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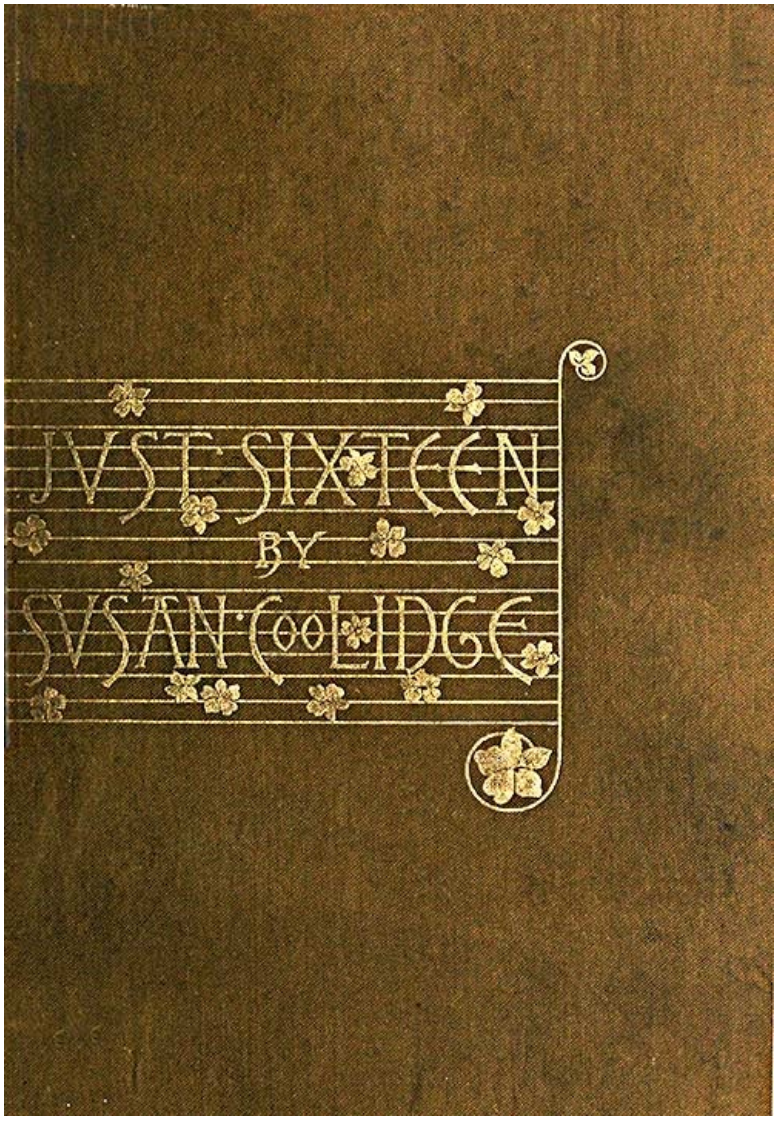
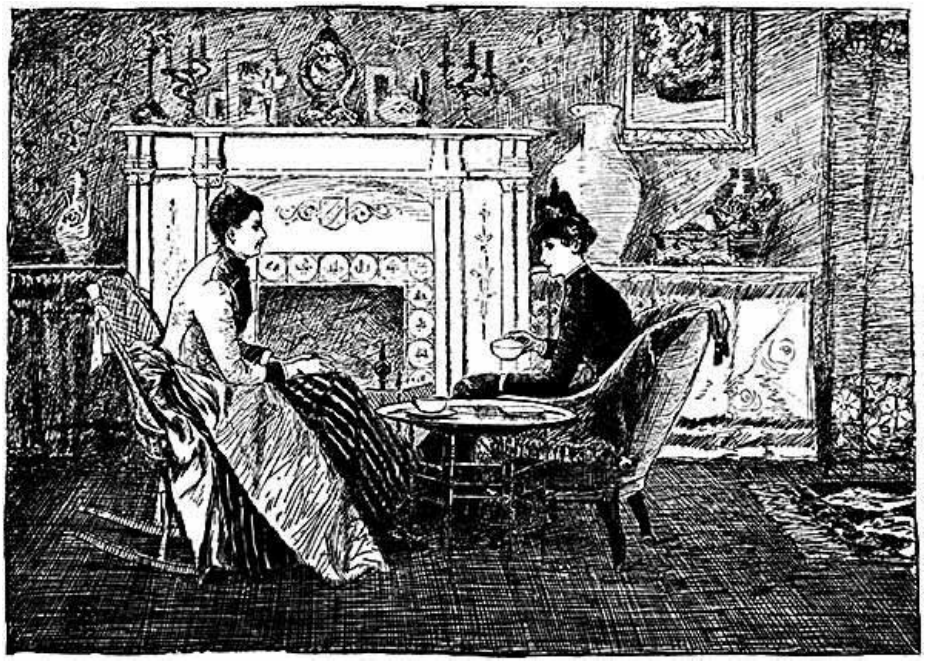
JUST SIXTEEN.





"We will have luncheon here close to the fire," she said, "and be as cosey as possible."—*Page 28*.

JUST SIXTEEN.

BY

SUSAN COOLIDGE,

AUTHOR OF "THE NEW YEAR'S BARGAIN," "WHAT KATY DID," "WHAT KATY DID AT SCHOOL," "WHAT KATY DID NEXT," "CLOVER," "A GUERNSEY LILY," ETC.

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JUST SIXTEEN.

[7]

A LITTLE KNIGHT OF LABOR.

THE first real snow-storm of the winter had come to Sandyport by the Sea.

It had been a late and merciful autumn. Till well into November the leaves still clung to their boughs, honeysuckles made shady coverts on trellises, and put forth now and then an orange and milk-white blossom full of frosty sweetness; the grass was still green where the snow allowed it to be seen. Thick and fast fell the wind-blown flakes on the lightly frozen ground. The patter and beat of the flying storm was a joyous sound to children who owned sleds and had been waiting the chance to use them. Many a boy's face looked out as the dusk fell, to make sure that the storm continued; and many a bright voice cried, "Hurrah! It's coming down harder than ever! To-morrow it will be splendid!" Stable-men [8] were shaking out fur robes and arranging cutters. Already the fitful sound of sleigh-bells could be heard; and all the world—the world of Sandyport that is—was preparing to give the in-coming winter a gay welcome.

But in one house in an old-fashioned but still respectable street no one seemed inclined to join in the general merry-making. Only two lights broke its darkness: one shone from the kitchen at the back, where, beside a kerosene lamp, Bethia Kendrick, the old-time servitor of the Talcott family, was gloomily darning stockings, and otherwise making ready for departure on the morrow. The other and fainter glow came from the front room, where without any lamp Georgie Talcott sat alone beside her fire.

It was a little fire, and built of rather queer materials. There were bits of lath and box-covers, fence-pickets split in two, shavings, pasteboard clippings, and on top of all, half of an old chopping-bowl. The light material burned out fast, and had to be continually replenished from the

basket which stood on one side the grate.

Georgie, in fact, was burning up the odds and ends of her old life before leaving it behind [9]
forever. She was to quit the house on the morrow; and there was something significant to her, and very sorrowful, in this disposal of its shreds and fragments; they meant so little to other people, and so very much to her. The old chopping-bowl, for instance,—her thoughts went back from it to the first time she had ever been permitted to join in the making of the Christmas pies. She saw her mother, still a young woman then, and pretty with the faded elegance which had been her characteristic, weighing the sugar and plums, and slicing the citron, while her own daring little hands plied the chopper in that very bowl. What joy there was in those vigorous dabs and cross-way cuts! how she had liked to do it! And now, the pretty mother, faded and gray, lay under the frozen turf, on which the snow-flakes were thickly falling. There could be no more Christmases for Georgie in the old house; it was sold, and to-morrow would close its doors behind her forever.

She shivered as these thoughts passed through her mind, and rising moved restlessly toward the window. It was storming faster than ever. The sight seemed to make the idea of the morrow [10]
harder to bear; a big tear formed in each eye, blurring the white world outside into a dim grayness. Presently one ran down her nose and fell on her hand. She looked at it with dismay, wiped it hastily off, and went back to the fire.

"I won't cry, whatever happens, I'm resolved on that," she said half aloud, as she put the other half of the chopping-bowl on the waning blaze. The deep-soaked richness of long-perished meats was in the old wood still. It flared broadly up the chimney. Georgie again sat down by the fire and resumed her thinking.

"What am I going to do?" she asked herself for the hundredth time. "When my visit to Cousin Vi is over, I must decide on something; but what? A week is such a short time in which to settle such an important thing."

It is hard to be confronted at twenty with the problem of one's own support. Georgie hitherto had been as happy and care-free as other girls. Her mother, as the widow of a naval officer, was entitled to a small pension. This, with a very little more in addition, had paid for Georgie's schooling, and kept the old house going in a sufficiently comfortable though very modest fashion. [11]
But Mrs. Talcott was not by nature an exemplary manager. It was hard not to overrun here and there, especially after Georgie grew up, and "took her place in society," as the poor lady phrased it,—the place which was rightfully hers as her father's daughter and the descendant of a long line of Talcotts and Chaunceys and Wainwrights. She coveted pretty things for her girl, as all mothers do, and it was too much for her strength always to deny herself.

So Georgie had "just this" and "just that," and being a fresh attractive creature, and a favorite, made her little go as far as the other girls' much, and now and again the tiny capital was encroached upon. And then, and then,—this is a world of sorry chances, as the weak and helpless find to their cost,—came the bad year, when the Ranscuttle Mills passed their dividend and the stock went down to almost nothing; and then Mrs. Talcott's long illness, and then her death. Sickness and death are luxuries which the poor will do well to go without. Georgie went over the calculations afresh as she sat by the fire, and the result came out just the same, and not a penny [12]
better. When she had paid for her mother's funeral, and all the last bills, she would have exactly a hundred and seventy-five dollars a year to live upon,—that and no more!

The furniture,—could she get something for that? She glanced round the room, and shook her head. The articles were neither handsome enough nor quaint enough to command a good price. She looked affectionately at the hair-cloth sofa on which her mother had so often lain, at the well-worn secretary. How could she part with these? How could she sell her great-grandfather's picture, or who, in fact, except herself, would care for the rather ill-painted portrait of a rigid old worthy of the last century, in a wig and ruffled shirt, with a view of Sandyport harbor by way of a background? Her father's silhouette hung beneath it, with his sword and a little mezzotint of his ship. These were treasures to her, but what were they to any one else?

"No," she decided. "Bethia shall take the old kitchen things and her own bedroom furniture, and have the use of them; but the rest must go into Miss Sally's attic for the present. They wouldn't fetch anything; and if they would, I don't think I could bear to sell them. And now that is [13]
settled, I must think again, what *am* I to do? I must do something."

She turned over all manner of schemes in her mind, but all seemed fruitless. Sew? The town was full of sempstresses. Georgie knew of half a dozen who could not get work enough to keep them busy half the time. Teach? She could not; her education in no one respect had been thorough enough. Embroider for the Women's Exchanges and Decorative Art Societies? Perhaps; but it seemed to her that was the very thing to which all destitute people with pretensions to gentility fled as a matter of course, and that the market for tidies and "splashers" and pine-pillows was decidedly overstocked.

"It's no use thinking about it to-night," was the sensible decision to which she at last arrived. "I am too tired. I'll get a sound night's sleep if I can, and put off my worries till I am safely at Miss Sally's."

The sound night's sleep stood Georgie in good stead, for the morrow taxed all her powers of endurance, both physical and moral. Bethia, unhappy at losing the home of years, was tearful and fractious to a degree. Sending off the furniture through the deep snow proved a slow and [14]

troublesome matter. The doors necessarily stood open a great deal, the rooms grew very cold, everything was comfortless and dispiriting. And underlying all, put aside but never unfelt, was a deep sense of pain at the knowledge that this was the last day,—the very, very last of the home she had always known, and might know no more.

When the final sledge-load creaked away over the hard frozen crust, Georgie experienced a sense of relief.

"The sooner 'tis over, the sooner to sleep,"

she sang below her breath. Everything was in order. She had generalled all ably; nothing was omitted or forgotten. With steady care she raked out the fire in the kitchen stove, which the new owner of the house had taken off her hands, and saw to the fastenings of the windows. Then she tied on her bonnet and black veil, gave the weeping Bethia a good-by kiss on the door-step, closed and locked the door, and waded wearily through the half-broken paths to the boarding-house of Miss Sally Scannell, where Cousin Vi, otherwise Miss Violet Talcott, had lived for years.

No very enthusiastic reception awaited her. Cousin Vi's invitation had been given from a sense [15]
of duty. She "owed it to the child," she told herself, as she cleared out a bureau-drawer, and made a place for Georgie's trunk in the small third-story room which for sixteen years had represented to her all the home she had known. Of course such a visit must be a brief one.

"So you're come!" was her greeting as Georgie appeared. "I thought you'd be here sooner; but I suppose you've had a good deal to do. I should have offered to help if the day had not been so cold. Come in and take your things off."

