleep that night. Deborah, who undressed her, asked many questions about the gallery and the door.

"It was very dark, and perhaps I mistook,"—that was all Hexie could be made to say. Ralph was disturbed and wakeful, and slept later than usual next morning. He jumped up in a hurry and made what haste he could with dressing and breakfast, but it seemed as though they never took so much time before; and all the while he ate he was conscious of a stir and bustle in the house, which excited his curiosity very much. Knocking—the sound of feet—something unusual was going on.

As soon as possible he slipped away from nurse and ran to the gallery. The door was half open. He looked in, and stood still with terror. Men in brown uniforms and steel caps were there sounding the walls and tapping the floor-boards with staves. The gallery seemed full of them, though when Rafe counted there were but five. [149]

"This man of iron was, in all likelihood, a Malignant also," he heard one of them say, striking the armor with his fist.

"He is somewhat old for that. Methinks that is armor of the time of that man of blood, Harry the Eighth. Move it aside, Jotham, that we may search the farther panel."

So the heavy figure was thrust into a corner, and the men went on tapping with their wands. Rafe groaned within himself when he heard them declare that the wall sounded hollow, and saw them searching for a spring. Twenty times it seemed as though they must have lighted on the right place. Twenty times they just missed it. [150]

"We were ill advised to come without tools," declared the man who seemed leader of the party. "Come thou to my shop, Peter Kettle, and thou, Bartimeus and Zerubbabel, and we will fetch such things as are needful. Jotham, stay thou here, to see that no man escapeth from the concealment behind the wall."

So four of the men went away, leaving Jotham striding up and down as on guard. Presently came a shout from beneath the window,—

"Jotham! our leader hath dropped his pouch in which are the keys of the smithy. Hasten and bring it to the outer door."

"Aye, aye!" answered Jotham, and, pouch in hand, he ran down the stairs. Now was Rafe's opportunity. Like a flash he was across the gallery, his hand on the boss. The door flew open, and he fell into the arms of Humphrey, who, sword in hand and teeth set, stood on the lower step of the staircase, prepared to sell his liberty as dearly as possible. [151]

"Rafe! little Rafe!" he exclaimed.

"Hush! The man will come back," panted Rafe. "Come away—hide—oh, where?" Then with a sudden inspiration he dragged his brother toward the iron man. "Get inside," he cried. "They will never think of searching there! Oh, Humphrey—make haste! Get inside!"

There was no time to be lost. With the speed of desperation, Humphrey unscrewed, lifted, stepped inside the armor. Rafe slipped the fastenings together, whispered "Shut your eyes," and flew back to his hiding-place. Just in time, for Jotham's step was on the stair, and next moment he

entered the gallery, and resumed his march up and down, little dreaming that the man sought for was peeping through the helmet holes at him, not three feet away.

Presently the other soldiers came back with hammers and wrenches, and in a short time the beautiful wainscot, split into pieces, lay on the floor. Suddenly there was a shout. The secret door had flown open, and the staircase stood revealed. Four of the men, with pikes and pistols, prepared to ascend, while the fifth guarded the opening below. [152]

At that moment Winifred entered the gallery from the farther end. She turned deadly pale when she saw the open door and the men.

"Oh! Heaven have mercy!" she cried, and dropped half fainting into a chair.

Rafe darted across the floor and seized her hand.

"Hush," he whispered. "Don't say a word, sister. *He* is safe."

"He? Who?" cried the amazed Winifred.

But now voices sounded from above. The men were coming down. Winifred rallied her courage, rose, and went forward. She was very white still, but she spoke in a steady voice. Her two brothers, Humphrey in his hiding-place and little Rafe by her side, both admired her greatly. [153]

"What is the meaning of this, Jotham Green?" she demanded. "By what warrant do you enter and spoil our house?"

"By the warrant which all true men have to search for traitors," said Jotham.

"You will find none such here," responded Winifred, firmly.

"We find the lurking-place in which one such has doubtless lain," said Zerubbabel. "Where holes exist, look out for vermin."

"You are less than civil, neighbor. An old house like this has many strange nooks and corners of which the inhabitants may have neither use nor knowledge. If your search is done, I will beg you to make good the damage you have caused as best you may, and with as little noise as possible, that my mother be not alarmed. Jotham Green, you are a good workman, I know. I recollect how deftly you once repaired that cabinet for us."

All the men knew Winifred, and her calm and decided manner made its impression. Jotham slowly picked up the fragments of the panelling and began to fit them together. The rest consulted, and at last rather sheepishly, and with a muttered half apology about "wrong information," went away, taking with them the injured woodwork, which Jotham undertook to repair. Rafe's first words after they disappeared were,— [154]

"Winifred, you must dismiss Deborah. It is she that has betrayed us."

"How do you know that, Rafe?"

Then it all came out. Winifred listened to the tale with streaming tears.

"Oh, Rafe, my darling, how brave you were! You played the man for us to-day, and have saved—I trust you have saved—our Humphrey. The men will not return to-day, and to-night the lugger sails."

And Humphrey was saved. Before morning, well disguised, he had made his way across country to a little fishing-port, embarked, and reached France without further accident. [155]

So that strange Christmas adventure ended happily. It was all long, long ago. Humphrey and Winifred and Rafe lived their lives out, and lay down to rest a century and a half since under the daisy-sprinkled English sod. Little Hexie died an aged woman, before any of us was born. But still the beautiful old manor-house stands amid its gardens and pasture lands, with the silvery look of time on its gray walls. Still the armed figure keeps guard beside the secret staircase, the tapestry hangs in the old heavy folds, evening reddens the cedar walls and the polished floor, and everything occupies the same place and wears the same look that it did when little Rafe played the man in that gallery, and saved his brother Humphrey, more than two hundred years ago.

THE TWO WISHES.

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PIEROT and Pierotte were a small brother and sister who were always wishing to be something that they were not, or to have something which they had not. They were not unhappy or discontented children,—far from it. Their home, though poor, was comfortable; their parents, though strict, were kind: they were used to both, and desired nothing better. Wishing with them was a habit, an idle game which they were forever playing. It meant little, but it sounded ill; and a stranger, listening, would have judged them less well-off and cheerful than they really were.

"I wish I needn't wake up, but might lie still all day," was Pierotte's first thought every [157]

morning; while Pierot's was, "I wish Pierotte wasn't such a sleepy-head, for then we could get out before sunrise, and gather every mushroom in the meadow while the Blaize children are still snoring in their beds." Then later, at breakfast, Pierotte would say, "I wish I were the Princess, to have coffee and white bread for my *déjeuner*, instead of tiresome porridge. I am tired of porridge. White bread and coffee must be better,—much better!" But all the time she spoke, Pierotte's spoon, travelling between her bowl and mouth, conveyed the "tiresome" porridge down her throat as rapidly as though it were the finest Mocha; and Pierotte enjoyed it as much, though she fancied that she did not.

"I wish I were the young Comte Jules," Pierot would next begin in his turn. "No fagots to bind, no cow to fodder, no sheep to tend. Ah! a fine life he leads! Beautiful clothes, nothing to do. Six meals a day, two of them dinners, a horse to ride,—everything! I wish—" [158]

"And a nice yellow skin and eyes like boiled gooseberries," chimed in his mother. "Better wish for these while you are about it. Much you know of noblemen and their ways! Didst ever have an indigestion? Tell me that. When thou hast tried one, wish for it again, if thou canst."

Then Pierot would laugh sheepishly, shoulder his hatchet, and go off after wood, the inseparable Pierotte trotting by his side. As they went, it would be,—

"I wish I were a bird," or "I wish we could jump like that grasshopper;" or, "Pierotte, I wish our godfather had left us his money. We should be rich then."

For the children had the same godfather. Pierotte first, and then Pierot having been named after their father's cousin, a well-to-do peasant, who it was expected would remember his little relatives in his will. This hope had been disappointed, and the children's regrets were natural and excusable, since even the wise dame, their mother, did not conceal her opinion of Cousin Pierre's conduct, which she considered irregular and dishonest. Children soon learn to join in chorus with older voices, and Pierot and Pierotte, in this case, found it particularly easy, as it chimed with the habit of their lives. [159]

One warm July morning their mother roused them for an early breakfast, and sent them into the forest after wood.

"My last fagot is in," she said. "You must bind and tie smartly to-day. And, Pierotte, help thy brother all that thou canst, for the father cannot spare him to go again this week, and on Saturday is the sennight's baking."

So they set forth. The sun was not fairly risen, but his light went before his coming, and even in the dim forest-paths it was easy to distinguish leaf from flower. Shadows fell across the way from the trees, which stood so motionless that they seemed still asleep. Heavy dew hung on the branches; the air was full of a rare perfume, made up of many different fragrances, mixed and blended by the cunning fingers of the night. A little later, and the light broadened. Rays of sun filtered through the boughs, a wind stirred, and the trees roused themselves, each with a little shake and quiver. Somehow, the forest looked unfamiliar, and like a new place to the children that morning. They were not often there at so early an hour, it is true, but this did not quite account for the strange aspect of the woods. Neither of them knew, or, if they knew, they had forgotten, that it was Midsummer's Day, the fairies' special festival. Nothing met their eyes, no whirl of wings or sparkle of bright faces from under the fern-branches, but a sense of something unusual was in the air, and the little brother and sister walked along in silence, peering curiously this way and that, with an instinctive expectation of unseen wonders. [160]

"Isn't it lovely?" whispered Pierotte, at last. "It never looked so pretty here as it does to-day. See that wild-rose,—how many flowers it has! Oh! what was that? It waved at me!" [161]

"What waved?"

"The rose. It waved a white arm at me!"

"Nonsense! It was the wind," replied Pierot, sturdily, leading the way into a side-path which led off from the rose-bush.

"Is it much farther where we get the wood?" asked Pierotte, for the children had been walking a considerable time.

"Father said we were to go to the hazel copse," answered Pierot. "We must be almost there."

So for half an hour longer they went on and on, but still no sign of fallen trees or wood-choppers appeared, and Pierot was forced to confess that he must have mistaken the road.

"It is queer, too," he said. "There was that big red toadstool where the paths joined. I noticed it the other day when I came with the father. What's the matter?" for Pierotte had given a sudden jump. [162]

"Some one laughed," said Pierotte, in an awe-struck tone.

"It was a cricket or tree-toad. Who is here to laugh?"

Pierotte tried hard to believe him, but she did not feel comfortable, and held Pierot's sleeve tight as they went. He felt the trembling of the little hand.

"Pierotte, thou art a goose!" he said; but all the same he put his arm round her shoulders,

which comforted her so that she walked less timorously.

One path after another they tried, but none of them led to the cleared spot where the fallen trees lay. The sun rose high, and the day grew warmer, but in the forest a soft breeze blew, and kept them cool. Hour after hour passed; the children had walked till they were tired. They rested awhile, ate half their dinner of curds and black bread, then they went on again, turned, twisted, [163] tried paths to right and paths to left, but still the dense woods closed them in, and they had no idea where they were or how they should go.

Suddenly the track they were following led to a little clearing, in which stood a tiny hut, with a fenced garden full of cherry-trees and roses. It was such a surprise to find this fertile and blooming spot in the heart of the wild wood, that the children stood still with their mouths open, to stare at it.

"How strange!" gasped Pierot, when at last he found his voice. "The father always said that ours was the only hut till you got to the other side the forest."

"Perhaps this *is* the other side," suggested Pierotte.

An odd chuckling laugh followed this remark, and they became aware of an old woman sitting at the window of the cottage,—a comical old woman, with a stiff square cap on her head, sharp twinkling eyes, and a long hooked nose. As the children looked, she laughed again, and, [164] extending her finger, beckoned them to come nearer.

Timidly they obeyed, setting down their big wood-basket at the gate. The old woman leaned over the window to await them, her hand on a square glass jar full of yellow liquid, in which floated what seemed to be a pickled serpent with his tail in three coils, and the tip in his mouth. Pierotte shuddered at the serpent, but Pierot was bolder.

"Did you want us, good madam?" he asked.

"Want you? No," replied the "good madam." "How should I want you? I saw you staring at my house as if your eyes would pop out of your heads, and I thought, perhaps, you wanted me."

"It was only—we were only—surprised," stammered Pierot. "Because we didn't know that there was a house here."

"There was none last night, and there won't be any to-morrow morning—at least—none for children to stare at," replied the old woman, coolly. [165]

"What *do* you mean?" cried Pierot, astonished beyond measure. "How can a house be built in one night? And why won't it be here to-morrow?"

"Because to-morrow won't be Midsummer's Day—and to-day is," replied the old woman; "and a fairy-house is visible to mortal eyes at that time, and no other."

"Fairy-house!" faltered Pierot; while Pierotte, jumping more rapidly to a conclusion, fairly screamed: "Oh, Pierot! Madam, then, is a fairy! A real fairy! Pierot, think of it, only think of it!"

"Very much at your service," said the old woman, with a malicious smile. "Do you like fairies, then? Do you admire my pickled snake? Would you wish to pull some flowers?"

Something in the smile made Pierotte draw back; but Pierot said politely,—

"One rose, perhaps—since Madam is so good." [166]

The fairy leaned out and plucked a rose from the vine which grew on the wall close by.

"Now listen," she said. "Each of my roses encloses a wish. You are great wishers, I know;" and her eyes twinkled queerly. "This time the wish will come true, so take care what you are about. There will be no coming to get me to undo the wish, for I shan't be visible again till this time next year on Midsummer's Day,—you know."

"Oh, Pierot! what shall we wish for?" cried Pierotte, much excited; but the old woman only repeated, "Take care!" drew her head in at the window, and all in a minute—how, they could not explain—the cottage had vanished, the garden, the gate,—they were in the wood again, with nothing but trees and bushes about them; and all would have seemed like a dream, except for the red and fragrant rose which Pierot held in his hand.

"What shall we wish for?" repeated Pierotte, as they seated themselves under a tree to talk over this marvellous adventure. [167]

"We must be very careful, and ask for something nice," replied Pierot.

"It would be better to wait and think for a long time first," suggested Pierotte.

"Thou art right. We will. Art thou not hungry?"

"Oh, so hungry! Let us eat the rest of our bread now. I can't wait any longer."

So Pierot produced the big lump of bread, and divided it into two equal portions.