Georgie glanced about her as she smoothed her hair. The room bore the unmistakable marks of spinsterhood and decayed gentility. It was crammed with little belongings, some valuable, some perfectly valueless. Two or three pieces of spindle-legged and claw-footed mahogany made an odd contrast to the common painted bedroom set. Miniatures by Malbone and lovely pale-lined mezzotints and line engravings hung on the walls amid a maze of photographs and Japanese fans and Christmas cards and chromos; an indescribable confusion of duds encumbered every shelf [16]
and table; and in the midst sat Miss Vi's tall, meager, dissatisfied self, with thin hair laboriously trained after the prevailing fashion, and a dress whose antique material seemed oddly unsuited to its modern cut and loopings. Somehow the pitifulness of the scene struck Georgie afresh.

"Shall I ever be like this?" she reflected.

"Now tell me what has happened since the funeral," said her cousin. "I had neuralgia all last week and week before, or I should have got down oftener. Who has called? Have the Hanburys been to see you?"

"Ellen came last week, but I was out," replied Georgie.

"What a pity! And how did it happen that you were out? You ought not to have been seen in the street so soon, I think. It's not customary."

"How could I help it?" responded Georgie, sadly. "I had all the move to arrange for. Mr. Custer wanted the house for Saturday. There was no one to go for me."

"I suppose you couldn't; but it's a pity. It's never well to outrage conventionalities. Have Mrs. St. John and Mrs. Constant Carrington called?"

"Mrs. Carrington hasn't, but she wrote me a little note. And dear Mrs. St. John came twice, and [17]
brought flowers, and was ever so kind. She always has been so very nice to me, you know."

"Naturally! The St. Johns were nobodies till Mr. St. John made all that money in railroads. She is glad enough to be on good terms with the old families, of course."

"I don't think it's that," said Georgie, rather wearily. "I think she's nice because she's naturally so kind-hearted, and she likes me."

The tea-bell put an end to the discussion. Miss Sally's welcome was a good deal warmer than Cousin Vi's had been.

"You poor dear child," she exclaimed, "you look quite tired out! Here, take this seat by the fire, Georgie, and I'll pour your tea out first of all. She needs it, don't she?" to Cousin Vi.

"*Miss Talcott* is rather tired, I dare say," said that lady, icily. Cousin Vi had lived for sixteen years in daily intercourse with Miss Sally, one of the sunniest and most friendly of women, and had never once relaxed into cordiality in all that time. Her code of manners included no approximation toward familiarity between a Talcott and a letter of lodgings. [18]

Georgie took a different view. "Thank you so much, dear Miss Sally," she said. "How good you are! I *am* tired."

"I wish you wouldn't call Miss Sally 'dear,'" her cousin remarked after they had gone upstairs. "That sort of thing is most disagreeable to me. You have to be on your guard continually in a house like this, or you get mixed up with all sorts of people."

Georgie let it pass. She was too tired to argue.

"Now, let us talk about your plans," Miss Talcott said next morning. "Have you made any yet?"

"N—o; only that I must find some work to do at once."

"Don't speak like that to any one but me," her cousin said sharply. "There *are* lady-like occupations, of course, in which you can—can—mingle; but they need not be mentioned, or made known to people in general."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I've never had occasion to look into the matter, but I suppose a girl situated as you are could find something,—embroidery, for instance. You could do that for the [19] Decorative Art. They give you a number, and nobody knows your real name."

"I thought of embroidery," said Georgie; "but I never was very good at it, and so many are doing it nowadays. Besides, it seems to me that people are getting rather tired of all but the finer sort of work."

"What became of that nephew of Mr. Constant Carrington whom you used to see so much of two or three years ago?" demanded Miss Vi, irrelevantly.

"Bob Curtis? I don't quite know where he is. His father failed, don't you remember, and lost all his money, and Bob had to leave Harvard and go into some sort of business?"

"Oh, did he? He's of no consequence, then. I don't know what made me think of him. Well, you could read to an invalid, perhaps, or go to Europe with some lady who wanted a companion."

"Or be second-best wing-maker to an angel," put in Georgie, with a little glint of humor. "Cousin Vi, all that would be very pleasant, but I don't think it is likely to happen. I'm dreadfully afraid no one wants me to go to Europe; and I must have something to do at once, you know. I [20] must earn my bread."

"Don't use such a phrase. It sounds too coarse for anything."

"I don't think so, Cousin Vi. I don't mind working a bit, if only I can hit on something that somebody wants, and that I can do well."

"This is exactly what I have been afraid of," said Miss Vi, despairingly. "I've always had a fear that old Jacob Talcott would break out in you sooner or later. He has skipped two generations, but he was bound to show himself some day or other. He had exactly that common sort of way of looking at things and talking about them,—the only Talcott I ever knew of that did! Don't you recollect how he insisted on putting his son into business, and the boy ran away and went to the West Indies and married some sort of Creole,—all his father's fault?

"Now, I'll tell you," she went on after a pause. "I've been thinking over this matter, and have made up my mind about it. You're not to do anything foolish, Georgie. If you do, you'll be sorry for it all your life, and I shall never forgive you besides. Such a good start as you have made in society, and all; it will be quite too much if you go and spoil your chances with those ridiculous [21] notions of yours. Now, listen. If you'll give up all idea of supporting yourself, unless it is by doing embroidery or something like that, which no one need know about, I'll—I'll—well—I'll agree to pay your board here at Miss Sally's, and give you half this room for a year. As likely as not you'll be married by the end of that time, or if not, something else will have turned up! Any way, I'll do it for one year. When the year is over, we can talk about the next." And Miss Talcott folded her hands with the manner of one who has offered an ultimatum.

If rather a grudging, this was a really generous offer, as Georgie well knew. To add the expense of her young cousin's board to her own would cost Miss Vi no end of self-denials, pinchings here and pinchings there, the daily frets and calculations that weigh so heavily. Miss Talcott's slender income at its best barely sufficed for the narrow lodgings, to fight off the shabbiness which would endanger her place in "society," and to pay for an occasional cab and theatre ticket. Not to do, or at least to seem to be doing and enjoying, what other people did, was real suffering to Cousin Vi. [22] Yet she was deliberately invoking it by her proposal.

Had it been really made for her sake, had it been quite disinterested, Georgie would have been deeply touched and grateful; as it was, she was sufficiently so to thank her cousin warmly, but without committing herself to acceptance. She must think it over, she said.

She did think it over till her mind fairly ached with the pressure of thought, as the body does after too much exercise. She walked past the Woman's Exchange and studied the articles in the windows. There were the same towels and tidies that had been there two months before, or what seemed the same. Georgie recollected similar articles worked by people whom she knew about, for which she had been asked to buy raffle tickets. "She can't get any one to buy it," had been said. Depending on such work for a support seemed a bare outlook. She walked away with a little shake of her head.

"No," she thought; "embroidery wouldn't pay unless I had a 'gift'; and I don't seem to have a gift for anything unless it is housework. I always was good at that; but I suppose I can't exactly take a place as parlor-maid. Cousin Vi would certainly clap me into an asylum if I suggested such [23] a thing. How nice it would be to have a real genius for something! Though now that I think of it, a good many geniuses have died in attics, of starvation, without being able to help themselves."

When she reached home she took a pencil and a piece of paper and wrote as follows:—

Things Wanted.

1. Something I can do.
2. Something that somebody wants me to do.
3. Something that all the other somebodies in search of work are not trying to do.

Round these problems her thoughts revolved, and though nothing came of them as yet, it seemed to clear her mind to have them set down in black and white.

Meantime the two days' *tête-à-tête* with Cousin Vi produced one distinct result, which was, that let come what come might, Georgie resolved that nothing should induce her to stay on at Miss Sally's as proposed, and be idle. Her healthy and vigorous youth recoiled from the idea.

"It is really good of her to ask me," she thought, "though she only does it for the honor of the family and the dead-and-gone Talcotts. But what a life it would be, and for a whole year too! [24] Cousin Vi has stood it for sixteen, to be sure, poor thing! but how could she? Mother used to say that she was called a bright girl when she first grew up. Surely she might have made something of herself if she had tried, and if Aunt Talcott hadn't considered work one of the seven deadly sins for a lady! She was handsome, too. Even I can recollect her as very good looking. And here she is, all alone, and getting shabbier and poorer all the time. I know she sometimes has not money enough to pay her board, and has to ask Miss Sally to wait, snubbing her and despising her all the time, and holding on desperately to her little figment of gentility. People laugh at her and make fun of her behind her back. They invite her now and then, but they don't really care for her. What is such a society worth? I'll take in washing before I'll come to be like Cousin Vi!"

How little we guess, as we grope in the mists of our own uncertainties, just where the light is going to break through! Georgie Talcott, starting for a walk with her cousin on the third day of [25] her stay at Miss Sally's, saw the St. John carriage pass them and then pull up suddenly at the curb-stone; but she had no idea that so simple a circumstance could affect her fate in any manner. It did, though.

Mrs. St. John was leaning out of the window before they got to the place where the carriage stood, and two prettily gloved hands were stretched eagerly forth.

"Georgie! oh Georgie, how glad I am to see you out, dear! I made Henry stop, because I want you to get in for a little drive and then come home with me to lunch. Mr. St. John is in New York. I am quite alone, and I'll give orders that no one shall be admitted, if you will. Don't you think she might, Miss Talcott? It isn't like going anywhere else, you know,—just coming to me quietly like that."

"I don't see that there would be any impropriety in it," said Miss Talcott, doubtfully; "though—with you, however, it *is* different. But please don't mention it to any one, Mrs. St. John. It might be misunderstood and lead to invitations which Georgie could not possibly accept. Good-morning."

With a stately bend Cousin Vi sailed down the street. Mrs. St. John, I am sorry to say, made a [26] face after her as she went.

"Absurd old idiot!" she muttered. "Such airs!" Then she drew Georgie in, and as soon as the carriage was in motion pulled her veil aside and gave her a warm kiss.

"I am so glad to get hold of you again!" she said.

Mrs. St. John, rich, childless, warm-hearted, and not over-wise, had adopted Georgie as a special pet on her first appearance in society two years before. It is always pleasant for a girl to be made much of by an older woman; and when that woman has a carriage and a nice house, and can do all sorts of things for the girl's entertainment, it is none the less agreeable. Georgie was really fond of her friend. People who are not over-wise are often loved as much as wiser ones; it is one of the laws of compensation.

"Now tell me all about yourself, and what you have been doing this past week," said Mrs. St. John, as they drove down to the beach, where the surf-rollers had swept the sands clean of snow and left a dry, smooth roadway for the horses' feet. The sea wore its winter color that day,—a [27] deep purple-blue, broken by flashing foam-caps; the wind was blowing freshly; a great sense of refreshment came to Georgie, who had been wearying for a change.

"It has been rather sad and hard," she said. "I have had the house to clear out and close, and all manner of things to do, and I was pretty tired when I finished. But I am getting rested now, and by and by I want to talk over my affairs with you."

"Plans?" asked Mrs. St. John.

"Not exactly. I have no plans as yet; but I must have some soon. Now tell me what *you* have

been doing."

Mrs. St. John was never averse to talking about herself. She always had a mass of experiences and adventures to relate, which though insignificant enough when you came to analyze them, were so deeply interesting to herself that somehow her auditors got interested in them also. Georgie, used to her ways, listened and sympathized without effort, keeping her eyes fixed meanwhile on the shining, shifting horizon of the sea, and the lovely arch of clear morning sky. [28] How wide and free and satisfactory it was; how different from the cramped outlook into which she had perforce been gazing for days back!

"If life could all be like that!" she thought.

The St. John house seemed a model of winter comfort, bright, flower-scented, and deliciously warm, as they entered it after their drive. Mrs. St. John rang for her maid to take off their wraps, and led Georgie through the drawing-room and the library to a smaller room beyond, which was her favorite sitting-place of a morning.

"We will have luncheon here close to the fire," she said, "and be as cosey as possible."

It was a pretty room, not over-large, fitted up by a professional decorator in a good scheme of color, and crowded with ornaments of all sorts, after the modern fashion. It was many weeks since Georgie had seen it, and its profusion and costliness of detail struck her as it never had done before. Perhaps she was in the mood to observe closely.

They were still sipping their hot *bouillon* in great comfort, when a sudden crash was heard in the distance.

"There!" said Mrs. St. John, resignedly; "that's the second since Monday! What is it *now*, [29] Pierre?"

She pushed back her chair and went hurriedly into the farther room. Presently she came back laughing, but looking flushed and annoyed.

"It's really too vexatious," she said. "There seems no use at all in buying pretty things, the servants do break them so."

"What was it this time?" asked Georgie.

"It was my favorite bit of Sèvres. Don't you recollect it,—two lovely little shepherdesses in blue Watteaus, holding a flower-basket between them? Pierre says his feather duster caught in the open-work edge of the basket."

"Why do you let him use feather dusters? The feathers are so apt to catch."

"My dear, what can I do? Each fresh servant has his or her theory as to how things should be cleaned. Whatever the theory is, the china goes all the same; and I can't tell them any better. I don't know a thing about dusting."

That moment, as if some quick-witted fairy had waved her wand, an idea darted like a flash into Georgie's head.

She took five minutes to consider it, while Mrs. St. John went on:— [30]

"People talk of the hardship of not being able to have things; but I think it's just as hard to have them and not be allowed to keep them. I don't dare to let myself care for a piece of china nowadays, for if I do it's the first thing to go. Pierre's a treasure in other respects, but he smashes most dreadfully; and the second man is quite as bad; and Marie, upstairs, is worse than either. Mr. St. John says I ought to be 'mistress of myself, though china fall;' but I really can't."

Georgie, who had listened to this without listening, had now made up her mind.

"Would you like me to dust your things?" she said quietly.

"My dear, they *are* dusted. Pierre has got through for this time. He won't break anything more till to-morrow."

"Oh, I don't mean only to-day; I mean every day. Yes, I'm in earnest," she went on in answer to her friend's astonished look. "I was meaning to talk to you about something of this sort presently, and now this has come into my head. You see," smiling bravely, "I find that I have got almost [31] nothing to live upon. There is not even enough to pay my board at such a place as Miss Sally's. I must do something to earn money; and dusting is one of the few things that I can do particularly well."

"But, my dear, I never heard of such a thing," gasped poor Mrs. St. John. "Surely your friends and connections will arrange something for you."

"They can't; they are all dead," replied Georgie, sadly. "Our family has run out. I've one cousin in China whom I never saw, and one great-aunt down in Tennessee who is almost as poor as I am, and that's all except Cousin Vi."

"She's no good, of course; but she's sure to object to your doing anything all the same."

"Oh yes, of course she objects," said Georgie, impatiently. "She would like to tie my hands and

make me sit quite still for a year and see if something won't happen; but I can't and won't do it; and, besides, what is there to happen? Nothing. She was kind about it, too—" relenting; "she offered to pay my board and share her room with me if I consented; but I would so much rather get to work at once and be independent. Do let me do your dusting," coaxingly; "I'll come every morning and put these four rooms in nice order; and you need never let Pierre or Marie or any one touch the china again, unless you like. I can almost promise that I won't break anything!" [32]

"My dear, it would be beautiful for me, but perfectly horrid for you! I quite agree with your cousin for once. It will never do in the world for you to attempt such a thing. People would drop you at once; you would lose your position and all your chance, if it was known that you were doing that kind of work."

"But don't you see," cried Georgie, kneeling down on the hearth-rug to bring her face nearer to her friend's,—"don't you see that I've *got* to be dropped any way? Not because I have done anything, not because people are unkind, but just from the necessity of things. I have no money to buy dresses to go out and enjoy myself with. I have no money to stay at home on, in fact,—I *must* do something. And to live like Cousin Vi on the edge of things, just tolerated by people, and mortified and snubbed, and then have a little crumb of pleasure tossed to me, as one throws the last scrap of cake that one doesn't want to a cat or a dog,—*that* is what I could not possibly bear. [33]

"I like fun and pretty things and luxury as well as other people," she continued, after a little pause. "It isn't that I shouldn't *prefer* something different. But everybody can't be well off and have things their own way; and since I am one of the rank and file, it seems to me much wiser to give up the things I *can't* have, out and out, and not try to be two persons at once, a young lady and a working-girl, but put my whole heart into the thing I must be, and do it just as well as I can. Don't you see that I am right?"

"You poor dear darling!" said Mrs. St. John, with tears in her eyes. Then her face cleared.

"Very well," she said briskly, "you *shall*. It will be the greatest comfort in the world to have you take charge of the ornaments. *Now* I can buy as many cups and saucers as I like, and with an easy mind. You must stay and lunch, always, Georgie. I'll give you a regular salary, and when the weather's bad I shall keep you to dinner too, and to spend the night. That's settled; and now let us decide what I shall give you. Would fifty dollars a month be enough?"

"My dear Mrs. St. John! Fifty! Two dollars a week was what I was thinking of." [34]

"Two dollars! oh, you foolish child! You never could live on that! You don't know anything at all about expenses, Georgie."

"But I don't mean only to do *your* dusting. If you are satisfied, I depend on your recommending me to your friends. I could take care of four sets of rooms just as well as of one. There are so many people in Sandyport who have beautiful houses and collections of bric-à-brac, that I think there might be as many as that who would care to have me if I didn't cost too much. Four places at two dollars each would make eight dollars a week. I could live on that nicely."

"I wish you'd count me in as four," said Mrs. St. John. "I should see four times as much of you, and it would make me four hundred times happier."

But Georgie was firm, and before they parted it was arranged that she should begin her new task the next morning, and that her friend should do what she could to find her similar work elsewhere.

Her plan once made, Georgie suffered no grass to grow under her feet. On the way home she [35] bought some cheese-cloth and a stiff little brush with a pointed end for carvings, and before the next day had provided herself with a quantity of large soft dusters and two little phials of alcohol and oil, and had hunted up a small pair of bellows, which experience had shown her were invaluable for blowing the dust out of delicate objects. Her first essay was a perfect success. Mrs. St. John, quite at a loss how to face the changed situation, gave her a half-troubled welcome; but Georgie's business-like methods reassured her. She followed her about and watched her handle each fragile treasure with skilful, delicate fingers till all was in perfect fresh order, and gave a great sigh of admiration and relief when the work was done.

"Now come and sit down," she said. "How tired you must be!"

"Not a bit," declared Georgie; "I like to dust, strange to say, and I'm not tired at all; I only wish I had another job just like it to do at once. I see it's what I was made for."

By the end of the week Georgie had another regular engagement, and it became necessary to break the news of her new occupation to Cousin Vi. I regret to say that the disclosure caused an [36] "unpleasantness," between them.

"I would not have believed such a thing possible even with you," declared that lady with angry tears. "The very idea marks you out as a person of low mind. It's enough to make your Grandmother Talcott rise from her grave! In the name of common decency, couldn't you hunt up something to do, if do you must, except this?"

"Nothing that I could do so well and so easily, Cousin Vi."

"Don't call me Cousin Vi, I beg! There was no need of doing anything whatever. I asked you to stay here,—you cannot deny that I did."

"I don't wish to deny it," said Georgie, gently. "It was ever so kind of you, too. Don't be so vexed with me, Cousin Vi. We look at things differently, and I don't suppose either of us can help it; but don't let us quarrel. You're almost the only relative that I have in the world."

"Quarrel!" cried Miss Talcott with a shrill laugh,—"quarrel with a girl that goes out dusting! That isn't in my line, I am happy to say. As for being relatives, we are so no longer, and I shall say so to everybody. Great Heavens! what will people think?" [37]

After this outburst it was evident to Georgie that it was better that she should leave Miss Sally's as soon as possible. But where to go? She consulted Miss Sally. That astute person comprehended the situation in the twinkling of an eye, and was ready with a happy suggestion.

"There's my brother John's widder in the lower street," she said. "She's tolerably well off, and hasn't ever taken boarders; but she's a sort of lonesome person, and I shouldn't wonder if I could fix it so she'd feel like taking you, and reasonable too. It's mighty handy about that furniture of yours, for her upstairs rooms ain't got nothing in them to speak of, and of course she wouldn't want to buy. I'll step down after dinner and see about it."

Miss Sally was a power in her family circle, and she knew it. Before night she had talked Mrs. John Scannell into the belief that to take Georgie to board at five dollars a week was the thing of all others that she most wanted to do; and before the end of two days all was arranged, and [38] Georgie inducted into her new quarters. It was a little low-pitched, old-fashioned house, but it had some pleasant features, and was very neat. A big corner room with a window to the south and another to the sunset was assigned to Georgie for her bedroom. The old furniture that she had been used to all her life made it look homelike, and the hair-cloth sofa and the secretary and square mahogany table were welcome additions to the rather scantily furnished sitting-room below, which she shared at will with her hostess. Mrs. Scannell was a gentle, kindly woman, the soul of cleanliness and propriety, but subject to low spirits; and contact with Georgie's bright, hopeful youth was as delightful to her as it was beneficial. She soon became very fond of "my young lady," as she called her, and Georgie could not have been better placed as to kindness and comfortableness.

A better place than Sandyport for just such an experiment as she was making could scarcely have been found. Many city people made it their home for the summer; but at all times of the year there was a considerable resident population of wealthy people. Luxurious homes were rather the rule than the exception, and there was quite a little rivalry as to elegance of [39] appointment among them. Mrs. St. John's enthusiasm and Mrs. St. John's recommendation bore fruit, and it was not long before Georgie had secured her coveted "four places."

Two of her employers were comparative strangers; with the fourth, Mrs. Constant Carrington, she had been on terms of some intimacy in the old days, but was not much so now. It *is* rather difficult to keep up friendship with your "dusting girl," as her Cousin Vi would have said; Mrs. Carrington called her "Georgie" still, when they met, and was perfectly civil in her manners, but always there was the business relation to stand between them, and Georgie felt it. Mrs. St. John still tried to retain the pretty pretext that Georgie's labors were a sort of joke, a playing with independence; but there was nothing of this pretext with the other three. To them, Georgie was simply a useful adjunct to their luxurious lives, as little to be regarded as the florist who filled their flower-boxes or the man who tuned their pianos.

These little rubs to self-complacency were not very hard to bear. It was not exactly pleasant, certainly, to pass in at the side entrance where she had once been welcomed at the front door; to [40] feel that her comings and her goings were so insignificant as to be scarcely noticed; now and then, perhaps, to be treated with scant courtesy by an ill-mannered servant. This rarely chanced, however. Georgie had a little natural dignity which impressed servants as well as other people, and from her employers she received nothing but the most civil treatment. Fashion is not unkindly, and it was still remembered that Miss Talcott was born a lady, though she worked for a living. There were stormy days and dull days, days when Georgie felt tired and discouraged; or, harder still to bear, bright days and gala days, when she saw other girls of her age setting forth to enjoy themselves in ways now closed to her. I will not deny that she suffered at such moments, and wished with all her heart that things could be different. But on the whole she bore herself bravely and well, and found some happiness in her work, together with a great deal of contentment.

Mrs. St. John added to her difficulties by continual efforts to tempt her to do this and that pleasant thing which Georgie felt to be inexpedient. She wanted her favorite to play at young [41] ladyhood in her odd minutes, and defy the little frosts and chills which Georgie instinctively knew would be her portion if she should attempt to enter society again on the old terms. If Georgie urged that she had no proper dress, the answer was prompt,—"My dear, I am going to give you a dress;" or, "My dear, you can wear my blue, we are just the same height." But Georgie stood firm, warded off the shower of gifts which was ready to descend upon her, and loving her friend the more that she was so foolishly kind, would not let herself be persuaded into doing what she knew was unwise.

"I can't be two people at once," she persisted. "There's not enough of me for that. You remember what I said that first day, and I mean to stick to it. You are a perfect darling, and just as kind as you can be; but you must just let me go my own way, dear Mrs. St. John, and be satisfied to know that it is the comfort of my life to have you love me so much, though I won't go to balls with you."

But though Georgie would not go to balls or dinner-parties, there were smaller gayeties and pleasures which she did not refuse,—drives and sails now and then, tickets to concerts and [42] lectures, or a long quiet Sunday with a "spend the night" to follow. These little breaks in her busy life were wholesome and refreshing, and she saw no reason for denying them to herself. There was nothing morbid in my little Knight of Labor, which was one reason why she labored so successfully.

So the summer came and went, and Georgie with it, keeping steadily on at her daily task. All that she found to do she did as thoroughly and as carefully as she knew how. She was of real use, and she knew it. Her work had a value. It was not imaginary work, invented as a pretext for giving her help, and the fact supported her self-respect.

We are told in one of our Lord's most subtly beautiful parables, that to them who make perfect use of their one talent, other talents shall be added also. Many faithful workers have proved the meaning and the truth of the parable, and Georgie Talcott found it now among the rest. With the coming in of the autumn another sphere of activity was suddenly opened to her. It sprang, as good things often do, from a seeming disappointment.

She was drawing on her gloves one morning at the close of her labors, when a message was [43] brought by the discreet English butler.

"Mrs. Parish says, Miss, will you be so good as to step up to her morning-room before you go."

"Certainly, Frederick." And Georgie turned and ran lightly upstairs. Mrs. Parish was sitting at her writing-table with rather a preoccupied face.

"I sent for you, Miss Talcott, because I wanted to mention that we are going abroad for the winter," she began. "Maud isn't well, the doctors recommend the Riviera, so we have decided rather suddenly on our plans, and are to sail on the 'Scythia' the first of November. We shall be gone a year."

"Dear me," thought Georgie, "there's another of my places lost! It is quite dreadful!" She was conscious of a sharp pang of inward disappointment.