"Look, look!" cried Pierotte, as her teeth met in the first mouthful. "A cherry-tree, brother,—a real cherry-tree here in the woods! And with ripe cherries on it! How good some would be with

our bread!"

"First-rate!" cried Pierot; and, putting their bread carefully on the grass, both ran to the tree. Alas! the boughs grew high, and the cherries hung far beyond their reach. Pierot tried to climb the tree, but the stem was both slight and slippery. Then they found a forked stick, but vainly attempted to hook and draw down a branch.

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"Oh, dear! I wish we were both grown up," cried Pierot, panting with exertion.

"So do I. If we were as old as father and mother, we could reach the boughs without even getting on tiptoe," chimed in Pierotte.

Luckless words! As Pierot spoke, the rose, which he had stuck in his cap, shrivelled and faded, while a queer sensation as if he were being carried up into the air swept over him. He clutched at something to hold himself down. That something was the cherry-tree bough! He could reach it now, and as his eyes turned with dismay toward Pierotte, there she stood, also holding a twig of the tree, only two or three inches lower than his own. Her pretty round cheeks and childish curls were gone, and instead of them he beheld a middle-aged countenance with dull hair, a red nose, and a mouth fallen in for lack of teeth. She, on her part, unconscious of the change, was staring at him with a horrified expression.

"Why, Pierot!" she cried at last, in a voice which sounded as old as her face, "how queer you look! You've got a beard, and your forehead is all criss-cross and wrinkly, and your chin rough. Dear me, how ugly you are! I never thought you could be so ugly."

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"Ugly, eh! Perhaps you would like to see your own face," said Pierot, enraged at this flattering criticism. "Just wait till we get home, and I show you the old looking-glass. But stay, we needn't wait;" and he dragged Pierotte to the side of a little pool of still water, which had caught his eye among the bushes. "Here's a looking-glass ready made," he went on. "Look, Pierotte, and see what a beauty you have become."

Poor Pierotte! She took one look, gave a scream, and covered her face with her hands.

"That me?" she cried. "Oh! I never, never will think it! What is the matter with us, Pierot? Was it that horrid fairy, do you think? Did she bewitch us?"

"The wish!" faltered Pierot, who at that moment caught sight of the faded rose in his cap. "I wished that we were both grown up, don't you remember? Oh, what a fool I was!"

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"You horrid boy! You have gone and wished me into an ugly old woman! I'll never forgive you!" sobbed Pierotte.

"It was your wish too. You said you would like to be as old as father and mother. So you needn't call me horrid!" answered Pierot, angrily.

Silence followed, broken only by Pierotte's sobs. The two old children sat with their backs to each other, under different trees. By and by Pierot's heart began to smite him.

"It was more my fault than hers," he thought; and, turning round a little way, he said coaxingly, "Pierotte."

No answer. Pierotte only stuck out her shoulder a little and remained silent.

"Don't look so cross," went on Pierot. "You can't think how horrid it makes you—a woman of your age!"

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"I'm not a woman of my age. Oh, how can you say such things?" sobbed Pierotte. "I don't want to be grown-up. I want to be a little girl again."

"You used to be always wishing you were big," remarked her now big brother.

"Y—es, so I was; but I never meant all at once. I wanted to be big enough to spin—and the—mother—was—going—to teach me," went on poor Pierotte, crying bitterly, "and I wanted to be as big as Laura Blaize—and—pretty—and some day have a sweetheart, as she had—and—but what's the use—I've lost it all, and I'm grown up, and old and ugly already, and the mother won't know me, and the father will say, 'My little Pierotte—Cœur de St. Martin—impossible! get out, you witch!'" Overcome by this dreadful picture, Pierotte hid her face and cried louder than ever.

"I'll tell you what," said Pierot, after a pause, "don't let us go home at all. We will just hide here in the woods for a year, and when Midsummer's Day comes round, we'll hunt till we find the fairy house again, and beg the fairy, on our knees, for another wish, and if she says 'yes,' we'll wish at once to be little just as we were this morning, and *then* we'll go home directly."

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"Poor mother; she will think we are dead!" sighed Pierotte.

"That's no worse than if she saw us like this. I'd be conscripted most likely and sent off to fight, and me only twelve years old! And you'd have a horrid time of it with the Blaize boys. Robert Blaize said you were the prettiest girl in Balne aux Bois. I wonder what he'd say now!"

"Oh, yes, let us stay here," shuddered Pierotte. "I couldn't bear to see the Blaize boys now. But then—it will be dark soon—shan't you be frightened to stay in the woods all night?"

"Oh! a man like me isn't easily frightened," said Pierot, stoutly, but his teeth chattered a little.

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"It's so queer to hear you call yourself 'a man,'" remarked Pierotte.

"And it's just as queer to hear you call yourself a little girl," answered Pierot, with a glance at the antiquated face beside him.

"Dear, how my legs shake, and how stiff my knees are!" sighed Pierotte. "Do grown-up people feel like that always?"

"I don't know," said Pierot, whose own legs lacked their old springiness. "Would you like some cherries now, Pierotte? I can reach them easily."

"Cherries! Those sour things? No, thank you. They would be sure to disagree with me," returned Pierotte, pettishly.

"Times are changed," muttered Pierot; but he dared not speak aloud.

"Where shall we sleep?" asked Pierotte.

"Under the trees, so long as the summer lasts."

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"Gracious! We shall both die of rheumatism."

"Rheumatism? What an idea for a child like you!"

"I wish I *were* a child," said Pierotte, with a groan. "Here's a tree with grass below it, and I'm getting tired and sleepy."

When the brother and sister woke it was broad sunlight again.

"One day gone of our year," said Pierot, trying to be cheerful.

It was hard work as time went on, and with all their constant walking and wandering they never seemed to find their way out of the forest, or of that particular part of it where their luckless adventure had befallen them. Turn which way they would, the paths always appeared to lead them round to the same spot; it was like bewitchment; they could make nothing out of it. The dulness of their lives was varied only by an occasional quarrel. Pierot would essay to climb a tree, and Pierotte, grown sage and proper, would upbraid him for behaving so foolishly,—"just like a boy,"—or he would catch her using the pool as a mirror, and would tease her for caring so much for a plain old face when there was nobody but himself to look. How the time went they had no idea. It seemed always daylight, and yet weeks, if not months, must have passed, they thought, and Pierot at last began to suspect the fairy of having changed the regular course of the sun so as to cheat them out of the proper time for finding her at home.

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"It's just like her," he said. "She is making the days seem all alike, so that we may not know when Midsummer comes. Pierotte, I'll tell you what, we must be on the lookout, and search for the little house every day, for if we forget just once, that will be the very time, depend upon it."

So every day, and all day long, the two old children wandered to and fro in search of the fairy cot. For a long time their quest was in vain; but at last, one bright afternoon, just before sunset, as they were about giving up the hunt for that day, the woods opened in the same sudden way and revealed the garden, the hut, and—yes—at the window the pointed cap, the sharp black eyes. It was the fairy herself; they had found her at last.

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For a moment they were too much bewildered to move; then side by side they hurried into the garden without waiting for invitation.

"Well, my old gaffer, what can I do for you, or for you, dame?" asked the fairy, benevolently.

"Oh, please, I am not a dame, he is not a gaffer," cried Pierotte, imploringly. "I am little Pierotte"—and she bobbed a courtesy. "And this is Pierot, my brother."

"Pierot and Pierotte! Wonderful!" said the fairy. "But, my dear children, what has caused this change in your appearance? You have aged remarkably since I saw you last."

"Indeed, we have," replied Pierot, with a grimace.

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"Well, age is a very respectable thing. Some persons are always wishing to be old," remarked the fairy, maliciously. "You find it much pleasanter than being young, I dare say."

"Indeed, we don't," said Pierotte, wiping her eyes on her apron.

"No? Well, that is sad, but I *have* heard people say the same before you."

"Oh, please, please," cried Pierot and Pierotte, falling on their knees before the window, "please, dear, kind fairy, forgive us. We don't like to be grown-up at all. We want to be little and young again. Please, dear fairy, turn us into children as we were before."

"What would be the use?" said the old woman. "You'd begin wanting to be somebody else at once if you were turned back to what you were before."

"We won't, indeed we won't," pleaded the children, very humbly.

The fairy leaned out and gathered a rose.

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"Very well," she said. "Here's another wish for you. See that it is a wise one this time, for if you

fail, it will be of no use to come to me."

With these words, she shut the blinds suddenly, and lo! in one second, house, garden, and all had vanished, and Pierot and Pierotte were in the forest again.

There was no deliberation this time as to what the wish should be.

"I wish I was a little boy," shouted Pierot, holding the rose over his head with a sort of ecstasy.

"And I wish I was a little girl, the same little girl exactly that I used to be," chorused Pierotte.

The rose seemed to melt in air, so quickly did it wither and collapse. And the brother and sister embraced and danced with joy, for each in the other's face saw the fulfilment of their double wish.

"Oh, how young you look! Oh, how pretty you are! Oh, what happiness it is not to be old any longer! The dear fairy! The kind fairy!" These were the exclamations which the squirrels and the birds heard for the next ten minutes, and the birds and the squirrels seemed to be amused, for certain queer and unexplained little noises like laughs sounded from under the leaves and behind the bushes. [179]

"Let us go home at once to mother," cried Pierotte.

There was no difficulty about the paths now. After walking awhile, Pierot began to recognize this turn and that. There was the huntsman's oak and the Dropping Well; and there—yes, he was sure—lay the hazel copse where the father had bidden them go for wood.

"I say," cried Pierotte, with a sudden bright thought, "we will wait and bind one fagot for the mother's oven—the poor mother! Who has fetched her wood all this time, do you suppose?"

Plenty of sticks lay on the ground ready for binding. The wood-choppers had just left off their work, it would seem. Pierotte's basket was filled, a fagot tied and lifted on to Pierot's shoulders, and through the gathering twilight they hurried homeward. They were out of the wood soon. There was the hut, with a curl of smoke rising from the chimney; there was the mother standing at the door and looking toward the forest. What *would* she say when she saw them? [180]

What she said astonished them very much.

"How long you have been!" were the words, but the tone was not one of surprise.

"O mother, mother!" cried Pierotte, clinging to her arm, while Pierot said, "We were afraid to come home because we looked so old, and we feared you would not know us, but now we are young again."

"Old! young!" said the mother. "What does the lad mean! One does not age so fast between sunrise and sunset as to be afraid to come home. Are you dreaming, Pierot?" [181]

"But we have been away a year," said Pierot, passing his hand before his eyes as if trying to clear his ideas.

"A year! Prithee! And the sheets which I hung out at noon not fairly dry yet. A year! And the goats thou drovest to pasture before breakfast not in the shed yet! A year! Thou wouldst better not let the father hear thee prate thus! What, crying, Pierotte! Here's a pretty to-do because, forsooth, you are come in an hour late!"

An hour late! The children looked at each other in speechless amazement. To this day the amazement continues. The mother still persists that they were absent but a few hours. Where, then, were the weeks spent in the wood, the gray hair, the wrinkles, the wanderings in search of the old woman and her hut? Was all and each but a bit of enchantment, a trick of the mirth-loving fairies? They could not tell, and neither can I. Fairies are unaccountable folk, and their doings surpass our guessing, who are but mortal, and stupid at that! One thing I know, that the two children since that day have dropped their foolish habit of wishing, and are well content to remain little Pierot and Pierotte till the time comes for them to grow older, as it will only too soon. [182]

BLUE AND PINK.

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TWO valentines lay together in the pillar post-box. One was pink and one was blue. Pink lay a-top, and they crackled to each other softly in the paper-language, invented long since by Papyrus, the father of Manuscript, and used by all written and printed sheets unto this day. Listen hard, next time you visit the reading-room at the Public Library, and you will hear the newspapers exchanging remarks across the table in this language.

Said the pink valentine: "I am prettier than you, much prettier, Miss Blue."

Blue was modester. "That may be true, my dear Miss Pink; still, some folks like blue best, I think," she replied. [184]

"I wonder they should," went on Pink, talking in prose now, for valentines can speak in prose and in rhyme equally well. "You are such a chilly color. Now I warm people. They smile when they see me. I like that. It is sweet to give pleasure."

"I like to give pleasure, too," said Blue, modestly. "And I hope I may, for something beautiful is written inside me."

"What? oh! what?" cried Pink.

"I cannot say," sighed Blue. "How can one tell what is inside one? But I know it is something sweet, because

She who sent me here
Is so very fair and dear."

Blue was running into rhyme again, as valentines will.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Pink, digging her sharp elbow into Blue's smooth side. "Nothing is written inside me, and I'm glad of it. I am too beautiful to be written on. In the middle of my page is a picture, Cupid, with roses and doves. Oh, so fine! There is a border too, wreaths of flowers, flowers of all colors, and a motto, 'Be mine.' Be mine! What can be better than that? Have you got flowers and 'Be mine' inside, you conceited thing? If not, say so, and be ashamed, as you deserve to be." [185]

Again the pink elbow dented Blue's smooth envelope.

But Blue only shook her head softly, and made no answer. Pink grew angry at this. She caught Blue with her little teeth of mucilage and shook her viciously.

"Speak," she said. "I hate your stuck-up, shut-up people. Speak!"

But Blue only smiled, and again shook her head.

Just then the pillar-post opened with a click. The postman had come. He scooped up Pink, Blue, and all the other letters, and threw them into his wallet. A fat yellow envelope of law-papers separated the two valentines, and they had no further talk. [186]

Half an hour later, Pink was left at the door of a grand house, almost the finest in the town. Charles, the waiter, carried her into the parlor, and Pink said to herself: "What a thing it is to have a mission. My mission is to give pleasure!"

"A letter for you, Miss Eva," said Charles. He did not smile. Well-behaved waiters never smile; besides, Charles did not like Eva.

"Where is your tray?" demanded Eva, crossly. "You are always forgetting what mamma told you. Go and get it." But when she saw Pink in her beautiful envelope, unmistakably a valentine, she decided not to wait.

"Never mind, this time," she said; "but don't let it happen again."

"Who's your letter from, Evy?" asked grandmamma.