"My cousin, Mrs. Ernest Stockton, is to take the place," continued Mrs. Parish. "Her husband has been in the legation at Paris, you know, for the last six years, but now they are coming back for good; and when I telegraphed her of our decision, she at once cabled to secure this house. They will land the week after we sail, and I suppose will want to come up at once. Now, of course [44] all sorts of things have got to be done to make ready for them; but it's out of the question that I should do them, for what with packing and the children's dressmaking and appointments at the dentist's and all that, my hands are so full that I could not possibly undertake anything else. So I was thinking of you. You have so much head and system, you know, and I could trust you as I could not any stranger, and you know the house so well; and you could get plenty of people to help, so that it need not be burdensome. There will be some things to be packed away, and the whole place to be cleaned, floors waxed and curtains washed, the Duchesse dressing-tables taken to pieces and done up and fluted,—all that sort of thing, you know. Oh! and there would be an inventory to make, too; I forgot that. Then next year I should want it gone over again in the same way,—the articles that are packed taken out and put into place, and so on, that it may look natural when we come home. My idea would be to move the family down to New York on the 15th, so as to give you a clear fortnight, and just come up for one day before we sail, for a final [45] look. Of course I should leave the keys in your charge, and I should want you to take the whole responsibility. Now, will you do it, and just tell me what you will ask for it all?"

"May I think it over for one night?" said prudent Georgie. "I will come to-morrow morning with my answer."

She thought it over carefully, and seemed to see that here was a new vista of remunerative labor opened to her, of a more permanent character than mere dusting. So she signified to Mrs. Parish that she would undertake the job, and having done so, bent her mind to doing it in the best possible manner. She made careful lists, and personally superintended each detail. Miss Sally recommended trustworthy workpeople, and everything was carried out to the full satisfaction of Mrs. Parish, who could not say enough in praise of Georgie and her methods.

"It robs going to Europe of half its terrors to have such a person to turn to," she told her friends. "That little Miss Talcott is really wonderful,—so clear-headed and exact. It's really extraordinary where she learned it all, such a girl as she is. If any of you are going abroad, you'll [46] find her the greatest comfort possible."

These commendations bore fruit. People in Sandyport were always setting forth for this part of the world or that, and leaving houses behind them. A second job of the same sort was soon urged upon Georgie, followed by a third and a fourth. It was profitable work, for she had fifty dollars in each case (a hundred for her double job at the Algernon Parishes'); so her year's expenses were assured, and she was not sorry when another of her "dusting" families went to Florida for the winter.

It became the fashion in Sandyport to employ "little Miss Talcott." Her capabilities once discovered, people were quick in finding out ways in which to utilize them. Mrs. Robert Brown had the sudden happy thought of getting Georgie to arrange the flowers for a ball which she was giving. Georgie loved flowers, and had that knack of making them look charming in vases which

is the gift of a favored few. The ball decorations were admired and commented upon; people said it was "so clever of Mrs. Brown," and "so much better than stiff things from a florist's," and presently half a dozen other ladies wanted the same thing done for them. Fashion and sheep always follow any leader who is venturesome enough to try a new fence. [47]

Later, Mrs. Horace Brown, with her cards out for a great lawn-party, had the misfortune to sprain her ankle. In this emergency she bethought herself of Georgie, who thereupon proved so "invaluable" as a *dea ex machina* behind the scenes, that thenceforward Mrs. Brown never felt that she could give any sort of entertainment without her help. Engagements thickened, and Georgie's hands became so full that she laughingly threatened to "take a partner."

"That's just what I always wanted you to do," said Mrs. St. John,—"a real nice one, with heaps of money, who would take you about everywhere, and give you a good time."

"Oh, that's not at all the sort I want," protested Georgie, laughing and blushing. "I mean a real business partner, a fellow-sweeperess and house-arranger and ball-supper-manageress!"

"Wretched girl, how horribly practical you are! I wish I could see you discontented and sentimental just for once!"

"Heaven forbid! That *would* be a pretty state of things! Now good-by. I have about half a ton of roses to arrange for Mrs. Lauriston." [48]

"Oh,—for her dance! Georgie," coaxingly, "why not go for once with me? Come, just this once. There's that white dress of mine from *Pingat*, with the *Point de Venie* sleeves, that would exactly fit you."

"Nonsense!" replied Georgie, briefly. She kissed her friend and hurried away.

"I declare," soliloquized Mrs. St. John, looking after her, "I could find it in my heart to *advertise* for some one to come and rescue Georgie Talcott from all this hard work! What nice old times those were when you had only to get up a tournament and blow a trumpet or two, and have true knights flock in from all points of the compass in aid of distressed damsels! I wish such things were in fashion now; I would buy a trumpet this very day, I vow, and have a tournament next week."

Georgie's true knight, as it happened, was to come from a quarter little suspected by Mrs. St. John. For the spare afternoons of this second winter Georgie had reserved rather a large piece of work, which had the advantage that it could be taken up at will and laid down when convenient. This was the cataloguing of a valuable library belonging to Mr. Constant Carrington. That gentleman had observed Georgie rather closely as she went about her various avocations, and had formed so high an opinion of what he was pleased to term her "executive ability," that he made a high bid for her services in preference to those of any one else.

Recognizing an old friend, she jumped up, exclaiming, "Why Bob—Mr. Curtis—how do you do?"—*Page 49*.

She was sitting in this library one rainy day in January, beside a big packing-case, with a long row of books on the table, which she was dusting, classifying, and noting on the list in her lap, when the door opened and a tall young man came in. Georgie glanced at him vaguely, as at a stranger; then recognizing an old friend, she jumped up, exclaiming, "Why Bob—Mr. Curtis,—how do you do? I had no idea that you were here."

Bob Curtis looked bewildered. He had reached Sandyport only that morning. No one had chanced to mention Georgie or the change in her fortunes, and for a moment he failed to recognize in the white-aproned, dusty-fingered vision before him the girl whom he had known so well five years previously.

"It is?—why it *is*," he exclaimed. "Miss Georgie, how delighted I am to see you! I was coming [49] [50]
down to call as soon as I could find out where you were. My aunt said nothing about your being in the house."

"Very likely she did not know. I am in and out so often here that I do not always see Mrs. Carrington."

"Indeed!" Bob looked more puzzled than ever. He had not remembered that there was any such close intimacy in the old days between the two families.

"I can't shake hands, I am too dusty," went on Georgie. "But I am very glad indeed to see you again."

She too was taking mental notes, and observing that her former friend had lost somewhat of the gloss and brilliance of his boyish days; that his coat was not of the last cut; and that his expression was spiritless, not to say discontented. "Poor fellow!" she thought.

"What on earth does it all mean?" meditated Bob on his part.

"These books only came yesterday," said Georgie, indicating the big box with a wave of the hand.

"I have had to dust them all; and I find that Italian dust sticks just as the American variety does, [51]
and makes the fingers just as black." A little laugh.

"What *are* you doing, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"Cataloguing your uncle's library. He has been buying quantities of books for the last two years, as perhaps you know. He has a man in Germany and another in Paris and another in London, who purchase for him, and the boxes are coming over almost every week now. A great case full of the English ones arrived last Saturday,—such beauties! Look at that Ruskin behind you. It is the first edition, with all the plates, worth its weight in gold."

"It's awfully good of you to take so much trouble, I'm sure," remarked Mr. Curtis politely, still with the same mystified look.

"Not at all," replied Georgie, coolly. "It's all in my line of business, you know. Mr. Carrington is to give me a hundred dollars for the job; which is excellent pay, because I can take my own time for doing it, and work at odd moments."

Her interlocutor looked more perplexed than ever. A distinct embarrassment became visible in [52]
his manner at the words "job" and "pay."

"Certainly," he said. Then coloring a little he frankly went on, "I don't understand a bit. Would you mind telling me what it all means?"

"Oh, you haven't happened to hear of my 'befalments,' as Miss Sally Scannell would call them."

"I did hear of your mother's death," said Bob, gently, "and I was truly sorry. She was so kind to me always in the old days."

"She was kind to everybody. I am glad you were sorry," said Georgie, bright tears in the eyes which she turned with a grateful look on Bob. "Well, that was the beginning of it all."

There was another pause, during which Bob pulled his moustache nervously! Then he drew a chair to the table and sat down.

"Can you talk while you're working?" he asked. "And mayn't I help? It seems as though I might at least lift those books out for you. Now, if you don't mind, if it isn't painful, won't you tell me what has happened to you, for I see that something *has* happened."

"A great deal has happened, but it isn't painful to tell about it. Things *were* puzzling at first, but [53]
they have turned out wonderfully; and I'm rather proud of the way they have gone."

So, little by little, with occasional interruptions for lifting out books and jotting down titles, she told her story, won from point to point by the eager interest which her companion showed in the narrative. When she had finished, he brought his hand down heavily on the table.

"I'll tell you what," he exclaimed with vigorous emphasis, "it's most extraordinary that a girl should do as you have done. You're an absolute little *brick*,—if you'll excuse the phrase. But it makes a fellow—it makes *me* more ashamed of myself than I've often been in my life before."

"But why,—why should you be ashamed?"

"Oh, I've been having hard times too," explained Bob, gloomily. "But I haven't been so plucky as you. I've minded them more."

Georgie knew vaguely something of these "hard times." In the "old days," five years before, when she was seventeen and he a Harvard Junior of twenty, spending a long vacation with his

uncle, and when they had rowed and danced and played tennis together so constantly as to set [54]
people to wondering if anything "serious" was likely to arise from the intimacy, the world with all its opportunities and pleasures seemed open to the heir of the Curtis family. Bob's father was rich, the family influential, there seemed nothing that he might not command at will.

Then all was changed suddenly; a great financial panic swept away the family fortunes in a few weeks. Mr. Curtis died insolvent, and Robert was called on to give up many half-formed wishes and ambitions, and face the stern realities. What little could be saved from the wreck made a scanty subsistence for his mother and sisters; he must support himself. For more than two years he had been filling a subordinate position in a large manufacturing business. His friends considered him in luck to secure such a place; and he was fain to agree with them, but the acknowledgment did not make him exactly happy in it, notwithstanding.

Discipline can hardly be agreeable. Bob Curtis had been a little spoiled by prosperity; and [55]
though he did his work fairly well, there was always a bitterness at heart, and a certain tinge of false shame at having it to do at all. He worked because he must, he told himself, not because he liked or ever should like it. All the family traditions were opposed to work. Then he had the natural confidence of a very young man in his own powers, and it was not pleasant to be made to feel at every turn that he was raw, inexperienced, not particularly valuable to anybody, and that no one especially looked up to or admired him. He scorned himself for minding such things; but all the same he did mind them, and the frank, kindly young fellow was in danger of becoming soured and cynical in his lonely and uncongenial surroundings.

It was just at this point that good fortune brought him into contact with Georgie Talcott, and it was like the lifting of a veil from before his eyes. He recollected her such a pretty, care-free creature, petted and adored by her mother, every day filled with pleasant things, not a worry or cloud allowed to shadow the bright succession of her amusements; and here she sat telling him of a fight with necessity compared with which his seemed like child's play, and out of which she had
come victorious. He was struck, too, with the total absence of embarrassment and false shame in [56]
the telling. Work, in Georgie's mind, was evidently a thing to be proud of and thankful over, not something to be practised shyly, and alluded to with bated breath. The contrast between his and her way of looking at the thing struck him sharply.

It did not take long for Georgie to arrive at the facts in Bob's case. Confidence begets confidence; and in another day or two, won by her bright sympathy, he gradually made a clean breast of his troubles. Somehow they did not seem so great after they were told. Georgie's sympathy was not of a weakening sort, and her questions and comments seemed to clear things to his mind, and set them in right relations to each other.

"I don't think that I pity you much," she told him one day. "Your mother and the girls, yes, because they are women and not used to it, and it always *is* harder for girls—"

"See here, you're a girl yourself," put in Bob.

"No—I'm a business person. Don't interrupt. What I was going to say was, that I think it's *lovely*
for a young man to have to work! We are all lazy by nature; we need to be shaken up and [57]
compelled to do our best. You will be ten times as much of a person in the end as if you had always had your own way."

"Do you really think that? But what's the use of talking? I may stick where I am for years, and never do more than just make a living."

"I wouldn't!" said Georgie, throwing back her pretty head with an air of decision. "I should scorn to 'stick' if I were a man! And I don't believe you will either. If you once go into it heartily and put your will into it, you're sure to succeed. I always considered you clever, you know. You'll go up—up—as sure as, as sure as *dust*,—that's the thing of all the world that's most certain to rise, I think."

"'Overmastered with a clod of valiant marl,'" muttered Robert below his breath; then aloud, "Well, if that's the view you take of it, I'll do my best to prove you right. It's worth a good deal to know that there is somebody who expects something of me."

"I expect everything of you," said Georgie confidently. And Bob went back to his post at the end of the fortnight infinitely cheered and heartened.

"Bless her brave little heart!" he said to himself. "I won't disappoint her if I can help it; or, if I [58]
must, I'll know the reason why."

It is curious, and perhaps a little humiliating, to realize how much our lives are affected by what may be called accident. A touch here or there, a little pull up or down to set us going, often determines the direction in which we go, and direction means all. Robert Curtis in after times always dated the beginning of his fortunes from the day when he walked into his uncle's library and found Georgie Talcott cataloguing books.

"It set me to making a man of myself," he used to say.

Georgie did not see him for more than a year after his departure, but he wrote twice to say that he had taken her advice and it had "worked," and he had "got a rise." The truth was that the boy had an undeveloped capacity for affairs, inherited from the able old grandfather, who laid the foundations of the fortune which Bob's father muddled away. When once will and energy were

roused and brought into play, this hereditary bent asserted itself. Bob became valuable to his employers, and like Georgie's "dust," began to go up in the business scale. [59]

Georgie had just successfully re-established the Algernon Parishes, who arrived five months later than was expected, in their home, when Bob came up for a second visit to his uncle. This time he had three weeks' leave, and it was just before he went back that he proposed the formation of what he was pleased to call "A Labor Union."

"You see I'm a working man now just as you are a working woman," he explained. "It's our plain duty to co-operate. You shall be Grand Master—or rather Mistress—and I'll be some sort of a subordinate,—a Walking Delegate, perhaps."

"Indeed, you shall be nothing of the sort. Walking Delegates are particularly idle people, I've always heard. They just go about ordering other folks to stop work and do nothing."

"Then I won't be one. I'll be Grand Master's Mate."

"There's no such office in Labor Unions. If we have one at all, you must have the first place in it."

"What is that position? Please describe it in full. Whatever happens, I won't strike."

"Oh," said Georgie, with the prettiest blush in the world, "the position is too intricate for explanation; we won't describe it." [60]

"But will you join the Union?"

"I thought we had joined already,—both of us."

"Now, Georgie, dearest, I'm in earnest. Thanks to you, I know what work means and how good it is. And now I want my reward, which is to work beside you always as long as I live. Don't turn away your head, but tell me that I may."

I cannot tell you exactly what was Georgie's answer, for this conversation took place on the beach, and just then they sat down on the edge of a boat and began to talk in such low tones that no one could overhear; but as they sat a long time and she went home leaning contentedly on Bob's arm, I presume she answered as he wished. He went back to his work soon afterward, and has made his way up very fast since. Next spring the firm with which he is connected propose to send him to Chicago to start a new branch of their business there. He is to have a good salary and a share of the profits, and it is understood that Georgie will go with him. She has kept on steadily at her various avocations, has made herself so increasingly useful that all Sandyport [61] wonders what it shall do without her when she goes away, and has laid up what Miss Sally calls "a tidy bit of money" toward the furnishing of the home which she and Bob hope to have before long. Mrs. St. John has many plans in mind for the wedding; and though Georgie laughingly protests that she means to be married in a white apron, with a wreath of "dusty miller" round her head, I dare say she will give in when the time comes, and consent to let her little occasion be made pretty. Even a girl who works likes to have her marriage day a bright one.

Cousin Vi, for her part, is dimly reaching out toward a reconciliation. For, be it known, work which brings success, and is proved to have a solid money value of its own, loses in the estimation of the fastidious its degrading qualities, and is spoken of by the more euphonious title of "good fortune." It is only work which doesn't succeed, which remains forever disrespectable. I think I may venture to predict that the time will come when Cousin Vi will condone all Georgie's wrong-doings, and extend, not the olive-branch only, but both hands, to "the Curtises," that is if [62] they turn out as prosperous as their friends predict and expect them to be.

But whatever Fate may have in store for my dear little Georgie and her chosen co-worker, of one thing I am sure,—that, fare as they may with worldly fortune, they will never be content, having tasted of the salt of work, to feed again on the honey-bread of idleness, or become drones in the working-hive, but will persevere to the end in the principles and practices of what in the best sense of the word may be called their Labor Union.

SNOWY PETER. [63]

THE weather was very cold, though it was not Christmas yet, and to the great delight of the Kane children, December had brought an early and heavy fall of snow. Older people were sorry. They grieved for the swift vanishing of the lovely Indian summer, for the blighting of the last flowers, chrysanthemums, snow-berries, bitter-sweet, and for the red leaves, so pretty but a few days since, which were now blown about and battered by the strong wind. But the children wasted no sympathy on either leaves or berries. A snow-storm seemed to them just then better than anything that ever grew on bush or tree, and they revelled in it all the long afternoon without a thought of what it had cost the world.

It was a deep snow. It lay over the lawn six inches on a level; in the hollow by the fence the drifts were at least two feet deep. There was no lack of building material therefore when Reggie [64] proposed that they should all go to work and make a fort.

Such a wonderful fort as it turned out to be! It had walls and bastions and holes for cannon. It had cannon too, all made of snow. It had a gateway, just like a real fort, and a flag-staff and a flag. The staff was a tall slender column of snow, and they poured water over it, and it froze and became a long pole of glittering ice. The flag had a swallow-tail and was icy too. Reggie had been in New London and Newport the last summer, he had seen real fortifications and knew how they should look. Under his direction the little ones built a *glacis*. Some of you will know what that is, —the steep slippery grass slope which lies beneath the fort walls and is so hard to climb. This *glacis* was harder yet—snow is better than grass for defensive purposes—if only it would last.

"Now let's make the soldiers," shouted little Paul as the last shovel-full of snow was spread on the *glacis* and smoothed down.

"Oh, Paul, we can't, there won't be time," said Elma, the biggest girl, glancing apprehensively at the sun, which was nearing the edge of the sky. "It must be five o'clock, and nurse will call us [65] almost right away."

"Oh, bother! I wish the days weren't so short," said Paul discontentedly. "Let's make one man, any way; just for a sentry, you know. There ought to be a sentry to take care of the fort. Can't we, Elma?"

"Yes—only we must hurry."

The small crew precipitated itself on the drift. None of them were cold, for exercise had warmed their blood. The little ones gathered great snowballs and rolled them up to the fort, while the big ones shaped and moulded. In a wonderfully short time the "man" was completed,—eyes, nose, and all, and the gun in his hand. A pipe was put into his mouth, a cocked-hat on his head. Elma curled his hair a little. Susan Sunflower, as the round-faced younger girl was called for fun, patted and smoothed his cheeks and forehead with her warm little hands. They made boots for him, and a coat with buttons on the tail-pocket; he was a beautiful man indeed! Just as the last touch was given, a window opened and nurse's head appeared,—the very thing the children had been dreading.

"Come, children, come in to supper," she called out across the snow. "It's nearly half-past five. [66] You ought to have come in half an hour ago. Miss Susan, stop working in that snow, nasty cold stuff; you'll catch your death. Master Reggie, make the little boys hurry, please."

There was never any appeal from Nurse Freeman's decisions, least of all now when papa and mamma were both away, and she ruled the house as its undisputed autocrat. Even Reggie, on the verge of twelve, dare not disobey her. She was English and a martinet, and had been in charge of the children all their lives; but she was kind as well as strict, and they loved her. Reluctantly the little troop prepared to go. They picked up the shovels and baskets, for Nurse Freeman was very particular about fetching things in and putting them in their places. They took a last regretful look at their fort. Paul climbed the wall for one more jump down. Little Harry indulged in a final slide across the *glacis*. Susan Sunflower stroked the Sentinel's hand. "Good-night, Snowy Peter!" they cried in chorus, for that was the name they had agreed upon for their soldier. Then they ran across the lawn in a long skurrying line like a covey of birds, there was a scraping of feet on the [67] porch, the side-door closed with a bang, and they were gone.

Left to himself, Snowy Peter stood still in his place beside the gateway of the fortification. Snowmen usually do stand still, at least till the time comes for them to melt and run away, so there was nothing strange in that. What *was* singular was that about an hour after the children had left him, when dusk had closed in over the house and the leafless trees, and "Fort Kane" had grown a vague dim shape, he slowly turned his head! It was as though the fingers of little Susan had communicated something of their warmth and fulness of life to the poor senseless figure while working over it, and this influence was beginning to take effect. He turned his head and looked in the direction of the house. All was dark except for the hall lamp below, which shone through the glass panes above the door, and for two windows in the second story out of which streamed a strong yellow light. These were the windows of the nursery, where, at that moment, the children were eating their supper.

Snowy Peter remained for a time in motionless silence looking at the window. Then his body [68] slowly began to turn, following the movement of its head. He lifted one stiff ill-shaped foot and moved a step forward. Then he lifted the other and took another step. His left arm dangled uselessly; the right hand held out the gun which Paul had made, and which was of the most curious shape. The tracks which he left in the snow as he crossed the lawn resembled the odd, waddling tracks of a flat-footed elephant as much as anything else.

It took him a long, long time to cross the space over which the light feet of the children had run in two minutes. Each step seemed to cost him a mighty effort. The right leg would quiver for a moment, then wave wildly to and fro, then with a sort of galvanic jerk project itself, and the whole body, with a pitch and a lurch, would plunge forward heavily, till brought up again in an upright position by the advanced leg. After that the left leg would take its turn, and the process be repeated. There was no spring, no supple play to the joints; in fact, Snowy Peter had no joints. His young creators had left them out while constructing him.

At last he reached the wall of the house, and stood beneath the windows where the yellow light [69]
was burning. This had been the goal of his desires; but, alas, now that he had attained the coveted position he could not look in at the windows—he was far too short. Desperation lent him energy. A stout lattice was nailed against the house, up which in summer a flowering clematis twined and clustered. Seizing this, Snowy Peter began to climb!

Up one bar after another he slowly and painfully went, lifting his heavy feet and clinging tightly with his poor, stiff hands. His gun-stock snapped in the middle, his cocked-hat sustained many contusions, even his nose had more than one hard knock. But he had the heart of a hero, whom neither danger, nor difficulty, nor personal inconvenience can deter, and at last his head was on a level with the nursery window-sill.

It was a pleasant sight that met his eyes. No one had slept in the nursery since Paul had grown big enough for a bed of his own; and though it kept its own name, it was in reality only a big, cheerful upstairs sitting-room, where lessons could be studied, meals taken, and Nurse Freeman sit and do her mending and be on hand always for any one who wanted her. Now that Mr. and [70]
Mrs. Kane were absent, the downstairs rooms looked vacant and dreary, and the children spent all their evenings in the nursery from preference. A large fire burned briskly in the ample grate. A kettle hissed and bubbled on the hob; on the round table where the lamp stood, was a row of bright little tin basins just emptied of the smoking-hot bread-and-milk which was the usual nursery supper. Nurse was cutting slices from a big brown loaf and buttering them with nice yellow butter. There was also some gingerbread, and by way of special and particular treat, a pot of strawberry-jam, to which Paul at that moment was paying attention.

He had scooped out such an enormous spoonful as to attract the notice of the whole party; and just as Snowy Peter raised his white staring eyes above the sill, Reggie called out, "Hullo! I say! leave a little of that for somebody else, will you?"

"Piggy-wiggy," remarked Harry, indignantly; "and it's your second help too!"

"Master Paul, I'm surprised at you," observed Nurse Freeman severely, taking the big spoonful [71]
away from him. "There, that's quite enough," and she put half the quantity on the edge of his plate and gave the other half to Susan.

"That's not fair," remonstrated Paul, "when I've been working so hard, and it's so cold, and when I like jam so, and when it's so awfully good beside."

"Jam! what is jam?" thought Snowy Peter. He pressed his cold nose closer to the glass.

"We all worked hard, Paul," said Elma, "and we all like jam as much as you do. May I have some more, Nursey?"

"I wonder how poor Snowy Peter feels all alone out there in the garden," said Susan Sunflower. "He must be very cold, poor fellow!"

"Ho, he don't mind it!" declared Paul with his mouth full of bread-and-jam.

"Oh, yes, I do—I mind it very much," murmured Snowy Peter to himself; but he had no voice with which to make an outward noise.

"Won't you come out and see him to-morrow, Nursey?" went on Susan. "He's the best man we ever made. He's quite beautiful. He's got a pipe and a hat and curly hair and buttons on his coat —I'm sure you'll like him."

Snowy Peter reared himself straighter on the lattice. He was proud to hear himself thus [72]
commended.

"If he could only talk and walk, he'd be just as good as a live person, really he would, Nursey," said Elma. "Wouldn't it be fun if he could! We'd bring him in to tea and he'd sit by the fire and warm his hands, and it would be such fun."

"He'd melt fast enough in this warm room," observed Reggie, while Nurse Freeman added: "That's nonsense, Miss Elma. How could a man like that walk? And I don't want no nasty snow images in *my* nursery, melting and slopping up the carpet."

Snowy Peter listened to this conversation with a painful feeling at his heart. He felt lonely and forlorn. No one really liked him. To the children he was only a thing to be played with and joked about. Nurse Freeman called him a "nasty snow image." But though he was hurt and troubled in his spirit, the warm bright nursery, the sound of laughter and human voices, even the fire, that foe most fatal of all to things made of snow, had an irresistible attraction for him. He could not bear the idea of returning to his cold post of duty beside the lonely Fort, and under the wintry midnight sky. So he still clung to the lattice and looked in at the window with his unwinking eyes; [73]
and a great longing to be inside, and to sit down by the cheerful fire and be treated with kindness, took possession of him. But what is the use of such ambitions to a snow-man?