"I haven't opened it yet, and I wish you wouldn't call me Evy; it sounds so backwoodsy," replied Eva, who, for some mysterious reason, had waked that morning very much out of temper. [187]

"Eva!" said her father, sternly.

Eva had forgotten that papa was there. To hide her confusion, she opened the pink envelope so hastily as to tear it all across.

"Oh dear!" she complained. "Everything goes wrong."

Then she unfolded the valentine. Pink, who had felt as if a sword were thrust through her heart when her envelope was torn, brightened up.

"Now," she thought, "when she sees the flowers, Cupid, and doves, she *will* be pleased."

But it was not pleasure which shone on Eva's countenance.

"What's the matter?" asked papa, seeing her face swell and angry tears filling her eyes.

"That horrid Jim Slack!" cried Eva. "He said he'd send me a valentine just like Pauline's, and he hasn't. Hers was all birds and butterflies, and had verses—"

"Yours seems pretty enough," said papa, consolingly. [188]

"It's not pretty enough," responded Eva, passionately. "It's a stupid, ugly thing. I hate it. I won't have it."

And, horrible to state, she flung Pink, actually flung her, into the middle of the fire. There was time for but one crackling gasp; then the yellow flame seized and devoured all—Cupid, doves, flowers! Another second, they were gone. A black scroll edged with fiery sparkles reared itself up in the midst of the glow; then an air-current seized it, it rose, and the soul of Pink flew up the chimney.

Blue, meantime, was lying on the lap of a little girl of twelve, a mile or more from this scene of tragedy. Two plump hands caressed her softly.

"Sister, may I read it to you just once more?" begged a coaxing voice.

"Yes, Pet, once more. That'll make five times, and they say there is luck in odd numbers," said another voice, kind and gay.

So Pet read:—

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"My dear is like a dewy rose
All in the early morn;
But never on her stem there grows
A single wounding thorn.

"My dear is like a violet shy,
Who hides her in the grass,
And holds a fragrant bud on high
To bless all men who pass.

"My dear is like a merry bird,
My dear is like a rill,
Like all sweet things or seen or heard,
Only she's sweeter still.

"And while she blooms beside my door,
Or sings beneath my sky,
My heart with happiness runs o'er,
Content and glad am I.

"So, sweetheart, read me as I run,
Smile on this simple rhyme,
And choose me out to be your one
And only VALENTINE."

"Isn't it lovely?" said Pet, her blue eyes dancing as she looked up.

"Yes, it's very nice," replied sister.

"I wish everybody in the world had such a nice valentine," went on Pet. "How pleased they'd be! Do you suppose anybody has sent Lotty one? Only that about the bird wouldn't be true, because Lotty's so sick, you know, and always stays in bed."

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"But Lotty sings," said sister. "She's always singing and cheerful, so she's like a bird in that."

"Birdies with broken wings
Hide from each other;
But babies in trouble
Can run home to mother,"

hummed Pet, who knew the "St. Nicholas" jingles by heart. "But poor Lotty hasn't any mamma to run to," she added softly.

"No; and that's a reason why it would be so specially nice to give her the pleasure of a valentine like yours."

"I wish somebody had sent her one," said Pet, thoughtfully.

"I don't suppose there is another in the world just like yours," said sister, smiling at Pet.

"Then she *can't* have one. What a pity!"

"She might have this of yours," suggested sister.

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"But—then—I shouldn't have any," cried Pet.

"Oh yes, you would, and I'll tell you how," said sister. "You've had all the pleasure of getting it, and opening and reading it, already. *That's* yours to keep. Now, if I copy the verses for you on plain white paper, you can read them over as often as you like, till by and by you learn them by heart. When you have done that they will be yours for always; and, meanwhile, Lotty will have the pleasure of getting the valentine, opening, reading, learning, just as you have done—so you will get a double pleasure instead of one. Don't you see?"

"That will be splendid," cried Pet, joyously. "Poor Lotty, how glad she will be! And I shall have two pleasures instead of one, shan't I?"

"How nice," thought Blue, "to have given two pleasures already!"

Sister copied the verses, a fresh envelope was found, and Blue was sent on her way. When she was carried upstairs to Lotty's room, she thought it the pleasantest place she had ever seen. Sunshine was there—on the wall, on the plants in the window, most of all in Lotty's face, as she sat up in bed, knitting with red worsted and big needles. When Blue was put into her hands, she

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laughed with astonishment.

"For me!" she cried. "Who could have sent it? How pretty it is—how pretty! A great deal too pretty for me. Oh, what a kind, dear somebody there is in the world!"

Everybody in the house was glad because Lotty was glad. Grandmamma came in to hear the valentine; so did papa, and Jack, Lotty's big brother, and Fred, her little one. Even the cook made up an excuse about the pudding, and stole upstairs to hear the "fine verses which somebody had sent to Miss Lotty. It's swate as roses she is, any day," said cook; "and good luck to him for sending it, whoever he is."

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By and by Lotty's tender heart began to busy itself with a new plan.

"Grandma," she said, "I'm thinking about little Mary Riley. She works so hard, and she hardly ever has anything nice happen to her. Don't you think I might send her my valentine—in a different envelope, you know, with her name on it and all? She'd be so pleased."

"But I thought you liked it so much yourself, dear," replied grandmamma, unwilling to have her darling spare one bit of brightness out of her sick-room life.

"Oh, I do; that's the reason I want to give it away," said Lotty, simply, and stroking Blue, who, had she known how, would gladly have purred under the soft touch. "But I shall go on liking it all the same if Mary has it, and she'll like it too. Don't you see, grandmamma? I've copied the verses in my book, so that I can keep them."

Grandmamma consented. The new envelope was found, Mary's address was written upon it, and away went happy Blue to give pleasure to a fresh friend.

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"This is best of all," she said to herself, as Mary laid aside her weary sewing to read over and over again the wonderful verses, which seemed to have dropped out of fairy-land. She almost cried with pleasure that they should be sent to *her*.

"I wish I could buy a frame for 'em—a beautiful gold frame," she whispered to herself.

Pink would have been vain had she heard this; but Blue glowed with a purer feeling—the happiness of giving happiness.

Mary read the verses over a dozen times at least before putting them aside; but she did put them aside, for she had work to finish, and daylight was precious. The work was a birthday frock. When the last stitch was set, she folded it carefully, put on cloak and bonnet, and prepared to carry the frock home. Last of all, she dropped Blue into her pocket. She did not like to leave it behind. Something might happen, she thought.

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It was quite a grand house to which the birthday frock went. In fact; it was next door but one to the house in which Pink met with her melancholy fate. The little girl who was to wear the frock was very glad to see Mary, and her mamma came upstairs to pay for the work.

"Have you any change?" she said. "Come nearer to the fire. It is cold to-night."

Mary was confused by this kindness. Her fingers trembled as she searched for her portemonnaie, which was at the bottom of her pocket, underneath her handkerchief. She twitched out the handkerchief hastily, and with it, alas! came Blue. They were close to the grate, and Blue was flung into the fire. Mary gave a scream and made a snatch. It was too late! Already the flames had seized it; her beloved valentine was gone, vanished into ashes!

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"Was it anything valuable?" asked the lady, as Mary gave a little sob.

"Oh, n-o—yes, ma'am; that is, it was verses. I never had any before. And they were s-o beautiful!" replied poor Mary, half crying.

The lady gave her an extra dollar for the sewing, but this did not console Mary.

Meantime the ghost of Blue flew up the chimney. Upon the roof hovered a dim gray shade. It was the ghost of Pink, wind-blown for a little space.

"How sad life is!" sighed Pink's ghost—

"I was young, I was fair,
And now I'm in the air,
As ugly gray ashes as ever were."

"How sweet life is!" murmured the ghost of Blue—

"I've only lived a little while,
But I have made three people smile."

A chickadee who heard the two ghosts discoursing now flew down from the roof-peak. He gathered Blue's ashes up into his beak, flew down into the garden, and strewed them about the root of a rose-tree.

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"In the spring you'll be a rose," he said.

Then he flew back, took up Pink's ashes, bore them into another garden, and laid them in the midst of a bed of chickweed.

"Make that chickweed crop a little richer, if you can," he chirped. "All the better for the dicky-birds if you do; and a good thing for you too, to be of use for once in your life."

Then the chickadee flew away. Ghosts have to get accustomed to plain speaking.

This was the end of Blue and Pink.

A FORTUNATE MISFORTUNE.

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EMMY GALE was far from anticipating misfortunes or suspecting that she was going to have any as she packed her trunk for the much-talked-of visit to Elliott's Mills. The very putting of the things into the trays was a pleasure, for it meant the satisfaction of a long-deferred wish. To go to Elliott's Mills had been the desire of her heart ever since she was a little girl of eight, and she was now fourteen; and she folded her dresses and patted each collar and pair of stockings into place with a glad feeling at her heart.

I must tell you about Elliott's Mills, or you will not understand why Emmy was so pleased to go there. It was a very small village in the western part of New York. To reach it you had to take, first a whole day's journey by rail, and then a two-mile drive over a rather rough road. When arrived there you found yourself in an ugly, unattractive little wooden hamlet, set down among low hills and tracts of woodland. This does not sound over-delightful, does it? But what made Elliott's Mills so charming was that Aunt Emma lived there during the summer, and the life that she and her family led had an inexpressible fascination for all the young people in the connection.

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Aunt Emma's home had always been in New York City until her husband, who was a lawyer, came into possession some years before of an enormous tract of land, some thousands of acres in extent, in the western part of the State. It became necessary for him to spend some months there every year to look after it. First he built a small law office and a couple of bedrooms for use on these occasions. Then Aunt Emma wanted to go with him, and another room or two was added for her; and so it went on till the little law office had grown into a big, rambling country house of the most irregular shape, with small chambers opening out of large ones, doors, cupboards, entries, and staircases where you least expected them, little flights of steps leading up into rooms and down into rooms—just the sort of house, in short, which boys and girls delight in. Aunt Emma, who was a woman of admirable sense, made no attempt to introduce the elegances of the city into the woods, not even when it grew to be her home for the greater part of the year. Air, space, and freedom to do as you liked were the luxuries of the place. All the bedrooms were furnished with the same small-patterned blue ingrain carpet and little sets of oak-painted furniture precisely alike. The big parlor and dining-room had wicker chairs and willow tables, roomy sofas and couches covered with well-washed chintz, and skins and rugs on the matted floors. Deer's antlers in the hall held hats, whips, and coats. There was a garden of sweet common flowers to supply the summer vases, crackling wood-fires for cool evenings, and a bookcase of light reading for rainy days. The table was deliciously supplied with game and trout, wild fruits and country cream, and you might sit on the floor and tell ghost-stories till midnight if you cared to do so. In the big stables a little troop of Indian ponies, broken to saddle or harness, were kept. Most of them had Indian names, in honor of the half-civilized tribe which lived close by on their reservation. There was Chief Blacksnake and Lady Blacksnake and Young Blacksnake, Uncas and Pottomet and "Xantego," commonly pronounced "Want-to-go," and riding and driving went on the summer through among the visitors who filled the ample, hospitable house. There seemed to be a pony for everybody, and everybody liked to have a pony, and the ponies themselves enjoyed it.

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Emmy Gale was her aunt Emma's namesake, but, as it happened, she had never been at Elliott's Mills, though her elder sisters, Bess and Jean, had made many visits there. This was partly accidental, for twice it had been arranged that she should go, and twice illness had prevented. Once, her cousin Lena had measles, and the other time Emmy herself had scarlet fever. Nobody was in fault either time, still it rankled in Emmy's mind that she should never have seen the place about which Bess and Jean were forever raving. And now her time was come; she was actually packing her trunk. No wonder she was pleased.

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I must just say one word about Emmy before I start her on her journey. She was very tall of her age, thin, and rather awkward, as overgrown girls are apt to be. A passionate desire to be liked was one of the ruling motives of her nature, but she was very apt to fancy that people did not like her, and to worry and grieve over it in a morbid manner. When quite at her ease, she was an attractive girl, loving and bright and funny, but poor Emmy was seldom quite at ease. She could only be that when she forgot herself, and that was not often; for what with wondering if people would approve of her, and vexing herself with the idea that they did not, and fidgeting as to *why* they did not, she contrived to be the subject of her own thoughts for a considerable part of the time.

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Her escort was an old gentleman, a friend of her father's. He did not say much to Emmy, but he was very polite as old gentlemen go, and in the course of the long day's journey bought for her three illustrated papers, half a dozen beautiful red apples, and a "prize package of pop-corn,"

which, had it chosen to live up to its label, *might* have had a gold bracelet in it, but in reality contained nothing better than a brass ring. Emmy liked the apples, and did not at all resent her escort's lack of conversation. In fact, she scarcely noticed it, so busy was she in thinking of the joys to come. With her eyes fixed on the long reaches of soft red and yellow woods which seemed to be running past the train as the train ran by them, she made pictures to herself of what was going to happen. Lena would come down at the carriage to meet her, she was quite sure. And perhaps Bess or Jean, who had been at Elliott's Mills for the past month, would come too. It would be about half-past five when the train was due, so they could reach the house just before supper, which is always a pleasant time to arrive anywhere. It all seemed most promising as she thought it over.

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The first bit of ill luck which befell Emmy was that the train proved to be behind time. There were tiresome stops and unaccountable delays. At noon the conductor owned to being two hours late, so they kept on losing time. Railroads are like a dissected puzzle—if one piece gets out of its place it makes the other pieces wrong. They had to wait for all the other trains, and telegraph and stand still. Tired and vexed, Emmy sat with her nose pressed against the window, looking out into the deepening dusk as the engine puffed and snorted and ran the train slowly back and forward, on to sidings and off them. Her impatience grew and grew, till it seemed as if she *must* jump out and push something, the locomotive or the conductor—she didn't care which—anything to make them go on; and when eight o'clock came and nine, with the Mills station still far ahead, she felt so worn out and discouraged that she could easily have cried, except that girls of fourteen do not like to cry in public. The only thing that diverted her from her woes was watching two girls of her own age who sat in front of her, and were "capping verses" to pass away the time. The train made a great deal of noise, so that they had to scream to make themselves heard; then the roar and rumble ceased suddenly in that queer way which is common to all railroads, and a very high-pitched voice was heard to shriek out the following extraordinary question,—

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"Pray how was the Devil dressed? D—" Everybody jumped, and Emmy's old gentleman put on his spectacles and gazed long and solemnly at the young ladies who seemed to be conversing on such extraordinary topics, while they hid their faces and giggled violently for two miles.