Long, long he clung to the lattice and lingered and looked in. He saw the two little ones when first the sand-man began to drop his grains into their eyes, and noticed how they struggled against the sleepy influence, and tried to keep awake. He saw Nurse Freeman carry them off, and presently fetch them back in their flannel nightgowns to say their prayers beside the fire. Snowy Peter did not know what it meant as they knelt with their heads in Nursey's lap, and their pink toes curled up in the glow of the heat, but it was a pretty sight to see, and he liked it.

After they were taken away for the second time, he watched Elma as she studied her geography lesson for the morrow, while Reggie did sums on his slate, and Paul played at checkers with Susan Sunflower. Snowy Peter thought he should like to do sums, and he was sure it would be nice to play checkers, and jump squares and chuckle and finally beat, as Paul did. Alas, checkers [74] are not for snow-men! Paul went to bed when the game was ended, and Susan, and a little later the other two followed. Then Nurse Freeman raked out the fire and put ashes on top, and blew the lights out and went away herself, leaving the nursery dark and silent except for a dim glow from the ash-smothered grate and the low ticking of the clock.

Some time after she departed, when the lights in the other windows had all been extinguished and the house was as dark inside as the night was outside, Snowy Peter raised his hand and pushed gently at the sash. It was not fastened, and it opened easily and without much noise. Then a heavy leg was thrown over the sill, and stiffly and painfully the snow soldier climbed into the room. He wanted to feel what it was like to sit in a chair beside a table as human beings sit, and he was extremely curious about the fire.

Alas, he could not sit! He was made to stand but not to bend. When he tried to seat himself his body lay in a long inclined plane, with the shoulder-blades resting on the back of the chair, and the legs sticking out straight before him,—an attitude which was not at all comfortable. The chair [75] creaked beneath him and tipped dangerously. It was with difficulty that he got again into his natural position, and he trembled with fear in every limb. It had been a narrow escape. "A fine thing it would have been if I had fallen over and not been able to get on my feet again," he thought. "How that terrible old woman would have swept me up in the morning!" Then, cautiously and timidly, he put his finger into the nearly empty jam-pot, rubbed it round till a little of the sweet, sticky juice adhered to it, and raised it to his lips. It had no taste to him. Jam was a human joy in which he could not share, and he heaved a deep sigh.

Drops began to stand on his forehead. Though there was so little fire left, the room was much warmer than the outer air, and Snowy Peter had begun to melt. A great and sudden fear took possession of him. As fast as his heavy limbs would allow, he hastened to the window. It was a great deal harder to go down the lattice than to climb up it, and twice he almost lost his footing. But at last he stood safely on the ground. The window he left open; he had no strength left for [76] extra exertion.

With increasing difficulty he stumbled across the lawn to his old position beside the gateway of the fort. A sense of duty had sustained him thus far, for a sentry must be found at his post; but now that he was there, all power seemed to desert his limbs. Little Susan's warm fingers had perhaps put just so much life into him, and no more, as would enable him to do what he had done, as a clock can run but its appointed course of hours and must then stop. His head turned no longer in the direction of the house. His eyes looked immovably forward. The straight stiff hand held out the broken gun. Two o'clock sounded from the church steeple, three, four. The earliest dawn crept slowly into the sky. It broadened to a soft pink flush, a sudden wind rose and stirred, and as if quickened by its impulse up came the yellow sun. Smoke began to curl from the house chimneys, doors opened, voices sounded, but still Snowy Peter did not move.

"Why, what is this?" cried Nurse Freeman, hurrying into the nursery from her bedroom, which was near. "How comes this window to be open? I left the fire covered up a purpose, that my dears [77] might have a warm room to breakfast in. It's as cold as a barn. It must be that careless Maria. She's no head and no thoughtfulness, that girl."

Maria denied the accusation, but Nurse was not convinced. "Windows did not open without hands," she justly observed. But what hands opened this particular window Nurse Freeman never, never knew!

Presently another phenomenon claimed her attention. There on the carpet, close to the table where the jam-pot stood, was a large slop of water. It marked the spot where the snow-man had begun to melt the night before.

"It's the snow the children brought in on their boots," suggested Maria.

"Boots!" cried Nurse Freeman incredulously. "Boots! when I changed them myself and put on their warm slippers!" She shook her head portentously as she wiped up the slop. "There's something *on*accountable in it all," she said. So there was, but it was a great deal more unaccountable than Nurse Freeman suspected.

When the children ran out, after lessons, to play in their fort, their time for wonderment came. How oddly Snowy Peter looked,—not at all as he did the day before. His figure had somehow [78] grown rubbed and shabby. The buttons were gone from his coat-tails. The gun they had taken such pains with was broken in two. *Where was the other half?*"

"What's that on his finger?" demanded Elma. "It looks as if it were bleeding."

It was the juice of the strawberry-jam! Paul first tasted delicately with the tip of his tongue, then he boldly bit the finger off and swallowed it.

"Why, what made you do that?" asked the others.

"Jam!" was the succinct reply.

"Jam! Impossible. How could our snow-man get at any jam? It couldn't be that."

"Tastes like it, any way," remarked Paul.

"I can't think what has happened to spoil him so," said Elma, plaintively. "Do you think a loose horse can have got into the yard during the night? See how the snow is trampled down!"

"Hallo, look here!" shouted Reggie. "This is the queerest thing yet. There's the other half the gun sticking out half-way up the clematis frame!"

"It must have been a horse," said Elma, who having once settled on the idea found it hard to [79] give it up. "It couldn't be anything else."

"Oh, yes, it could. It was no horse. It was me," said Snowy Peter in the depths of his being, where a little warmth still lingered.

"He's very ugly now, I think; see how he's melted all along his shoulder, and his hair has got out of curl, and his nose is awful," pronounced Susan Sunflower. "Let's pull him to pieces and make a nicer man."

"Oh, oh!" groaned Snowy Peter, with a final effort of consciousness. His inward sufferings did not affect his features in the least, and no one suspected that he was feeling anything. Paul knocked the pipe out of his mouth with a snow-ball. Harry, with a great push, rolled him over. The crisp snow parted and flew, the children hurrahed; in three minutes he was a shapeless mass, and nobody ever knew or guessed how for a few brief hours he had lived the life of a human being, been agitated by hope and moved by desire. So ended Snowy Peter; and his sole mourner was little Susan, who remarked, "After all, he *was* nice before he got spoiled, and I wish Nursey had seen him."

THE DO SOMETHING SOCIETY.

[80]

CLATTER, clatter, went a sewing-machine in an upstairs room, as the busy mamma of the Newcombe children bent over it, guiding the long breadths beneath the clicking needle, her eyes fixed on its glancing point, but her thoughts very far away, after the fashion of mammas who work on sewing-machines. The slam of a door, and the sound of quick feet in the entry below, arrested her attention.

"That is Catherine, of course," she said to herself. "None of the other children bang the door in just that particular way."

The top of a rapidly ascending red hat, with a pigtail of fair hair hanging beneath it, became visible, as Mrs. Newcombe glanced across to the staircase. It *was* Catherine. Another moment, and she burst into the room.

"Mamma, mamma, where are you? Oh, mamma, we girls have invented a society, and we are all [81] going to belong to it."

"Who is 'all,' and what sort of a society is it?" demanded Mrs. Newcombe, by no means suspending her machine work.

"All—we six, I mean—Frances and the Vaughns, and the 'Tittering Twins,' and me. We haven't any name for the society yet, but we want to do something."

"What sort of a something?"

"Oh, I don't know. All sorts of somethings; but, first of all—you know how sick Minnie Banister is, don't you, mamma?"

"Yes."

"Well, the society is really gotten up for her. We want to go every Saturday, and take her presents. Surprises, you know, so that she can be sort of expecting us all the week and looking forward. Don't you think that is a good plan, mamma?"

"Very good; but what kind of presents were you thinking of?"

"I don't know exactly; we haven't thought about that yet. Something pretty. You'll give us some [82] money to buy them with, won't you, mamma?"

"No, dear, I can't do that."

"But, mamma!"

"Listen, Catherine, and don't pucker your forehead so. It's a bad habit which you have taken up lately, and I want you to break yourself of it. I cannot give you money to buy presents; not that I do not love Minnie, or am not sorry for her, but I cannot afford it. Papa has his own boys and girls to feed and clothe and educate. He cannot spare money for things that are not necessary, even when they are kind pleasant things like this plan of yours."

"But, mamma—little bits of things! It wouldn't take much!"

"You naturally feel that there is no bottom to papa's pocket, Catherine; that he has only to put his hand in and take out what he likes; but, my dear, that isn't true. Papa cannot do it any more than you can."

"Then we can't have our society," cried Catherine.

Her lip trembled, and her face flushed pink with the sense of disappointment.

"I didn't say that," said her mother, smiling. "Have the society by all means, and carry out your [83] plans. That can be done without money."

"But, mamma, how can it? What do you mean?"

"The how I must leave to you. Set your wits to work, and you will find out. There are plenty of ways in which to please sick people besides buying them things. Notice carefully when you are there; ask Mrs. Banister; use your eyes. Things will suggest themselves. What sick people enjoy most are little surprises to vary their dull days, and the sense that some one is loving and thinking about them. Small unexpected pleasures count for more than their worth with them. Now, dear, run away. Consult with the others, and when you decide what you want to do, come to me, and I will do what I can to help you in ways that do not cost money."

Catherine looked more hopeful, though not altogether convinced.

"I'll see what they say," she remarked thoughtfully. Then, after lingering a moment, as if in hopes of something more, she ran downstairs again.

She found the members of the future society looking rather crestfallen. They had all rushed home to propound their plan, and each of their mothers in turn had raised pretty much the same [84] objections to it which Mrs. Newcombe had raised, and had not tempered their denials with any fresh suggestions. Catherine's report had, therefore, rather the effect of raising their spirits.

"I'm—not—sure," said Frances Brooks, "but it would be more fun to do it that way than the other. Don't you know how much nicer it always is to make Christmas presents than to buy them? And I thought of something while you were talking that might do for the first Saturday surprise."

"Have you really? What?"

"It came into my head because the other day when Mary and I were there, Minnie lost her handkerchief. It had slipped under the mattress or somewhere, and she worried about not finding it, and Mrs. Banister was a good while in getting another, and I was wondering if it wouldn't be nice to make some sort of a little case, which could lie on the bed beside her, and hold it."

"Out of birch bark," suggested Mary Vaughn.

"Splendid! We could work little blue forget-me-nots on it in crewels," suggested Sue Hooper.

"Yes, and I have a bit of blue silk that would be just the thing for the lining," put in Ethel [85] Hooper, the second "Tittering Twin," Sue being the first. "Sister had it left over from a sofa-pillow, so she gave it to me. It is quite light, and will match the forget-me-nots."

"Now, isn't that delightful!" cried Catherine. "Here's our first surprise all settled without any trouble at all. I know where we can get the bark,—from one of those big birches in Mr. Swayne's woods, and mother'll give us some orris-root for a *sachet*, I know. She has some that's particularly nice. It came from Philadelphia."

Under these promising auspices the "Do Something Society," for that was the name resolved upon, came into existence. Many hands made light work of the little handkerchief-case. All the members went together to get the birch bark, which in itself was good fun. Mary Vaughn cut out the case. Amy, who had taken a set of lessons in Kensington stitch, worked the starry zigzag pattern, which did duty for forget-me-nots, upon it. Susy Hooper, who was the best needlewoman of them all, lined it. Catherine made the *sachet*. Ethel, as youngest, was allowed to fasten it into [86] the case with a tiny blue bow, and they took turns in carrying it, as they walked toward Minnie's house Saturday morning.

Minnie had been looking forward to Saturday all the week. It was the only day when these special friends had time to come for a good long stay with her. On other days they "ran in;" but what with schools and music-lessons, and daily walks and short winter afternoons, they always had to run out again long before she was ready to have them go. She had been watching the clock ever since she woke, in hopes that they would come early; nor was she disappointed, for by half-past ten the bell rang, and steps and voices were heard coming upstairs. Minnie raised herself, and held out her hands.

"O girls, how lovely! You've all come together," she said. "I've been wondering all the week if you would."

"You darling, how nice it is to see you! Are you any better to-day?" asked Catherine.

Then, after they had all kissed her, Amy laid on the counterpane the handkerchief-case pinned up in thin white paper.

"There's something for you," cried the society, as with one voice. [87]

It took a good while for Minnie to open the parcel, for her fingers were weak, but she would not let any one help her. When the pretty birch-bark case was revealed, she was even more pleased than her friends had hoped she would be.

"How dear you were to make it for me!" she kept repeating. "I shall never lose my handkerchiefs now. And I shall look at it when you are not here, and it will give me the feeling that you are making me a visit."