It was exactly ten when they finally reached the Mills station. The old gentleman helped Emmy out, the train rushed on, and she found herself standing alone on a wet platform beside her trunk. Her aunt's man William came to meet her, swinging a lantern.

"Didn't any one come down to meet me?" she asked.

"No, miss. Mr. Tom drove down for the two o'clock express, and sent back word that your train would be late, and I must be sure to fetch a big lantern, for the road is all washed away by the freshet. Is that your box, miss? We'd better start at once, for it's going to take us two hours and a half to get over to the village."

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"Two hours and a half!" gasped Emmy.

"Yes, miss, because of the roads. They're almost dangerous. We'll have to walk nearly the whole way, for it's so dark that we can't see where we're going."

It was quite two hours and a half before they reached the house. Emmy had fallen asleep half a dozen times, and waked up to be conscious that she was stiff, chilled, and aching in every bone, and that William was walking at the horses' heads, holding the lantern up high to make sure of the road. At last they turned in at a gate and he came to the window to say encouragingly, "Just there, miss."

"What time is it?" asked Emmy.

"Nigh on to one, miss."

"Oh dear, and they will all be in bed!" thought Emmy; but she was really too tired to care much about it. A sleepy-looking maid was sitting up to receive her. Mrs. Elliott had left her love, she said, and the young lady must take some hot soup and get to bed as fast as possible. It was not at all the reception which Emmy had dreamed of, but she was so worn out with fatigue that bed seemed the only thing in the world worth thinking of just then, and there, with the assistance of the maid, she soon found herself.

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When she woke, the room was bright with sun, which streamed into the window with such an "up a long time ago" expression, that Emmy knew she must have slept late. She was still tired, and lay quietly looking about her and recognizing all the little conveniences and devices of which she had heard from her sisters, till a little tap sounded, the door softly opened, and Aunt Emma's kind, handsome face looked in.

"Good morning, my dear; I hope you are rested," she said, with a kiss. "I would not let any one wake you, for you must have been tired out. Now you must have some breakfast." And in another moment, with the ease which seemed to characterize all arrangements in which Aunt Emma had a share, in came a napkin-covered tray borne by a neat little maid, with *such* a nice breakfast! A big pink-and-white cup full of hot cocoa, broiled chicken, delicious potato stewed with cream, two white rolls, and a baked pear in a saucer. Nothing could have been more tempting to hungry Emmy, but even as she sipped the first spoonful of cocoa, the question at her heart found its way to her lips: "Aunty, where are the girls?"

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"The girls," said aunty in her pleasant, decided voice, "are gone to Niagara for two or three

days. A party was made up for some friends of your cousin May's who are staying with us, and Bess and Jean and Lena went too. They will be back day after to-morrow, and meanwhile you will have a chance to get thoroughly rested."

"Gone to Niagara!" exclaimed Emmy. "Oh, why didn't they wait till I came!"

"That would not have been possible, my dear," said her aunt. "The Jarvises, for whom the party was made, only stay with us till next Thursday, and May expects other guests early in the week, so she could not be away later." Then some one called her, and Aunt Emma went away, just saying kindly as she walked off, "Make a good breakfast, dear!" [210]

Poor Emmy! she was too hungry not to eat, but the meal was literally mingled with tears. She sobbed with each mouthful, and more than one salt drop hopped down her nose to flavor the baked pear. It was foolish of her, I admit, but disappointments are hard to bear when one is only fourteen years old and very tired into the bargain, and this was a really great disappointment. Three whole days all alone with aunty, and the others away enjoying themselves at Niagara without her! She was rather afraid of her aunt, and, though very desirous to win her good opinion, this hidden fear made Emmy so shy and awkward that she never appeared at her best when in her company. [211]

Sadly and languidly she got up and began to dress, feeling as if the heart was taken out of everything. Raising the lid of the soap-dish, there on the nice little pink cake of soap lay a note with "Emmy" written on it. Much wondering, she opened. It was from her sister Bess, and it read:—

"DEAR EMMY,—Don't be poky because you find us gone. It's only for a day or two, and we shall be back almost before you miss us." ("Not much chance of that!" reflected Emmy, dolorously.) "Be a good girl, laugh and talk with aunty, pet Uncle Tom, *don't poke*, and be glad to see us on Saturday night.

"Your loving
"BESS."

"How can I help poking, and what does she mean anyway?" thought Emmy. However, this proof that she had been remembered cheered her a little, and she went on with her dressing in better spirits. A long folded slip of paper was pinned round the handle of the water-jug. Another note! from Jean this time. [212]

"DEAR LITTLE EMMY," (Emmy was half a head taller than Jean!)—"We hate to go away and leave you, and we wouldn't if it were not so perfectly splendid to see Niagara. It won't be long before we come back, and you mustn't be lonely. Aunty is so nice, and, dear, if only you wouldn't be afraid of her! She doesn't like shy people, so don't be shy. There's a lovely story-book in the bookcase in the dining-room: 'The Dove in the Eagle's Nest.' It's on the third shelf from the top. Do read it while we are away! You will like it, I am sure.

"Your affectionate "JEAN."

Jean was the kindest little soul in the world, but this hint about Aunt Emma's not liking shy people was a mistake. It made Emmy more frightened and ill at ease than ever.

Washing over, she went to the dressing-table to braid her hair. Behold! another billet on the pincushion. This was in rhyme:— [213]

"O Emmy tall, O Emmy fair,
Don't forget to brush your hair.
Pin your ruffle neat and straight,
Be down to breakfast at half-past eight;
Don't crook your shoulders when you sit down,
Don't rip the gathers of your gown,
Don't set up to be lonesome, pray,
Because we girls are gone away,
But cheer up auntie and Uncle Tom,
And we'll be back anon, anon!"

"ANON-Y-MOUS."

This made Emmy smile, and she did her hair quite cheerfully. When she opened the top drawer to put away her comb and brush, she spied a small parcel directed to herself, and laid there to catch her eye. She gave a little laugh. How nice in the girls to do this for her!

The parcel was from Lena. It contained a very pretty velvet pincushion, mounted on a fluted shell, and a note.

"DEAR EMMY,—We are *so* sorry not to be here when you come, but we shall only be gone a little while. Marian Jarvis is such a nice girl! She wants to see you *dreadfully*. I do hope you will like her. You must do everything pleasant that you can think of till we come back. [214]

"Your loving
"LENA."

One more surprise awaited Emmy. She was just leaving the room when she spied a large piece of brown paper pinned to the wall. On it was the following mysterious inscription,—

"N. E. corner of room, under edge of carpet. Search rewarded."

It took her some time to make out which was the northeast corner; when at last she identified it, all that appeared from under the carpet was a similar bit of paper with another mysterious inscription,—

"S. W. corner of room, under edge of carpet. Search rewarded."

The reward of search in this instance was a long narrow parcel containing two brand-new hair-pins and a single line of writing,—

"Behind looking-glass on bureau."

Highly diverted, Emmy hastened to tip the glass, and there, stored away behind it, she beheld a small white jam-pot. A label tucked in between lid and jar said succinctly,—

"Plum jam at bedtime eaten with a hair-pin is *goloptious!* Try it!"

All these jokes and surprises raised Emmy's spirits so that she ran down-stairs quite gleefully. But there things went wrong again. Aunt Emma was deep in household accounts. She nodded kindly to Emmy and said a few pleasant words; then she became absorbed in her reckonings and forgot her for the moment. Emmy was by no means one of those children who can be trusted to entertain themselves *in the room where any one else is sitting*. She was too self-conscious, too apt to imagine that people were criticising what she did or said. She wanted to ramble about the house and identify the things and places she had heard described, and if she had done this simply and naturally as Jean would, or Bess, no one would have been disturbed, least of all Aunt Emma. But a sense of shy awkwardness prevented, and what she did was to wait till her aunt was in the very middle of a long column of figures, and then say timidly,—

"Aunt Emma, may I—may I—go into the dining-room?"

Mrs. Elliott stopped, lost her count, and after trying in vain to recover it, said with a little natural impatience,—

"My dear, never interrupt any one who is adding up a sum, if you can help it. You have lost me all my last ten minutes' work. What did you say? go into the dining-room? why, of course, go just where you like." Then she began to cipher again.

This was quite enough to make Emmy miserable. She had done wrong. She had put Aunt Emma out. Aunt Emma did not love her. She never would love her as she loved the other girls! These reflections passed through her mind as she sat before the glass door of the bookcase, not even trying to look up the story which Jean had recommended. Uncle Tom coming into the room noticed her melancholy attitude, and said in his hearty voice, "Well, my little maid, you look dumpy. All your contemporaries gone, heh! Never mind; they will all be back soon, and meanwhile you must cheer up the old folks." Jean or Bess would have dimpled and giggled at such an address, and perhaps run across the room and given Uncle Tom a kiss; but Emmy only shrank a little and said nothing; so that her uncle, as he drank his glass of Apollinaris water, said to himself, "A sulky child, I'm afraid." So easy it is to be misjudged in this world.

At dinner, Emmy's evil angel took possession of her again. She answered in monosyllables when her uncle and aunt spoke to her, and poked her food into her mouth with a nervous haste which brought on a fit of choking. This mortified her deeply, for she imagined that Aunt Emma was thinking, "What an ill-mannered girl she is!" whereas Aunt Emma was really thinking, "Poor thing! what can I do to make her feel more comfortable?" It would be a convenience, sometimes, if we might have glass panes in our hearts, so that people could look in and see what we are really feeling.

The evening seemed dreadfully long. Emmy pretended to read "The Dove in the Eagle's Nest," but a sort of spell of stiff misery was over her all the while. She was conscious of her knees and elbows, her upper lip kept twitching, she neither acted nor spoke naturally. Mrs. Elliott pitied her, but she could not help saying to herself, "What a self-conscious child she is; how different from Jean and Bess!" And what was worse, Emmy suspected that aunty was thinking exactly that, and suffered accordingly.

Tom came home next day. He was an immensely tall, handsome, good-natured young man. Bess and Jean adored him, and were always telling stories about the things he said and did, but to Emmy he seemed a formidable person. He was fond of teasing and of banter, and it was another of his peculiarities to be particularly observant about a lady's dress. He noticed at once that the braid was ripped off the edge of Emmy's skirt so as to form a dangerous little loop, and told her of it. She went away at once, and sewed it fast, but she felt disgraced somehow, and marked out as a slattern, and could not help shedding a few tears as she worked. Then Tom, who saw everything, observed the red marks under her eyes, and the melancholy droop of her mouth, and he too set her down as sulky, and, supposing that she had taken offence at some of his harmless pleasantries, forbore to joke with her thenceforward. This made her sure that Tom did not like her either, which was another affliction, for Emmy was most anxious to be taken into the circle of his pets and favorites.

In the afternoon she had another mishap. Aunt Emma sent her to get a paper out of her writing-desk, and Emmy somehow managed to hamper the lock so that the key could not be turned. Nobody scolded her, but Mrs. Elliott looked sorry and perplexed, as well she might, with the nearest locksmith twenty miles distant, and Emmy felt that her cup of misfortune was full. That night she cried herself to sleep.

On the third day the party from Niagara came back, and the house all in a moment seemed to fill with bright life and gayety. Cousin May's friends, the Jarvises, were handsome, well-bred girls, with a great deal of air and style about all their appointments. Cousin May herself was a belle and beauty, and had always been the object of Emmy's wildest admiration. Several gentlemen were of the party, and there were Jean and Bess running about with the rest, on the friendliest terms with everybody, and as much at home as Lena. It made Emmy feel left out and lonely, for her shyness was by no means lessened by the arrival of all these strangers, and she had the painful sensation of being separated from the others by a sort of invisible wall, which she could not, and they would not, pass over. Jean and Bess did what they could to cheer her, but a great deal was going on in the large gay household, and they had not much time to spare for the little sister who could not explain even to herself why she felt so forlorn. [221]

Lady Blacksnake was supposed to be Lena's own particular pony. Lena had a little wagon of her own too; and on Monday she took Emmy out with her. This went delightfully till, as they were coming home late in the afternoon, Emmy coaxed Lena to let her drive. What she did to Lady Blacksnake no one ever knew, but all in one minute that excellent animal put her head down and ran away.

"Oh," screamed Emmy, "shall we jump out?" [222]

"No," said Lena, perfectly calm, though her face was very white. "Saw her mouth."

So she took one rein, and Emmy the other, and they sawed Lady Blacksnake's mouth with hard, regular pulls, till the wild pace slackened first to a gallop and then to a trot, and they were going along at their old rate, only Lady Blacksnake's heaving flanks and their own frightened countenances telling the tale of their late danger. It was real danger, for once during the run the hind wheel absolutely grazed the edge of a sharp bank, and had they met another carriage they could scarcely have escaped a collision; but they both agreed to make as light of the incident as they could when they got home, lest they should be forbidden to go out again by themselves. Their account of the accident therefore was given with a levity which quite angered Uncle Tom.

"Upon my word, young ladies," he said severely, "you seem to think it a fine thing to have been in danger of your lives. If you had really broken all your bones it would have been funnier still, I suppose. What on earth *are* you laughing at?" for somehow this address tickled the girls' half-hysterical mood into paroxysms of giggling which continued till they cried, and the more Uncle Tom frowned the more they giggled. Aunt Emma saw how it was, and ordered them off to bed, and next morning the reaction had come, and they were pale and nervous and depressed enough to please the most exacting friend who might be anxious to make them "sensible of their escape." [223]

Wednesday, the day before the Jarvises were to leave, had been set aside for a picnic. Emmy had looked forward eagerly to this; so you can imagine her feelings when on Tuesday a hard toothache set in which kept her awake all night, and left her next morning still in such pain and with such a swollen face that it was manifestly impossible for her to leave the house. Kind little Jean offered to give up the picnic and stay at home with her; but neither Emmy nor Aunt Emma would hear of this, and it ended in everybody's going and leaving her in the care of old Eliza, aunty's housekeeper, who had been nurse to all the children in turn, from Tom to Lena, and liked nothing better than a chance to cuddle and cosset any one who was ill. [224]

Her warm fomentations and roasted raisins and pettings and pattings were so effectual that by afternoon Emmy felt quite comfortable again. She grew very fond of kind old Eliza, and her heart being opened by the situation, she ended by telling her how miserable and "unlucky" she had been all the week.

"And indeed I can't see any reason for it, though I'm sorry enough it is so, Miss Emmy," declared Eliza when she had listened to the tale. "Never any young person came here before who didn't look upon this house as a kind of a paradise."

"I know. That's just the way Jean and Bess feel. But then they are different from me. Everybody likes them," said Emmy. [225]

"And pray why shouldn't they like yourself, miss, I'd like to ask?"

"I—don't—know," slowly. "I'm always getting into scrapes and making mistakes, and things don't happen nicely with me as they do with them. Just think of all the misfortunes I've had this week since I came! My train was late, and I was all tired out, and the girls went to Niagara without me, and I broke Aunt Emma's lock, and the horse ran away, and now this toothache! I am *very* unfortunate."

"Well, I *have* heard of other people's trains being late afore now," replied Eliza, dryly. "And though I'm sorry you didn't have the trip with the rest, miss, it wasn't nobody's fault that you didn't come in time. It was a pity about the lock, to be sure—the Madam hasn't got it open yet, I know—but so far as the horse goes, it's no more than I'm always expecting, letting Miss Lena drive out by herself with them vicious little rats of ponies. And God sent your toothache, miss, I

suppose you know that."

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"Well, God made me shy, too, I suppose, and that's my worst misfortune of all," declared Emmy.

"I'm not so sure about that, either," remarked the shrewd old Eliza. "In my opinion, what folks call shyness is very often just another name for selfishness. If you thought about yourself less and about other people more, Miss Emmy, you wouldn't be so shy, as you call it. You'll get better of it as soon as you're old enough to find out that for the most part of the time nobody is noticing what you do or thinking about you at all."

There was a certain tonic in this speech of Eliza's which did Emmy good. She lay meditating upon it that night after the girls had come in to kiss her and say how dreadfully they had missed her at the picnic, and how she must get quite well before next Monday, when they were going to have another. She had slept so much during the day that she was not sleepy now, and she lay turning over in her mind what Eliza had said. *Was shyness selfishness?* and was it her own fault that she got on so badly and made so many mistakes? or was she really marked for misfortune and doomed to be misunderstood, as she had sometimes imagined? She thought of Bess and Jean with a little wonderment of envy. How pretty and nice they were! how people liked them! how easy it seemed to them to be graceful and natural and at ease with strangers!

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While she was thus thinking, a queer little noise met her ear, like some one snapping two sticks together. Again it came and yet again, and Emmy was sure that she smelt a slight smell of burning. All her little foolish fancies fled at once. She jumped out of bed, lit a candle, slipped on her dressing-gown, and opened the door. The burning smell was stronger in the entry, and the air was dim with smoke. Not nervous now nor cowardly, Emmy ran down-stairs with all her wits about her, following the smoke till she came to Uncle Tom's office. The door stood half open, and inside she saw a flaring light. The carpet was on fire in front of the grate, flames were creeping up the legs of the table, which was covered with papers. Emmy knew that some of these papers were valuable, and without a thought of fear she hurried in, gathered as many as she could in her hands, flung them into the hall, ran back for more, and never stopped till all were safe. Then she ran to Uncle Tom's dressing-closet for a pitcher of water which she knew was kept there, and dashed it on the flames, all the time calling at the top of her voice, "Fire! fire! fire! O Tom! O aunty! O Uncle Tom! O somebody! Come, please come! Oh, why don't you hear!"

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It is astonishing how long it takes to wake up people who are sound asleep. Emmy had time to fetch another pitcher of water from the kitchen, and the fire was nearly out before the family came rushing down, half dressed and bewildered, to her aid. Fires are easily managed if they are taken in hand exactly at the right time, but half an hour more or less makes a great difference. Emmy had acted at the critical moment, and her courage and presence of mind had probably saved the house.

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Uncle Tom declared that he owed her ten thousand dollars. Part of this debt he paid the very next week by the present of the prettiest little gold watch and chain ever seen, with the date of the fire engraved inside the watch-lid. Aunty, too much agitated to speak, folded Emmy in her arms and gave her a great squeeze which said more than words. Tom, when he understood the whole, said that she was "a brick," and that not one girl in a thousand would have been so plucky or shown so much sense. So poor, awkward Emmy, who had fared so ill up to this time, got up next morning, like Lord Byron, to find herself famous, and the heroine of the house.

To be praised and made much of does some people harm, but to others it does a great deal of good. Emmy did not grow vain when she found herself thus made important. She only felt that she was liked, and approved of, and it set her at her ease. From that day Elliott's Mills grew delightful to her as it had always been to her sisters. She ran about freely among the others, talked, laughed, shared in the fun that was going on, and enjoyed every moment of her visit.

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Years afterward, when she and Aunt Emma had grown intimate, Emmy told that dear friend and relative whom she had learned to love and admire better than any one else except her own mother, the story of her foolish troubles.

"But indeed," she ended, "they were lucky troubles to me, for I never was so bad after that. I think what old Eliza said about selfishness stuck in my mind, and I found out after a while that she was pretty much right, and that the way to be comfortable and at ease was to think about other people instead of myself."

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"And I am sure," replied Aunt Emma, "that your troubles were lucky troubles for us. If you hadn't had the toothache and lain awake meditating on that and your other sorrows, I'm sure I don't know where we should all be now, my dear little Emmy."

TOINETTE AND THE ELVES.

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HE winter sun was nearing the horizon's edge. Each moment the tree-shadows grew longer in the forest; each moment the crimson light on the upper boughs became more red and bright. It was Christmas Eve, or would be in half an hour, when the sun should be fairly set; but it



did not feel like Christmas, for the afternoon was mild and sweet, and the wind in the leafless boughs sang, as it moved about, as though to imitate the vanished birds. Soft trills and whistles, odd little shakes and twitters,—it was astonishing what pretty noises the wind made, for it was in good humor, as winds should be on the Blessed Night; all its storm-tones and bass-notes were for the moment laid aside, and gently, as though hushing a baby to sleep, it cooed and rustled and brushed to and fro in the leafless woods.

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Toinette stood, pitcher in hand, beside the well. "Wishing Well," the people called it, for they believed that if any one standing there, bowed to the East, repeated a certain rhyme and wished a wish, the wish would certainly come true. Unluckily, nobody knew exactly what the rhyme should be. Toinette did not; she was wishing that she did, as she stood with her eyes fixed on the bubbling water. How nice it would be! she thought. What beautiful things should be hers, if it were only to wish and to have! She would be beautiful, rich, good—oh, so good! The children should love her dearly, and never be disagreeable. Mother should not work so hard—they should all go back to France—which mother said was *si belle*. Oh, dear, how nice it would be! Meantime, the sun sank lower, and mother at home was waiting for the water, but Toinette forgot that.

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Suddenly she started. A low sound of crying met her ear, and something like a tiny moan. It seemed close by, but she saw nothing.

Hastily she filled her pitcher, and turned to go. But again the sound came, an unmistakable sob, right under her feet. Toinette stopped short.

"What *is* the matter?" she called out bravely.

"Is anybody there; and if there is, why don't I see you?"

A third sob—and all at once, down on the ground beside her, a tiny figure became visible, so small that Toinette had to kneel and stoop her head to see it plainly. The figure was that of an odd little man. He wore a garb of green, bright and glancing as the scales of a beetle. In his mite of a hand was a cap, out of which stuck a long-pointed feather. Two specks of tears stood on his cheeks, and he fixed on Toinette a glance so sharp and so sad, that it made her feel sorry and frightened and confused all at once.

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"Why, how funny this is!" she said, speaking to herself out loud.

"Not at all," replied the little man, in a voice as dry and crisp as the chirr of a grasshopper. "Anything but funny. I wish you wouldn't use such words. It hurts my feelings, Toinette."

"Do you know my name, then?" cried Toinette, astonished. "That's strange! But what is the matter? Why are you crying so, little man?"

"I'm not a little man. I'm an elf," responded the dry voice; "and I think you'd cry if you had an engagement out to tea, and found yourself spiked on a great bayonet, so that you couldn't move an inch. Look!" He turned a little as he spoke, and Toinette saw a long rose-thorn sticking through the back of the green robe. The little man could by no means reach the thorn, and it held him fast prisoner to the place.

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"Is that all? I'll take it out for you," she said.

"Be careful—oh, be careful!" entreated the little man. "This is my new dress, you know—my Christmas suit, and it's got to last a year. If there is a hole in it, Peascod will tickle me, and Bean Blossom tease till I shall wish myself dead." He stamped with vexation at the thought.

"Now, you mustn't do that," said Toinette, in a motherly tone, "else you'll tear it yourself, you know." She broke off the thorn as she spoke, and gently drew it out. The elf anxiously examined the stuff. A tiny puncture only was visible, and his face brightened.

"You're a good child," he said. "I'll do as much for you some day, perhaps."

"I would have come before if I had seen you," remarked Toinette, timidly. "But I didn't see you a bit."

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"No, because I had my cap on," replied the elf. He placed it on his head as he spoke, and, hey, presto! nobody was there, only a voice which laughed and said: "Well—don't stare so. Lay your finger on me now."

"Oh!" said Toinette, with a gasp. "How wonderful! What fun it must be to do that! The children wouldn't see me. I should steal in and surprise them; they would go on talking, and never guess that I was there! I should so like it! Do elves ever lend their caps to anybody? I wish you'd lend me yours. It must be so nice to be invisible!"

"Ho!" cried the elf, appearing suddenly again. "Lend my cap, indeed! Why, it wouldn't stay on the very tip of your ear, it's so small. As for nice, that depends. Sometimes it is, and sometimes it isn't. No, the only way for mortal people to be invisible is to gather the fern-seed and put it in their shoes."

"Gather it? Where? I never saw any seed to the ferns," said Toinette, staring about her.

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"Of course not—we elves take care of that," replied the little man. "Nobody finds the fern-seed but ourselves. I'll tell you what, though. You were such a nice child to take out the thorn so

cleverly, that I'll *give* you a little of the seed. Then you can try the fun of being invisible, to your heart's content."

"Will you really? How delightful! May I have it now?"

"Bless me! do you think I carry my pocket stuffed with it?" said the elf. "Not at all. Go home, say not a word to anybody, but leave your bedroom window open to-night, and you'll see what you'll see."

He laid his finger on his nose as he spoke, gave a jump like a grasshopper, clapping on his cap as he went, and vanished. Toinette lingered a moment, in hopes that he might come back, then took her pitcher and hurried home. The woods were very dusky by this time; but, full of her strange adventure, she did not remember to feel afraid. [239]

"How long you have been!" said her mother. "It's late for a little maid like you to be up. You must make better speed another time, my child."

Toinette pouted, as she was apt to do when reproved. The children clamored to know what had kept her, and she spoke pettishly and crossly; so that they too became cross, and presently went away into the outer kitchen to play by themselves. The children were apt to creep away when Toinette came. It made her angry and unhappy at times that they should do so, but she did not realize that it was in great part her own fault, and so did not set herself to mend it.

"Tell me a 'tory," said baby Jeanneton, creeping to her knee a little later. But Toinette's head was full of the elf; she had no time to spare for Jeanneton.

"Oh, not to-night!" she replied. "Ask mother to tell you one." [240]

"Mother's busy," said Jeanneton, wistfully.

Toinette took no notice, and the little one crept away disconsolately.

Bedtime at last. Toinette set the casement open, and lay a long time waiting and watching; then she fell asleep. She waked with a sneeze and jump, and sat up in bed. Behold, on the coverlet stood her elfin friend, with a long train of other elves beside him, all clad in the beetle-wing green, and wearing little pointed caps! More were coming in at the window; outside a few were drifting about in the moon-rays, which lit their sparkling robes till they glittered like so many fire-flies. The odd thing was, that though the caps were on, Toinette could see the elves distinctly, and this surprised her so much, that again she thought out loud, and said, "How funny!"

"You mean about the caps," replied her special elf, who seemed to have the power of reading thoughts. "Yes, you can see us tonight, caps and all. Spells lose their value on Christmas Eve, always. Peascod, where is the box? Do you still wish to try the experiment of being invisible, Toinette?" [241]

"Oh, yes—indeed I do!"

"Very well—so let it be!"

As he spoke he beckoned, and two elves, puffing and panting like men with a heavy load, dragged forward a droll little box about the size of a pumpkin-seed. One of them lifted the cover.

"Pay the porter, please, ma'am," he said, giving Toinette's ear a mischievous tweak with his sharp fingers.

"Hands off, you bad Peascod!" cried Toinette's elf. "This is my girl. She shan't be pinched." He dealt Peascod a blow with his tiny hand as he spoke, and looked so brave and warlike that he seemed at least an inch taller than he had before. Toinette admired him very much; and Peascod slunk away with an abashed giggle, muttering that Thistle needn't be so ready with his fist. [242]

Thistle—for thus, it seemed, Toinette's friend was named—dipped his fingers in the box, which was full of fine brown seeds, and shook a handful into each of Toinette's shoes, as they stood, toes together, by the bedside.

"Now you have your wish," he said, "and can go about and do what you like, no one seeing. The charm will end at sunset. Make the most of it while you can; but if you want to end it sooner, shake the seeds from the shoes, and then you are just as usual."

"Oh, I shan't want to," protested Toinette; "I'm sure I shan't."

"Good-by," said Thistle, with a mocking little laugh.

"Good-by, and thank you ever so much," replied Toinette.

"Good-by, good-by," replied the other elves, in shrill chorus. They clustered together, as if in consultation; then straight out of the window they flew like a swarm of gauzy-winged bees, and melted into the moonlight. Toinette jumped up and ran to watch them; but the little men were gone—not a trace of them was to be seen; so she shut the window, went back to bed, and presently, in the midst of her amazed and excited thoughts, fell asleep. [243]

She waked in the morning with a queer, doubtful feeling. Had she dreamed, or had it really happened? She put on her best petticoat, and laced her blue bodice; for she thought the mother

would perhaps take them across the wood to the little chapel for the Christmas service. Her long hair smoothed and tied, her shoes trimly fastened, down-stairs she ran. The mother was stirring porridge over the fire. Toinette went close to her, but she did not move or turn her head.