Then they explained the new society to her and asked her to join, with the understanding that she was not to be an "active member" till she was quite well again, and Minnie agreed, and became on the spot number seven of the Do Somethings. What they did not explain was their plan for the Saturdays, because Mrs. Newcombe had dropped this word of wisdom into their counsels, that sick people enjoy a little pleasure which comes unexpectedly, much more than a larger one which they lie and think about till they are tired of the idea of it. Catherine had to bite her nimble tongue more than once to hold the secret in, but the eyes of the others held her in [88] check, and she remembered in time. And while they chattered and laughed, Mary Vaughn kept her eyes open as Mrs. Newcombe had advised, and with such good effect that, as the society trooped out on to the sidewalk, she was ready to say, "Girls, I have thought of something for next time."

"And so have I," added Frances.

"Not really! What fun! Tell us what yours is."

"A wall-basket full of dried leaves and things to fill up that bare space of wall opposite Minnie's bed. It needn't cost anything, for I have got one of those big Japanese cuffs made of straw which will do for the basket, and there are thousands of leaves to be had for the picking."

"What a good idea that is!" said Amy Vaughn. "We will make it lovely, and it will be something bright for Minnie to look at. We'll do it. But what was your idea, Mary?"

"Mine was a sand-bag. Didn't you hear Minnie say, 'Mamma, the sheet is quite wet just where my foot comes;' and Mrs. Banister came in a hurry and took away the hot-water bag, and said there was something wrong with the screw, and it was always leaking? My aunt, who is an [89] invalid, uses a bag of sand instead. It is made very hot in the oven and slipped into a little cover, and it keeps warm longer than hot water does, she says. Don't you think we might make one for Minnie?"

"It's the best idea yet," said Catherine. "And we will have it for next Saturday because it's something useful that she really wants, and that will give us plenty of time to dry the leaves for the Saturday after."

The sand-bag, with its little slip cover of red canton flannel, proved a remarkable success. It was the comfort of her life, Minnie declared; but the joy of her life was the wall-basket which followed on the next Saturday, and which made a beautiful spot of brightness on the bare wall. Ethel Hooper, who had a natural instinct for color and effect, arranged it. It held branches of deep red and vivid yellow leaves, with sprays of orange and green sumach, deep russet oak and trails of flaming blackberry-vine, amid which rose a few velvet-brown cat-tails and fluffy milk-weed pods, supporting in their midst a tiny bird's nest poised in a leafless twig. Minnie was never tired of looking at it. She said it was as good as taking a walk in the woods to see it. The gay color [90] refreshed her eyes, and cheered many a dull moment when she was alone and did not feel like reading; and, altogether, the wall-basket proved one of the most successful of the achievements of the Do Something Society that winter.

I have not time to tell you of all the many other things they did. One Saturday the gift was a home-made sponge-cake. Another time it was some particularly nice molasses candy, pulled very white, and braided and twirled into M's and B's. A pillow stuffed with balsam-fir was another of the presents. On Christmas Eve they carried her the tiniest little fir-tree ever seen, a mere baby of a fir, planted in a flower-pot, hung with six mandarin oranges, and lighted with wax matches which burned just long enough to be admired and no longer. Later there was a comical valentine, and on Minnie's birthday a pretty card, designed by Catherine, who had a taste for drawing.

One melancholy Saturday, when Minnie was too ill to see them, the members all left their cards in a little basket. Another time it was the cards of all their pet cats. And while they thus labored to make the hard months less hard for their friend, their own souls were growing, keeping pace [91] with their growing bodies, as souls do which are properly exercised in deeds of kindliness and unselfish love. So that when spring came, bringing roses back to Minnie's pale cheeks, and strength to her feeble limbs, and she was able to take her place among the rest and be a "Do Something" too, all of them were eager to keep on, and to continue the work begun for one, by service for the many who needed cheering as much as Minnie had done.

And the best part of the lesson which all of them had learned was, so Mrs. Newcombe thought, the great lesson that money, though a useful, is not an essential, part of true helpfulness, and that time given, and thought, and observation, and ingenuity, and loving hearts, can accomplish without it all the best and sweetest part of giving.

WHO ATE THE QUEEN'S LUNCHEON?

[92]

YOU can imagine the state of excitement into which Otillie Le Breton was thrown, when, one day in June, her father, the Seigneur of Sark, came home and told her that the Queen, who was cruising about the Channel in the royal yacht, had notified him of her intention of landing at Sark the next Thursday and of lunching at the Seigneurie.

It sounds such a fine thing to be the daughter of the Seigneur of Sark, that perhaps you will imagine that Otillie was used to kings and queens and fine company of all sorts, and wonder that she should feel so much excited on this occasion. Not at all! The Seigneur of Sark is only a quiet, invalid clergyman who owns his little island just as other English gentlemen do their estates, letting out the land to farmers and collecting his rents and paying his taxes like other people; and Otillie was a simply brought-up girl of fourteen, who knew much less of the world than most girls [93] of her age in Boston or New York, had never been off the Channel Islands, and never set eyes on a "crowned head" in her life, and she felt exactly as any of us would if we were suddenly told that a queen was coming to take a meal in our father's house.

Queens are not common apparitions in any of the Channel Islands, and least of all in little Sark. It is a difficult place to get to even for common people. The island, which is only three miles long, is walled by a line of splendid cliffs over three hundred feet high. Its only harbor is a strip of beach, defended by a tiny breakwater, from which a steep road is tunnelled up through the rocks to the interior of the island. In rough weather, when the wind blows and the sea runs high, which is the case five days out of seven in summer, and six-and-a-half days out of seven in winter, boats dare not make for this difficult landing, which is called by the natives "The Creux"—or hole. It is reported that some years since when the Lords of the Admiralty were on a tour of inspection they sailed all round Sark and sailed away again, reporting that no place could be discovered where it [94] was possible to land, which seemed to the Sarkites a very good joke indeed.

There are four principal islands in the Channel group: Alderney and Jersey, from which come the cows all of us know about; Guernsey, whose cattle, though not so celebrated on this side of the sea, are held by the islanders as superior to all others; and Sark, the smallest and by far the most beautiful of the four. It is a real story-book island. The soft, sea-climate and the drifting mists of the Gulf Stream nourish in its green valleys all manner of growing things. Flowers flourish there as nowhere else. Heliotropes grow into great clumps, and red and pink geraniums into bushes. Fuchsias and white-starred jessamines climb to the very roofs of the mossy old farm-houses, which stand knee-deep, as it were, in vines and flowers. Long links of rose-colored bindweed lie in tangles along the dusty roadside; you tread on them as you walk through the shady lanes, between hedge-rows of ivy and sweet-brier and briony, from whose leaves shine out little glittering beetles, in mail coats of flashing, iridescent green, like those which the Cuban ladies wear on their lace dresses as a decoration. There is only one wagon kept for hire on the [95] island, and all is primitive and peaceful and full of rest and repose.

But there are wonderful things too, as well as beautiful ones,—strange spouting-holes in the middle of green fields, where the sea has worn its way far inland, and, with a roar, sends sudden shocks of surf up through its chimney-like vent. Caves too, full of dim green light, in whose pools marvellous marine creatures flourish—

"The fruitage and bloom of the Ocean,"

or strange spines of rock path linking one end of the island with the other by a road not over five feet wide, from whose undefended edges the sheer precipice goes down on either side for hundreds of feet into the ocean. There are natural arches in the rocks also through which the wonderful blue-green sea glances and leaps. All about the island the water is of this remarkable color, like the plumage of a peacock or a dragonfly's glancing wings, and out of it rise strange rock-shapes, pyramids and obelisks and domes, over which white surf breaks constantly.

Some of the most remarkable of these rocks are beneath the Seigneurie, whose shaven lawns and walled gardens stretch to the cliff top and command a wide sea-view. It is a fine old house, [96] with terraces and stone balustrades over which vines cluster thickly, and peacocks sit, spreading their many-eyed tails to the sun, as if trying to outdo the strange, flashing, iridescent sea.

Otillie herself always fed these peacocks, which were old family friends. There were six of them, Bluet and Cramoisie,—the parents of the flock, who had been named by Mrs. Le Breton, who was a Frenchwoman,—Peri and Fee de Fees, and Lorenzo the Magnificent and the Great Panjandrum, these last christened by Otillie herself on account of their size and stately demeanor. The beautiful creatures were quite tame. They would take food from her hand, and if she failed to present herself at the accustomed time with her bowl of millet and bread, they would put their heads in at the terrace windows and scream, till she recollected her duty and came to them.

I am afraid that the peacocks were rather neglected for the few days preceding the Queen's visit, for everybody at the Seigneurie was very busy. Mr. Le Breton, as a general thing, lived simply enough. His wife had died when Otillie was only six years old. Miss Niffin the governess, [97] Marie the cook, two housemaids, and an old butler who had served the family for a quarter of a century made up the establishment indoors. Otillie had her basin of porridge and cream and her slice of bread at eight o'clock every morning, and bread and milk and "kettle-tea" for supper, with

now and then a taste of jam by way of a treat. The servants lived chiefly on "Jersey soup," a thick broth of oatmeal, vegetables, and fish, with a trifle of bacon or salt-beef to give it a relish. Mr. Le Breton had his morning coffee in his study, and the early dinner, which he shared with Otillie and Miss Niffin, was not an elaborate one.

These being the customs of the Seigneurie, it can easily be imagined that it taxed every resource of the establishment to provide suitably for the Queen's entertainment. All the island knew of the important event and longed to advise and help. The farmers sent their thickest cream and freshest strawberries and lettuces, desirous to prove their loyalty not to their sovereign only, but also to their landlord. Marie, the cook, spent the days in reading over her most difficult [98] recipes, and could not sleep at night. A friend of hers, once second cook to the Earl of Dunraven, but now retired on her laurels into private life, offered to come for a few days to assist, and to fabricate a certain famous game pasty, of which it was asserted the English aristocracy are inordinately fond. Peter the butler crossed over to Guernsey twice during the week with a long list of indispensables to be filled up at the shops there, hampers of wine came from London, and hot-house grapes and nectarines from friends in Jersey; the whole house was in a bustle, and nothing was spoken of but the Queen and the Queen's visit, what she would wear and say and do, whom she would bring with her, and what sort of weather she would have for her coming.

This last point was the one on which Otillie was most solicitous. A true child of Sark, she knew all about its tides and currents, the dangers of the island channels, and the differences which a little more or less wind and sea made in the navigation of them. She could recollect one stormy winter, when a Guernsey doctor who had come over to set a broken arm was detained for three weeks on the island, in plain sight all the time of his own home in St. Peterport, but as unable to [99] get to it as if it had been a thousand miles away!

"It would be dreadful if the Queen came and then could not get away again for three weeks!" she said to herself. "It would be awfully interesting to have her here, of course—but I don't quite know what we should do—or what she would do!" She tried to make a picture of it in her mind, but soon gave up the attempt. Provisions are scarce sometimes on Sark when the wind blows and the boats cannot get in. There would always be milk and vegetables and fruit if it were summer, and perhaps chickens enough could be collected to hold out; but there was something terrible in the idea of a queen without butcher's meat! Otillie's imagination refused to compass it!

Her very first thought when the important day dawned was the weather.

She waked with the first sunbeam and ran at once to the window. When she saw a clear sky and the sun rising out of a still sea, she gave a scream of delight.

"What is the matter?" asked Miss Niffin sleepily from the next room.

"It's good weather," replied Otillie. "We've got the most beautiful day for the Queen to come [100] in."

Miss Niffin's only answer was a little groan. She was a small, shy person, and the idea of confronting royalty made her dreadfully nervous. "Oh, if the day were only over!" she said to herself; and she longed to plead a headache and stay in bed, but she dared not. Besides, she felt that it would be cowardly to desert her post on such an important occasion and leave Otillie alone; so she braced her mind to face the awful necessity and began to dress.

Mr. Le Breton, awakening about the same time, gave a groan a good deal like Miss Niffin's. He was a loyal subject, and felt the honor that was done him by the Queen's inviting herself to luncheon; but, all the same, invalids do not like to be put out of their way, and he, too, wished the day well done.

"Ten to one I shall be laid up for the next month to pay for it," he reflected. Then he too braced himself to the necessity and rang for hot water, determined to do his duty as a man and a Seigneur.

Otillie was perhaps the only person in the house who was really glad to have the day come. The servants were tired and fretted with a sense of responsibility. Marie had passed a dreadful night, [101] full of dreams of failure and spoiled dishes.

"Now just as sure as guns my rolls will have failed to rise this day of all the days of the year," was her first waking thought. But no, the rolls were light as a feather, and the sponge and almond cakes came out of the oven delicately browned and quite perfect in taste and appearance. Nothing went wrong; and when Mr. Le Breton, just before starting for the Creux harbor to meet the royal party, took a look into the dining-room to make sure that all was right, he said to himself that he had never seen a prettier or more complete little "spread."