"How late the children are!" she said at last, lifting the boiling pot on the hob. Then she went to the stair-foot, and called, "Marc, Jeanneton, Pierre, Marie! Breakfast is ready, my children. Toinette—but where, then, is Toinette? She is used to be down long before this."

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"Toinette isn't up-stairs," said Marie, from above. "Her door is wide open, and she isn't there."

"That is strange!" said the mother. "I have been here an hour, and she has not passed this way since." She went to the outer door and called, "Toinette! Toinette!"—passing close to Toinette as she did so, and looking straight at her with unseeing eyes. Toinette, half frightened, half pleased, giggled low to herself. She really was invisible then! How strange it seemed, and what fun it was going to be!

The children sat down to breakfast, little Jeanneton, as the youngest, saying grace. The mother distributed the hot porridge, and gave each a spoon, but she looked anxious.

"Where can Toinette have gone?" she said to herself.

Toinette was conscience-pricked. She was half inclined to dispel the charm on the spot. But just then she caught a whisper from Pierre to Marc, which so surprised her as to put the idea out of her head.

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"Perhaps a wolf has eaten her up—a great big wolf, like the 'Capuchon Rouge,' you know." This was what Pierre said; and Marc answered, unfeelingly,—

"If he has, I shall ask mother to let me have her room for my own!"

Poor Toinette! her cheeks burnt and her eyes filled with tears at this. Didn't the boys love her a bit, then? Next she grew angry, and longed to box Marc's ears, only she recollected in time that she was invisible. What a bad boy, he was! she thought.

The smoking porridge reminded her that she was hungry; so brushing away the tears, she slipped a spoon off the table, and whenever she found the chance, dipped it into the bowl for a mouthful. The porridge disappeared rapidly.

"I want some more," said Jeanneton.

"Bless me, how fast you have eaten!" said the mother, turning to the bowl.

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This made Toinette laugh, which shook her spoon, and a drop of the hot mixture fell right on the tip of Marie's nose, as she sat with upturned face waiting her turn for a second helping. Marie gave a little scream.

"What is it?" said the mother.

"Hot water! Right in my face!" spluttered Marie.

"Water!" cried Marc. "It's porridge."

"You spattered with your spoon. Eat more carefully, my child," said the mother; and Toinette laughed again as she heard her. After all, there was some fun in being invisible!

The morning went by. Constantly the mother went to the door, and, shading her eyes with her hand, looked out, in hopes of seeing a little figure come down the wood-path, for she thought, perhaps the child went to the spring after water, and fell asleep there. The children played happily, meanwhile. They were used to doing without Toinette, and did not seem to miss her, except that now and then baby Jeanneton said: "Poor Toinette gone—not here—all gone!"

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"Well, what if she has?" said Marc at last, looking up from the wooden cup he was carving for Marie's doll. "We can play all the better."

Marc was a bold, outspoken boy, who always told his whole mind about things.

"If she were here," he went on, "she'd only scold and interfere. Toinette almost always scolds. I like to have her go away. It makes it pleasanter."

"It *is* rather pleasanter," admitted Marie, "only I'd like her to be having a nice time somewhere else."

"Bother about Toinette!" cried Pierre. "Let's play 'My godmother has cabbage to sell.'"

I don't think Toinette had ever felt so unhappy in her life, as when she stood by unseen, and heard the children say these words. She had never meant to be unkind to them, but she was quick-tempered, dreamy, wrapped up in herself. She did not like being interrupted by them, it put her out, and then she spoke sharply and was cross. She had taken it for granted that the others must love her, by a sort of right, and the knowledge that they did not grieved her very much. Creeping away, she hid herself in the woods. It was a sparkling day, but the sun did not look so bright as usual. Cuddled down under a rose-bush, Toinette sat sobbing as if her heart would break at the recollection of the speeches she had overheard.

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By and by a little voice within her woke up and began to make itself audible. All of us know this

little voice. We call it conscience.

"Jeanneton missed me," she thought. "And, oh dear! I pushed her away only last night and wouldn't tell her a story. And Marie hoped I was having a pleasant time somewhere. I wish I hadn't slapped Marie last Friday. And I wish I hadn't thrown Marc's ball into the fire that day I was angry with him. How unkind he was to say that—but I wasn't always kind to him. And once I said that I wished a bear would eat Pierre up. That was because he broke my cup. Oh dear, oh dear! What a bad girl I've been to them all!"

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"But you could be better and kinder if you tried, couldn't you?" said the inward voice. "I think you could." And Toinette clasped her hands tight and said out loud: "I could. Yes—and I will."

The first thing to be done was to get rid of the fern-seed, which she now regarded as a hateful thing. She untied her shoes and shook it out in the grass. It dropped, and seemed to melt into the air, for it instantly vanished. A mischievous laugh sounded close behind, and a beetle-green coat-tail was visible, whisking under a tuft of rushes. But Toinette had had enough of the elves, and, tying her shoes, took the road toward home, running with all her might.

"Where have you been all day, Toinette?" cried the children, as, breathless and panting, she flew in at the gate. But Toinette could not speak. She made slowly for her mother, who stood in the doorway, flung herself into her arms, and burst into a passion of tears.

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"Ma chérie, what is it, whence hast thou come?" asked the good mother, alarmed. She lifted Toinette into her arms as she spoke, and hastened indoors. The other children followed, whispering and peeping, but the mother sent them away, and, sitting down by the fire with Toinette in her lap, she rocked and hushed and comforted, as though Toinette had been again a little baby. Gradually the sobs ceased. For a while Toinette lay quiet, with her head on her mother's breast. Then she wiped her wet eyes, put her arms around her mother's neck, and told her all from the very beginning, keeping not a single thing back. The dame listened with alarm.

"Saints protect us," she muttered. Then feeling Toinette's hands and head, "Thou hast a fever," she said. "I will make thee a *tisane*, my darling, and thou must at once go to bed." Toinette vainly protested; to bed she went, and perhaps it was the wisest thing, for the warm drink threw her into a long, sound sleep, and when she woke she was herself again, bright and well, hungry for dinner, and ready to do her usual tasks.

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Herself,—but not quite the same Toinette that she had been before. Nobody changes from bad to better in a minute. It takes time for that, time and effort, and a long struggle with evil habits and tempers. But there is sometimes a certain minute or day in which people *begin* to change, and thus it was with Toinette. The fairy lesson was not lost upon her. She began to fight with herself, to watch her faults and try to conquer them. It was hard work; often she felt discouraged, but she kept on. Week after week and month after month she grew less selfish, kinder, more obliging than she used to be. When she failed, and her old fractious temper got the better of her, she was sorry, and begged every one's pardon so humbly that they could not but forgive. The mother began to think that the elves really had bewitched her child. As for the children, they learned to love Toinette as never before, and came to her with all their pains and pleasures, as children should to a kind older sister. Each fresh proof of this, every kiss from Jeanneton, every confidence from Marc, was a comfort to Toinette, for she never forgot Christmas Day, and felt that no trouble was too much to wipe out that unhappy recollection. "I *think* they like me better than they did then," she would say; but then the thought came, "Perhaps if I were invisible again, if they did not know I was there, I might hear something to make me feel as badly as I did that morning." These sad thoughts were part of the bitter fruit of the fairy fern-seed.

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So with doubts and fears the year went by, and again it was Christmas Eve. Toinette had been asleep some hours, when she was roused by a sharp tapping at the window-pane. Startled and only half awake, she sat up in bed, and saw by the moonlight a tiny figure outside, which she recognized. It was Thistle, drumming with his knuckles on the glass.

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"Let me in," cried the dry little voice. So Toinette opened the casement, and Thistle flew in and perched, as before, on the coverlet.

"Merry Christmas, my girl," he said, "and a Happy New Year when it comes! I've brought you a present;" and, dipping into a pouch tied round his waist, he pulled out a handful of something brown. Toinette knew what it was in a moment.

"Oh, no!" she cried, shrinking back. "Don't give me any fern-seeds. They frighten me. I don't like them."

"Now, don't be silly," said Thistle, his voice sounding kind this time, and earnest. "It wasn't pleasant being invisible last year, but perhaps this year it will be. Take my advice, and try it. You'll not be sorry."

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"Shan't I?" said Toinette, brightening. "Very well then, I will." She leaned out of bed, and watched Thistle strew the fine, dust-like grains in each shoe.

"I'll drop in to-morrow night, and just see how you like it," he said. Then, with a nod, he was gone.

The old fear came back when she woke in the morning, and she tied on her shoes with a tremble at her heart. Down-stairs she stole. The first thing she saw was a wooden ship standing

on her plate. Marc had made the ship, but Toinette had no idea that it was for her.

The little ones sat round the table with their eyes on the door, watching till Toinette should come in, and be surprised.

"I wish she'd hurry," said Pierre, drumming on his bowl with a spoon.

"We all want Toinette, don't we?" said the mother, smiling as she poured the hot porridge. [255]

"It will be fun to see her stare," declared Marc. "Toinette is jolly when she stares. Her eyes look big, and her cheeks grow pink. Andre Brugen thinks his sister Aline is prettiest, but I don't. Our Toinette is ever so pretty."

"She is ever so nice, too," said Pierre. "She's as good to play with as—as—a boy!" he finished triumphantly.

"Oh, I wish my Toinette *would* come!" said Jeanneton.

Toinette waited no longer, but sped up-stairs with glad tears in her eyes. Two minutes, and down she came again, visible this time. Her heart was light as a feather.

"Merry Christmas!" clamored the children. The ship was presented, Toinette was duly surprised, and so the happy day began.

That night Toinette left the window open, and lay down in her clothes; for she felt, as Thistle had been so kind, she ought to receive him politely. He came at midnight, and with him all the other little men in green. [256]

"Well, how was it?" asked Thistle.

"Oh, I liked it this time," declared Toinette, with shining eyes. "And I thank you so much!"

"I'm glad you did," said the elf. "And I'm glad you are thankful, for we want you to do something for us."

"What can it be?" inquired Toinette, wondering.

"You must know," went on Thistle, "that there is no dainty in the world which we elves enjoy like a bowl of fern-seed broth. But it has to be cooked over a real fire, and we dare not go near fire, you know, lest our wings scorch. So we seldom get any fern-seed broth. Now, Toinette—will you make us some?"

"Indeed I will," cried Toinette, "only you must tell me how."

"It is very simple," said Peascod; "only seed and honey dew, stirred from left to right with a sprig of fennel. Here's the seed and the fennel, and here's the dew. Be sure and stir from the left; if you don't, it curdles, and the flavor will be spoiled." [257]

Down into the kitchen they went, and Toinette, moving very softly, quickened the fire, set on the smallest bowl she could find, and spread the doll's table with the wooden saucers which Marc had made for Jeanneton to play with. Then she mixed and stirred as the elves bade, and when the soup was done, served it to them smoking hot. How they feasted! No bumble-bee, dipping into a flower-cup, ever sipped and twinkled more rapturously than they.

When the last drop was eaten, they made ready to go. Each, in turn, kissed Toinette's hand, and said a little word of farewell. Thistle brushed his feathered cap over the door-post as he passed.

"Be lucky, house," he said, "for you have received and entertained the luck-bringers. And be lucky, Toinette. Good temper *is* good luck, and sweet words and kind looks and peace in the heart are the fairest of fortunes. See that you never lose them again, my girl." With this, he too kissed Toinette's hand, waved his feathered cap, and—whir! they all were gone, while Toinette, covering the fire with ashes, and putting aside the little cups, stole up to her bed a happy child. [258]

JEAN'S MONEY, AND WHAT IT BOUGHT. [259]



THE last recitation of the last day of the district school-term was over, and the boys and girls shut their books and put away slates and pencils, with a glad sense of liberty immediately at hand, which made it doubly hard to sit still for the few remaining moments. Jean Thompson, their teacher, was almost as impatient as they. She was but seventeen, scarcely older than her oldest scholar, and in her joy at getting through the term would doubtless have made short work of the closing exercises, had not Mr. Gillicraft been there. Mr. Gillicraft was the senior member of the school board,—a slow, formal man, who liked things done ceremoniously, so for his sake there had to be a little delay. He made a speech to the children, speaking at length and deliberately. They were all pleased to have vacation begin, no doubt, but he hoped, etc. He was sure they would join him in thanking their excellent teacher, Miss Thompson, for the judicious manner in which, etc. He trusted the moral discipline inculcated during the term would not, etc. [260]

And he hoped some at least of them would find time to study somewhat during the vacation, and thus redeem time which otherwise would be idly spent. The children fidgeted dreadfully during these remarks. The blue sky and bright air wooed and coaxed them through the open door; their feet were dancing with impatience, how *could* they attend to Mr. Gillicraft? At last the end came, the long-desired bell tinkled; and whooping, jumping, rioting, out they all rushed into their twelve weeks' freedom. One or two of the lesser girls waited to kiss "Teacher" for good-by; then they followed the rest.

When the last child was gone, Mr. Gillicraft approached Jean, who was setting matters straight in her desk. His hand was in his pocket, from which he presently drew a fat leathern wallet. [261]

"Ahem!" he said. "It is my duty and my privilege, too, as I may say, to hand you this, Miss Thompson." Mr. Gillicraft called her "Jean" usually, having known her all her life, but this was a formal occasion. "Nine—ten—eleven," he went on, counting the bills which he had drawn from his wallet—"twelve. You will find that correct, I believe, \$120, and I desire to say, in the name of the board, that we are quite satisfied with the manner in which you have conducted the school, and gratified at your decision to continue with us during the ensuing year."

"Thank you, sir," said Jean, modestly.

"Count it," remarked Mr. Gillicraft, dropping the official and resuming the friend—"always count your money, Jean, it's business-like. And don't put it loose in your pocket—that's a careless trick. You never had so much money at a time before in your life, did you? What are you going to do with it all?" [262]

"I don't quite know yet," replied Jean, "I shall have to talk with father about it. I'll lock the door now, Mr. Gillicraft, if you're ready, and give you the key."

"Have you got it?" whispered her brother James, as Mr. Gillicraft and the key disappeared around the corner. "Have you got it, Jean?"

Jean nodded.

"How splendid," said Elsie, a younger sister, coming to Jean's other side. "Show me. Oh! What a lot of money!"

"What will you get with it?" asked James. "Don't I wish it was mine! I know well enough what I would buy."

"So do I," chimed in Elsie.

"What?" said Jean, with a smile.

"A piano! And the dearest little dog—just like Ruth Parsons's dog, if I could find one. And ever so many books. And a watch." And Elsie's list was interrupted by the necessity of taking breath. [263]

"Hoo! Isn't that just like a girl? Why, you couldn't get half those with that, you silly," put in her brother. "I'd get something quite different. I'd get a pony, a real strong useful pony, which father could plough with when I wasn't riding him. That would be something like."

"Your pony would cost as much as Elsie's piano," remarked Jean.

"Well, what would you get?" said James. "Will you get some nice clothes?"

"Pshaw! Clothes! Will you get a watch, Jean? Or a breastpin and ear-rings?"

"Now, what use would ear-rings be to her when she hasn't any holes in her ears, Elsie? Do tell us, Jean—what will you get?"

Jean laughed. It seemed as if all the world was bound to find out what she meant to do with her money. [264]

"I'll tell you by and by," she said. "I've made up my mind, I *think*, what I'd rather do, but I want to talk to father first." They reached the top of the hill as she spoke, and she pushed open the gate for the others to enter, paying no attention to Elsie's rather fretful—

"By and by. That's a long time. Tell us now, Jean, please do."

After tea was the best time to catch Farmer Thompson at leisure. At that hour he usually treated himself to half an hour's rest and a pipe in the porch, and there Jean found him on this particular night.

"Mr. Gillicraft paid me this to-day," she said, handing him the roll of bills.

"Ay. They're prompt with it, but that's but fair. Well, my lass—it's a good bit of money. What'll ye do with your gains?"

"I'll tell you something I was thinking of, father—if you approve, that is. It's a great many years since mother and you came from Scotland here, and she's never been home since, you know." [265]

"Twenty-one years come October. 'Tis a long time, truly," replied her father, letting a curl of smoke escape from the corner of his mouth.

"Well—there was an advertisement in the paper, awhile ago, about a steamboat line, the

Anchor Line, it's called, I think, which goes to Glasgow, and it said great reductions for this summer, and people could go and come back in the second cabin for forty-five dollars. Now if mother'd like it, and I know she would, she and I could go for what I've got, and she could visit grandmother, and there'd be thirty dollars left for other things, such as going down to New York and from Glasgow to Greenock. Grandmother lives in Greenock, doesn't she? Do you think it's a good plan, father?"

"Well, it depends on your mother. If she likes to go, I'd say nought against it," replied her father. Then, his habitual Scotch caution relaxing, he added: "You're a good lass, Jean. A good, dutiful lass to think of this. Your granny's an old woman by now, and I've known this long back that your mother was wearying to see her again before she dies, and I'd have sent her myself, only I never could see the way to do it. Scotland's a long travel, and money's none too plenty now-a-days with any of us. I'll just smoke my pipe out, and then you and I'll go in and talk it over with mother."

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Mrs. Thompson heard the proposal with a tremulous mixture of bewilderment and joy. She was not a strong woman, and fever-and-ague, that insidious scourge of so many country districts, had struck at the hill-farm the year before, and left her weakened and languid for months afterward. The neighbors were told the new plan, and preparations set on foot at once, that Jean might lose as little as possible of her brief vacation time. Everybody was interested and excited. Mrs. Parsons brought warm knitted hoods to be worn at sea; Mrs. Wright, a waterproof clothes-bag and a box of Ayer's Pills; Mrs. Gillicraft two linen catchalls for state-room use, with pockets, and pincushions well furnished with pins.

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"I envy you," said Maria Parsons, who was Jean's special friend. "I always was wild to travel, but there! I don't suppose I ever shall, so long as I live. Some folks are born lucky. You'll have a splendid time, Jean."

"Do you think so?" replied Jean, rather dismally.

"Think so? Why, girl alive, don't you *know* it?"

"Well no, I don't. The fact is, Maria—the fact is—well—I *hate* travelling. I don't look forward to it one bit. I shall be horribly sick first, and then I shall be horribly homesick: I'm perfectly sure of it. Dear me—how I wish it was over, and we safely back."

"Good gracious!" cried Maria, opening her eyes. "What on earth do you go for, Jean, if you feel that way?"

"Only to take mother. *She* wants to go, and I always said she should, if ever I could earn any money to take her. Except for that, I'd gladly give you the chance, and stay at home instead."

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This was not a very bright beginning for so long a journey. But Jean did not think about that. She had the sturdy old Scotch blood in her, and having once put her hand to a task, did not look back.

Her expectations were realized so far as the voyage went, for they had a rough passage, and both she and her mother were sick for more than half the way over. It was dull work enough for a strong, active girl to lie day after day in a narrow berth, watching the curtains swing and the vessel rock, and very often Jean said to herself, "I can't imagine what people want to go to Europe for. It's *horrid!* I only wish Maria were in my place—since she wanted to come so much, and I at home instead. I'm sure I'd change in a minute, if I could."

Matters mended toward the last, and by the time the steamer entered the Frith of Clyde, Mrs. Thompson, as well as Jean, was able to be on deck. It was a fine day, and as they slowly steamed up the beautiful Frith, between richly cultivated shores, with wooded hills dotted with country-seats rising behind, and purple mountain outlines still farther back, something new stirred in Jean's mind, a quite unlooked-for excitement and pleasure, which roused and woke her mind to the glad reception of fresh impressions. It was the first reward of her unselfishness, but she had looked for no reward, and had been conscious of no unselfishness; so it came with the zest of unexpectedness, and was doubly delightful.

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"Mother, there's a castle!" she exclaimed. "I truly think it's a real castle. It looks just like the pictures of them."

"And what for no?" replied her mother, whose Scotch seemed to revive and broaden with the very aspect of her native shores—"what for should it na' be a castle? Mony's the castle I've seen in my childish time. Oh! there's the Cathedral, Jean, and the Custom House, and the bonny Monument. I weel remember them a', lang as 'tis. And there—Jean, see by the pillar—I'm most sure that's your uncle Andrew. I know him by the bonny shoulders, and the head above everybody else's; but dear, he's grown much older since—much older."

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This was no unnatural result of twenty-one years of separation, but at that moment Mrs. Thompson did not remember this. "It's like a dream," she kept on repeating. "This is Glasgow, and that's my brother that I never looked to see again! It's like a dream, Jean."

If they had turned back then and there for thirteen more days of weary sea, Jean would have felt rewarded for her journey by the half-tearful rapture which shone in her mother's face at that moment. But they did not turn back. They landed instead, and, with Uncle Andrew's assistance, were soon in the train for Greenock. He and his sister plunged at once into conversation in

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Scotch so much broader than Jean was used to, that she could hardly follow it. So she looked out of the window instead of talking, and there was plenty there to keep both eyes and mind happily busy. The trees, the buildings, the silver links and windings of the Frith, the pearl-gray shimmering atmosphere which enveloped all—it was unlike anything she had ever seen, and gave her a pleasure which she had not expected to feel.

Grandmother's house, or flat, was in an old-fashioned street. It was rather barely furnished to American eyes, but very clean and orderly, and there was nothing bare in the greeting given by the sweet-faced old Scotchwoman to her long-unseen child and that child's child. Jean was amused to hear her mother spoken to as if she were still almost a baby, while to herself granny accorded a certain respect and distance as to a stranger and a woman grown. Her size and age seemed an entire surprise to her Scotch relations, who had apparently never realized a growth of which they had only heard in letters. [272]

"She's a big hearty lass, indeed, she's a very goodly lass!" granny kept on saying. "She's as large for a maiden as Sandy is for a lad. Aweel, I can't understand it, Maggie. Ye were always the least of my weans, always the wee one of the flock, and it's muckle strange that your lass should be bigger than any of her cousins, and your sisters all bigger than yersel. I'm clear puzzled about it."

But puzzlement was lost in pleasure when she understood that the whole journey was the gift of Jean, the earnings of a year's hard work. She took the girl into her arms, held her tight, and kissed her heartily.

"She who goes a mithering shall find violets in the lanes," she said, quoting the pretty old English proverb. "Ye'll find it so, my dear lassie. Ye'll be the richer all your life for giving your mither and me the chance of meeting again once more on this side the grave, trust me, Jean, ye will." [273]

"I'm richer already, granny," whispered Jean, warmed through and through by the words and the embrace. There was no stiffness between her and grandmother after that. So granny's love was the first thing bought with Jean's money.

"Sandy" was Uncle Andrew's son. His mother had long been dead, and he and his father lived with granny in her flat. He was a manly young fellow, steady and cheery both, and doing well as clerk in one of the large Greenock shipping-houses, with good chances of promotion. The advent of a cousin from America was an event in his life. He liked Jean at once and Jean liked him, so they grew friends speedily.

Under his guidance, Jean's "violet" gathering went on prosperously. There were many interesting things to see and do in the neighborhood of Greenock, and of Glasgow, to which place they ran down more than once in a cheap train. There were rows on the Frith, and walks into the lovely hill country, and visits to the different aunts and cousins, all of whom wanted to see Mrs. Thompson and make acquaintance with Jean, and once they went as far as Edinburgh with third-class return tickets, and Jean saw the wonders of Holyrood, the Castle, and Arthur's Seat. It seemed to put new color and life into history and all the past, this glimpse of the places where great things had happened. Jean's interest in books waked up, and as Sandy owned a share in a good People's Library, she was able to get at various histories and fictions which, read on the spot, had a value and meaning which they could not have had elsewhere. Her mind broadened, she took in more of the width and grasp of life, and this mental growth and stimulus was another thing—and a very good one—bought with Jean's money. [274]

So the short two months sped swiftly away, and the time came to go back. It was a hard parting, as partings must be, where seas roll between, and old age makes fresh meetings improbable. But with all its hardness, all of them felt that it had been blessed to meet. Sandy was even more cast down than granny, but he consoled himself by a long whispered talk with Jean the last evening, in which he promised to come out to America in two years from then; and Jean, I am inclined to think, half promised to go back again to Scotland with him. But this is neither here nor there in our story, and, as we all know, it is not polite to listen when people whisper. So the travellers sailed again over the wide Atlantic, the journey not seeming half so long or so hard, now that their faces were set the other way; and in a very few days after the homecoming, all they had seen and done began to recede into dream-like distance, and they found it almost impossible to realize that they had gone so far and achieved so much. [275]

"I told you you would enjoy it," remarked Maria Parsons. People always enjoy being able to say "I told you so." [276]

"And is your money really all gone?" said little Elsie, "every bit of it gone! And you haven't got one single thing of your own to keep out of it, Jean. What a pity!"

"Ah, but I have," replied Jean. But she made no answer to the further "What?"

"Elsie is sorry that I've spent all my money," she told her father that night. "She doesn't think I got much for it. But it seems to me no one else ever got so much as I have. I never thought I should learn to like travelling, father, but I did; I enjoyed it ever so much. Then I know granny now, and Uncle Andrew, and I've seen a great deal of Scotland, and mother is so much stronger, and we have so many nice things to remember and think about—that's a great, great deal to get with a hundred and twenty dollars, don't you think so, father? And besides—"

HOW THE STORKS CAME AND WENT.

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WHEN the storks came, the spring came too. Till then the skies had been gray and the air cold and raw, while the leaf-buds on the branches seemed afraid to peep from their coverings. But when the call of the storks was heard, and the click of their large white wings, the leaves took courage, unrolled their woolly blankets, and presently the trees were green. Soon other birds came too. The doves went to housekeeping in their cote under the peak of the roof-gable. Just beneath, a pair of swallows built a nest of plastered clay: the cherry-tree in the garden was chosen as home by a colony of lively sparrows. All the air was astir with wings and songs, and the world, which for months had seemed dead or asleep, waked suddenly into life and motion.

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"What a droll house Mother Stork seems to be building!" said the saucy swallow, cocking up one eye at the long-legged pair on the roof above. "I shouldn't like such an one at all. Sharp sticks everywhere, no conveniences, great holes for eggs to drop into and be broken. And how the wind must blow up there! Give me a cosey place like this of ours."

"Give *me* a nice, smooth wooden box," cooed the dove. "I don't fancy plaster; it's damp and rheumatic, my mate says. But you needn't worry about Mother Stork's eggs. They're too large to drop through the holes in the branches and be broken."

"What coarse things they must be!" remarked the swallow, looking complacently at the tiny clouded spheres beneath her own wings.

"They *are* big," agreed the dove. "But then, Mother Stork is big too."

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"Listen to those absurd creatures!" said Mother Stork to her partner. "Coarse, indeed! My eggs! I like that."

"Never mind them," replied Papa Stork, good-humoredly, giving a crooked twig the final shove to the side of the nest.

Below on the grass, which was still winter-brown, three little children stood gazing wistfully up at the storks.

"They flew straight to our roof," said Annchen. "Frau Perl says that means good luck before the year ends."

"What does good luck mean?" asked Carl, the youngest boy.

"It means—oh, all sorts of things," replied Annchen, vaguely: "that the mother should not work so hard; that we should have plenty,—plenty to eat every day,—and money, I suppose,—and my new shoes I've waited for so long;—all sorts of things."

"Perhaps my father'll come back," suggested Fritz, with a joyful leap.

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Annchen shook her brown head. The boys were too little to understand, but she knew well that the father would never come back. She recollected the day when he marched away with the other soldiers to fight the French. He had lifted her in his arms. She had played with his beard and kissed him, and Fritz had cried after the glittering helmet-spike, till at last the father took the helmet off and gave it him to play with. Then the drum-tap sounded, and he had to go. The mother had watched awhile from the window, and when she could no longer see anything, had sat down to sob and cry with her apron over her face. Annchen recollected it perfectly, and that other dreadful day when Corporal Spes of the same regiment had come, with his arm tied up and a bandage round his head, to tell how the father had been shot in one of the battles before Paris, and buried in French soil. Everything had been sad since. There was less black bread at dinner-time, less soup in the pot, sometimes no soup at all, and the mother worked all day and far into the night, and cried bitterly when she thought the children were not looking. Annchen was too young to comprehend the full cause of these tears, but she *felt* the sadness; it was like a constant cloud over her childish sun. Now the stork was come to their roof, which all the neighbors said meant something good. Perhaps the happy days would begin again.

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"How I hope they will!" she whispered to herself.

"Hope who will?" asked the mother, passing behind with an armful of wood.

Annchen felt abashed.

"The storks," she murmured. "Frau Perl said when they build on a roof it brings good fortune always." The mother sighed.

"There is no good fortune for us any more," she said sadly. "Even the dear stork cannot undo what is done."

"But aren't the storks lucky birds?" asked Fritz. "Jan Stein said they were."

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"Ah, luck, luck!" answered the mother. "That is a word only. People use it, but what does it mean?"

"Isn't there any luck, then?" asked Annchen.

"There is the good God, dear,—that is better," replied the mother, and carried her wood into the house.

"Jan said the stork was God's bird," observed little Carl.

"That's it," said Annchen, brightening. "God's bird; and the good God may let the stork bring us good fortune. Dear storkie, do! If only you would!"

Mamma Stork looked solemnly down on the children, and wagged her head gravely up and down. Annchen thought it was in answer to her appeal.

"See, Fritz! see, Carl! She says she will!" The stork kept on nodding, and Annchen went in to supper, feeling happy.

Days grew into weeks, and spring into full summer. The big eggs and the little eggs had in turn cracked and given place to young birds, who sat in the nests clamoring for food, and being fed, caressed, and kept warm by their mothers. At first the nestlings were ugly, featherless creatures, and seemed all beaks and appetites; but presently they began to grow, to put out plumage, and become round and fat. Soon they could hop; then they could flutter their wings; the air was full of their calls and their swift-moving bodies. Mother Stork's babies were white like herself, and had long legs and big bills. The swallow thought them awkward, and contrasted them proudly with her own brisk, glancing brood; but in Mother Stork's eyes they were perfect in every way, and graceful as birds should be. The dove thought the same of her plump squabs,—each parent was entirely satisfied with the kind of child which the Lord had sent her; and that was a happy thing, was it not?

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Summer was over, and now it was September, but Annchen had not ceased to hope for the good fortune which the stork's coming prophesied. Each morning, when she woke, she ran to the window to see if the lucky birds were still in the nest. There they were, but nothing else happened, and the mother worked harder than ever, and the black loaf grew smaller. Still Annchen hoped.

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"Do you notice what a kind bird the stork is?" said the mother one night, as she was putting the children to bed. "She never gets tired of taking care of her babies, nor beats them with her wings, nor scolds them. Do you not love her for being so amiable?"

"Sometimes the babies scold her," remarked Fritz from his corner.

"I don't think that is scolding. What they say is, 'Mother, we are hungry. We want a fish or a couple of young frogs; when will the father bring them?' The little storks do not like to wait for their dinners any more than you children do. I heard once a story about a good Mother Stork. Shall I tell it you?"

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"Oh, yes!" cried the children; but the mother went first for her knitting-work, for even at the twilight hour she dared not let her fingers be idle for a moment.

"Once there was a Frau Stork," she began, "who built a nest in the roof of an old shed, and in it laid three blue eggs. Presently out of the eggs came three baby storks, large and hungry. Then was Frau Stork very proud and glad. All day she sat in the nest, keeping her little ones warm under her feathers, while Papa Stork flew to and fro, seeking places where were ponds with fish and frogs; and these he fetched home in his beak, and with them fed his brood, who sat always with open mouths ready for anything good which should come along.

"One day when Papa Stork was absent, and Mother Stork had hopped from the nest to the roof, she heard a crackling sound which she did not at all understand. Then the air grew thick and smoky, and there was a smell of burning wood. The shed was on fire! Frau Stork became uneasy, and called loudly for her mate, but he was too far away to hear her voice. Presently the smoke became more dense, and a little red tongue of flame crept through the thatch. When it felt the air it grew large, swelled, and at last, like a fiery serpent, darted at the nest and the screaming brood within."

[286]

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried the children, sitting up in their beds. "What *did* the poor stork do?"

"She could easily have flown away, you know," continued the mother. "There were her strong wings, which would have borne her faster than the fire could follow. But she loved her babies too well to leave them like that. She seized them with her beak, and tried to drag them from the nest. But they were too heavy, and flapped and struggled, hindering her, for they did not understand what she wished to do. The flames drew nearer, the branches began to blaze. Then Mother Stork took her usual place in the nest, gathered her brood under her wings as if to shield them, bent her poor head, and—"

[287]

"Oh, she didn't burn up!—please don't say she did!" interrupted Annchen.

"Yes. When Papa Stork came from the pond with a fresh fish in his beak, there was no roof there, no nest, no little storks,—only a heap of ashes and curling smoke. Frau Stork loved her children too well to desert them, and they all died together."

There was silence for a minute or two. Annchen was sobbing softly, and a suspicious sniff was heard from the direction of Fritz's pillow.

"I hope *our* stork won't burn up," said Carl, solemnly.

"Yes,—because then she won't bring us good luck, you know," added Fritz.

"Do you think the stork has forgotten?" whispered Annchen to her mother. "I've waited and waited for her so long that I'm tired. Do they forget sometimes?" [288]

"She will have to bestir herself if she is to do anything for us this year," said the mother; and though her heart was heavy enough just then, she smiled into Annchen's eager eyes. "Autumn is here; the winter will come before long. Frau Stork and her family may fly off any day."

"I shall *have* to remind her," murmured Annchen, sleepily.

She remembered this resolution next morning, and went out into the yard. The day was chilly; the blue sky, all dappled with gray, looked as if a storm were coming. Mother Stork was alone on the roof. Her young ones could fly now, and they and their father were off somewhere together.

"Mother Stork," said Annchen, standing close to the wall, and speaking in a loud, confidential whisper, "you won't forget what you promised, will you—that day when you nodded your head, you know? The mother says you will fly away soon, but please bring us our good luck first. Poor mother works so hard and looks so pale, and sometimes there is almost no dinner at all, and the cold winter is coming, and I don't know what we shall do, if you don't help us. Please do, Mother Stork. We can't wait till you come again, it's such a long time. Pray fetch our good luck before you go." [289]

Mother Stork, perched on one leg on the roof's edge, nodded her head up and down, as if considering the point. Then she rose on her large wings and flew away. Annchen marked her course through the air, and her eyes grew large and eager with delight.

"She has gone to the fen!" she cried. "That's where she keeps it. Oh, the dear stork!"

"What is it? Who has gone where?" asked the boys, running into the yard.

"Frau Stork," explained Annchen. "I reminded her about it,—our good luck, you know,—and she flew straight off to fetch it. She went to the fen, the beautiful fen, where I went once with the father—*such* a place! How I should like to go there again! You never saw such a place, boys!" [290]

"I want to go to the fen too," said Carl.

"I wonder if we might!" went on Annchen, thoughtfully. "It isn't so very far. I didn't get tired at all that day when I went before. And we could help Frau Stork, perhaps. I wonder if we might."

"I'll go in and ask the mother," said Fritz, running to the door with an eager demand: "Mother, may we go for a walk,—Annchen and Carl and I?"

The mother, who was very busy, nodded.

"Don't go too far," she called after him.

"Mother says we may," shouted Fritz, as he ran again into the yard; and the children, overjoyed, set forth at once.

It was quite a distance to the fen, but the road was a plain one, and Annchen had no difficulty in following it. When she went there before, not only her father had been along, but Ernst the wood-cutter, with his donkey; so, when tired, she had rested herself by riding on top of the fagots. She was three years older now, and the sturdy lads did not mind the distance at all, but ran forward merrily, encouraging each other to make haste. [291]

The sun had broken through the clouds, and shone hotly on the white road. But as they neared the fen, they passed into shade. Softly they lifted the drooping branches of the trees, and entered, moving carefully, that they might not disturb the stork. A little farther, and the ground grew wet under foot. Bright streams of water appeared here and there. But between the streams were ridges and island-like tufts of moss and dried grasses, and stepping from one of these to the other, the little ones passed on, dry-shod. Tall reeds and lance-shaped rushes rose above their heads as they crept along, whispering low to each other. The air was hushed and warm, there was a pleasant fragrance of damp roots and leaves. The children liked the fen extremely. Their feet danced and skipped, and they would gladly have shouted, had it not been for the need of keeping quiet. [292]

Suddenly a beautiful glossy water-rat, with a long tail, glanced like a ray of quick sunshine from under a bank, and at sight of the intruders flashed back again into his hole. Fritz was enchanted at this sight. He longed to stay and dig into the bank in search of the rat. What fun it would be to take him home and tame him! But Annchen whispered imploringly, and Carl tugged at his fingers; so at last he gave up searching for the rat, and went on with the others. They were near the middle of the fen now, and Mother Stork, they thought, must be close at hand.

Pop! glug! An enormous bull-frog leaped from a log, and vanished into the pool with a splash. Next a couple of lovely water-flies, with blue, shining bodies and gauze-like wings, appeared hovering in the air. They rose and sank and circled and whirled like enchanted things; the [293]

children, who had never seen such flies before, felt as if they had met the first chapter of a fairy-story, and stood holding their breaths, lest the pretty creatures should take alarm and fly away. It was not till the water-flies suddenly whirled off and disappeared, that they recollected their errand, and moved on.

All at once Annchen, who was in advance of the rest, stopped short and uttered an exclamation. The parting of the reeds had shown her a pool larger than any they had seen before, round which grew a fringe of tall flowering water-plants. Half in, half out of the pool, lay a black log with a hollow end, and beside it, dabbling with her beak as if searching for something, stood a large white bird. At the sound of voices and rustling feet, the bird spread a pair of broad wings and flew slowly upward, turning her head to look at the children as she went.

[294]

"It was," cried Annchen. "Oh, Mother Stork, we didn't mean to frighten you. Please come back again. We'll go away at once if you don't like to have us here."

But Mother Stork was no longer visible. She had dropped into some distant part of the fen—where, the children could not see.

"Her eyes looked angry," said little Carl.

"Oh dear!" sighed Annchen. "I hope she isn't angry. That *would* be dreadful! What will poor mother do if she is? And it would be all our fault."

"I want to go home," whined Carl. "It's dinner-time. I want my dinner very much."

All of them wanted to go home, but it was not an easy or quick task to do so. The children had wandered farther than they knew. It took a long time to find their way out of the fen, and when at last they reached the rushy limits, and stood on open ground, it was an unfamiliar place, and much farther from home than the side where they had entered. Weary, hungry, and disheartened, they trudged along for what to them seemed hours, and it was long past midday when at last they reached the familiar gate.

[295]

Frau Stork had got there before them, and stood on the roof beside her mate, gazing down as the sorry little procession filed beneath. Annchen had no heart to greet her as she passed. She was tired, and a dread lest their long absence should have frightened or angered the mother added weight to her fatigue, and made her heart sink heavily as they opened the door.

The mother did not start or run forward to meet them as the children expected she would do. She sat by the table, and some one sat opposite her—a tall, stately officer in uniform, with an order on his breast. His helmet lay on the table, with some papers scattered about it. When the children came in, he turned and looked at them out of a pair of kind blue eyes.

"Ah," he said. "These are the little ones, dame?"

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"Yes," said the mother, "these are *his* children. Take off your hats, boys; and, Annchen, make your reverence. This is the Herr Baron, your father's captain, children."



Carl stared with round eyes at the splendid Herr Baron, while Annchen demurely dropped her courtesy. The captain lifted Fritz and perched him on his knee.

"My fine fellow," he said, "you have your father's face,"—and he stroked Fritz's yellow hair, while Fritz played with the bright buttons of the uniform. The captain and the mother went on talking. Annchen did not understand all they said, but she saw that her mother looked happier than for a long time before, and that made her feel happy too.

At last the captain rose to go. He kissed the children, and Annchen saw him put a purse into her mother's hands.

"I take shame to myself that I left you so long without aid," he said; "but keep up heart, dame. Your pension will no doubt be granted you, and I will see that you and the children are cared for, as a brave man's family should be. So good-day, and God bless you!"

[297]

"May He bless you, Herr Baron," sobbed the widow, as he went away.

"What is it, mother,—why do you cry?" asked little Carl at last, pulling her sleeve.

The Captain lifted Fritz and perched him on his knee.—PAGE 296.

"For joy, dear. The good Baron has brought your father's back pay. I can discharge my debts now, and you need hunger no more."

"It is the good luck come at last. I knew it would," said Annchen.

"We will thank God for it," said her mother. And they all knelt down and repeated "Our Father," that beautiful prayer which suits equally our time of joy and our time of sorrow.

But when the prayer was said, and the mother, smiling through her tears, was bustling about to cook such a supper as the little family had not tasted for many a day, dear, superstitious little Annchen stole softly to the door and went into the yard. [298]

The young storks were asleep with their heads under their wings, and Frau Stork, poised on one leg, was gazing about with drowsy eyes. She looked bigger than ever against the dim evening sky.

"Thank you, dear stork!" said Annchen.

University Press, John Wilson & Son: Cambridge.

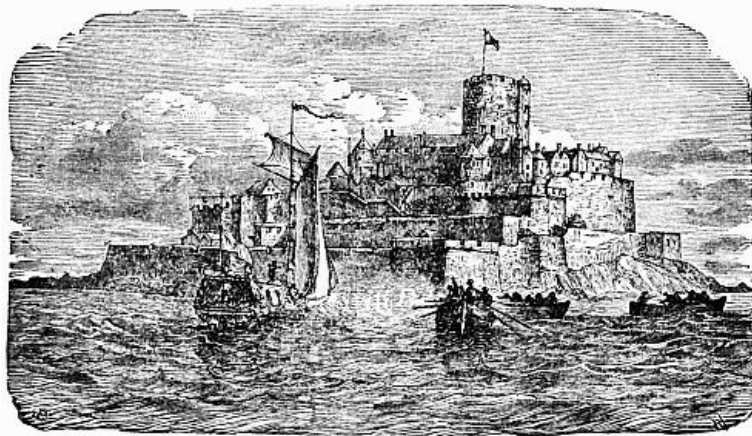
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[304]



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[Page 300](#), period added (of Mother Goose. With)

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