The table was ornamented with hot-house fruit and flowers, beautifully arranged by Miss Niffin and Otillie. All the fine old Le Breton plate had been brought out and polished, the napery shone like iced snow, there were some quaint pieces of old Venetian glass, jugs, dishes, and flagons, and a profusion of pretty confections, jellies, blanc-manges, crystallized fruits, and bonbons, to give sparkle and color. The light streamed in at the windows which opened on the terrace, from under the vines the flash of the waves could be seen, the curtains waved in the wind, which was [102] blowing inland. Nothing could be prettier; the only discord was the noisy scream of the peacocks on the lawn, who seemed as much upset and disturbed by the great event as the rest of the household.

"Can't something be done to stop those creatures?" said Mr. Le Breton. "Tie them up somewhere, can't you, Otillie, or send a boy to drive them down to the farm."

"It's only because they are hungry," replied Otillie rather absently. "I haven't given them their breakfast yet."

She was sticking long stems of fronded Osmundas into a jar as a decoration for the fireplace, and scarcely noticed what her father said. It was some minutes after the carriage drove away before she finished; then, with a sigh of relief, she brushed up the leaves she had scattered on the carpet, and ran upstairs to change her dress. It would never do to be caught by the Queen in a holland frock, with her hair blown about her eyes, and green finger-tips!

The clock struck one as she fastened her white dress and patted smooth the bows of her wide pink sash. One was the hour fixed for the Queen to land, so there was no time to lose. Otillie only [103] waited for a glance in at the door of the spare room, where the Queen, if so minded, was to take off her things. She glanced at the bed with a sort of awe as the possible repository of a royal bonnet, altered the position of a bowl of roses on the mantelpiece, and then hurried down to join Miss Niffin, who, attired in her best black silk and a pair of lace mitts, was seated decorously in the hall doing nothing. Otillie sat down beside her. It was rather a nervous waiting, and a long one; for half an hour passed, three quarters, and finally the clock struck two, before wheels were heard on the gravel, and during all that time the two watchers spoke scarcely a word. Only once Otillie cried as a gust of wind blew the curtains straight out into the room, "O dear! I hope it isn't rough. O dear! wouldn't it be dreadful if the Queen were to be sick? She would never like Sark again!"

"I think her Majesty must be used to the sea, she sails so much," replied Miss Niffin. The gust died away and did not blow the curtains any more, and again they sat in silence, waiting and listening.

"At last!" cried Otillie as the distinct roll of wheels was heard on the drive. Her heart beat fast, [104] but she got up bravely, straightened her slender little figure as became a Le Breton, and walked out on to the porch. Her eyes seemed strangely dazzled by the sun—for she could see no one in the carriage but her father.

It rolled up to the door, and Otillie felt a great throb of disappointment rise like a wave in her heart, and spread and swell! Mr. Le Breton had come back alone!

"Papa," she cried, as soon as she could speak, "what *has* happened? Where is the Queen?"

"I hope nothing has gone amiss with her Gracious Majesty," put in Miss Niffin from behind.

Mr. Le Breton got out of the carriage before he replied. He looked tired and annoyed.

"You can drive to the stable, Thomas," he said; "the carriage will not be wanted." Then he turned to Miss Niffin.

"Her Gracious Majesty has decided not to land," he went on. "The wind has sprung up and made rather a sea outside the breakwater; nothing to signify by the Sark standard, but enough to deter inexperienced persons. I waited at the Creux for nearly an hour, and every man, woman, [105] and child on the island waited with me, with the exception of you and Otillie and the servants, and then the captain of the royal yacht signalled that he could not risk putting the Queen ashore in a small boat in such rough water. So the thing is given up."

There was a certain latent relief in Mr. Le Breton's tone.

"Oh!" cried Otillie, stamping her foot. "How hateful of the wind to spring up! It could have waited as well as not! It has all the rest of the time to blow in, and now all the nice preparations are thrown away, and all our pleasant time spoiled, and just as likely as not the Queen will never come to Sark at all." Her voice died away into a storm of sobs.

"I wish I could be assured of that," remarked her father in a tone of weary resignation. "What I am afraid of is that she will come, or try to come, another day, and then there will be all this to do over again."

He indicated by a gesture the door of the dining-room, from which queer muffled sounds were heard just then.

"Peter seems as much afflicted by this disappointment as you are, Otillie," he added. "Come, my [106] child, don't cry over the matter. It can't be helped. Wind and waves oblige nobody, not even kings and queens."

"There are compensations for all our troubles," said Miss Niffin in her primmest tone. "We must bear up, and try to feel that all is for the best." Miss Niffin seemed to find it quite easy to be morally consoled for her share of loss in the giving up of the Queen's visit.

"How can you talk in that way!" cried Otillie, who was not in the least in awe of Miss Niffin. "If I had broken my comb, you would have said exactly the same, I know you would! There isn't any compensation at all for this trouble, and it's no use my trying to feel that it's for the best,—it isn't."

"We never know," replied Miss Niffin piously.

"Come," said Mr. Le Breton, desiring to put an end to the altercation, "I don't know why we should go hungry because her Majesty won't come and eat our luncheon. Take my arm, Miss Niffin, and let us have something to eat. Marie will break her heart if all her trouble and pains are not appreciated by somebody."

The peacocks, tired of waiting for their morning meal, and finding the windows open, had entered and helped themselves.—*Page 107*.

He gave his arm to Miss Niffin as he spoke, and moved forward to the dining-room. Otillie [107]
followed, wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, and feeling that the dainties would stick in her throat if she tried to swallow them, she was so very, very, dreadfully disappointed.

But when Mr. Le Breton reached the dining-room door he stopped suddenly as if shot, and gave a sort of shout! No one could speak for a moment. There was the feast, so prettily and tastefully arranged only an hour before, a mass of ruins! The flowers were upset, the fruit, tumbled and mashed, stained the cloth and the floor. Wine and lemonade dripped from the table's edge. The pink and yellow jellies, the forms of Charlotte Russe and blanc-mange and the frosted cakes and tarts were reduced to smears and crumbs. Where the gigantic pasty had stood remained only an empty dish, and above the remains, rearing, pecking, clawing, gobbling, appeared six long blue-green necks, which dipped and rose and dipped again!

The peacocks, tired of waiting for their morning meal, and finding the windows open, had [108]
entered and helped themselves! There was Lorenzo the Magnificent with a sponge-cake in his beak, and Peri gobbling down a lump of blanc-mange, and the Grand Panjandrum with both claws embedded in a pyramid of macaroons. Their splendid tails were draggled with cream and crumbs, and sticky with jelly; altogether they presented a most greedy and disreputable appearance! The strangest part of the whole was that while they stuffed themselves they preserved a dead silence, and did not express their enjoyment by one of their usual noisy screams. It was evident that they felt that the one great opportunity of their lives was going on, and that they must make the most of it.

At the sound of Mr. Le Breton's shout the peacocks started guiltily. Then they gathered up their tails as best they might, and, half flying, half running, scuttled out of the windows and far across the lawn, screaming triumphantly as they went, while Otillie tumbled into a chair and laughed till she cried.

"Oh! didn't they look funny?" she gasped, holding her sides.

"Rather expensive fun," replied the Seigneur ruefully. "But it is one comfort that we have it to ourselves." Then the humor of the situation seized on him also, and he sat down and laughed almost as hard as Otillie. [109]

"Dear me! what a mercy that her Majesty didn't come!" remarked Miss Niffin in an awe-struck tone.

"Good gracious," cried Otillie with sudden horror at the thought, "suppose she had! Suppose we had all walked in at that door and found the peacocks here! And of course we should! Of course they would have done it just the same if there had been fifty queens to see them! How dreadful it would have been! Oh, there are compensations, Miss Niffin; I see it now."

So Otillie was reconciled to her great disappointment, though the Queen never has tried to land at Sark again, and perhaps never will. For, as Otillie sensibly says, "It is a great deal better that we should be disappointed than that the Queen should be; for if she had been very hungry, and most likely she would have been after sailing and all, she would not have thought the Grand Panjandrum with his feet in the macaroons half so funny as we did, and would have been truly and really vexed."

So it was all for the best, as Miss Niffin said.

THE SHIPWRECKED COLOGNE-BOTTLE. [110]

IT seemed the middle of the night, though it was really only three o'clock in the morning, when little Davy Crocker was wakened by a sudden stamping of feet on the stoop below his window, and by a voice calling out that a ship was ashore off the Point, and that Captain Si, Davy's uncle, must turn out and help with the life-boat.

Davy was a "landlubber," as his cousin Sam Coffin was wont to assert whenever he wanted to tease him. He had lived all his short life at Townsend Harbor, up among the New Hampshire hills, and until this visit to his aunt at Nantucket, had never seen the sea. All the more the sea had for him a great interest and fascination, as it has for everybody to whom it has not from long familiarity become a matter of course.

Conversation in Nantucket is apt to possess a nautical and, so to speak, salty flavor. Davy, since his arrival, had heard so much about ships which had foundered, or gone to pieces on rocks, or burned up, or sprung leaks and had to be pumped out, that his mind was full of images of disaster, and he quite longed to realize some of them. To see a shipwreck had become his great ambition. He was not particular as to whether the ship should burn or founder or go ashore, any of these would do, only he wanted all the sailors to be saved. [111]

Once he had gone with his cousins to the South Shore on the little puffing railroad which connects Nantucket town with Siasconsett, and of which all the people of the island are so justly proud; and there on the beach, amid the surf-rollers which look so soft and white and are so cruelly strong, he had seen a great piece of a ship. Nearly the whole of the bow end it appeared to be. It was much higher than Davy's head, and seemed to him immense and formidable; yet this enormous thing the sea had taken into its grasp and tossed to and fro like a plaything and at last flung upon the sand as if it were a toy of which it had grown weary. It gave Davy an idea of the great power of the water, and it was after seeing this that he began to long to witness a shipwreck. And now there was one, and the very sound of the word was enough to make him rub open his sleepy eyes and jump out of bed in a hurry! [112]

But when he had groped his way to the window and pulled up the rattling paper shade, behold! there was nothing to be seen! The morning was intensely dark. A wild wind was blowing great dashes of rain on the glass, and the house shook and trembled as the blasts struck it.

Davy heard his uncle on the stairs, and hurried to the door. "Mayn't I go to the shipwreck with you, Uncle Si?" he called out.

"Go to what? Go back to bed, my boy, that's the place for you. There'll be shipwreck enough in the morning to satisfy all of us, I reckon."

Davy dared not disobey. He stumbled back to bed, making up his mind to lie awake and listen to the wind till it was light, and then go to see the shipwreck "anyhow." But it is hard to keep such resolutions when you are only ten years old. The next thing he knew he was rousing in amazement to find the room full of brilliant sunlight. The rain was over, though the wind still thundered furiously, and through the noise it made, the sea could be heard thundering louder still. [113]

Davy jumped out of bed, dressed as fast as he could, and hurried downstairs. The house seemed strangely empty; Aunt Patty was not in the kitchen, nor was cousin Myra in the pantry skimming milk, as was usual at this hour of the day. Davy searched for them in woodshed, garden, and barn. At last he spied them on the "walk" at the top of the house, and ran upstairs to

join them.

Do any of you know what a "walk" is? I suppose not, unless you have happened to live in a whaling-town. Many houses in Nantucket have them. They are railed platforms, built on the peak of the roof between the chimneys, and are used as observatories from which to watch what is going on at sea. There the wives and sweethearts of the whalers used to go in the old days, and stand and sweep the ocean with spy-glasses, in hopes of seeing the ships coming in from their long cruises each with the signals set which told if the voyage had been lucky or no, and how many barrels of oil and blubber she was bringing home. Then they used to watch the "camels," great hulls used as floats to lighten the vessels, go out and help the heavy-laden ship over the [114] bar. And when that was done and every rope and spar conned and studied by the experienced eyes on the roofs, it was time to hurry down, hang on the welcoming pot, trim the fire and don the best gown, so as to make a bright home-coming for the long-absent husband or son.

Aunt Patty had a spy-glass at her eyes when Davy gained the roof. She was looking at the wrecked ship, which was plainly in view, beyond the little sandy down which separated the house from the sea. There she lay, a poor broken thing, stuck fast on one of the long reaches of sandy shoal which stretch about the island and make the navigation of its narrow and uncertain channels so difficult and sometimes so dangerous. The heavy seas dashed over the half-sunken vessel every minute; between her and the shore two lifeboats were coming in under closely-reefed sails.

"Oh, do let me look through the glass!" urged Davy. When he was permitted to do so he uttered an exclamation of surprise, so wonderfully near did it make everything seem to be.

"Why, I can see their faces!" he cried. "There's Uncle Si! There's Sam! And there's a very wet [115] man! I guess he's one of the shipwrecked sailors! Hurrah!" and Davy capered up and down.

"You unfeeling boy!" cried Myra, "give me the glass—you'll let it fall. He's right, mother, father and Sam are coming ashore as fast as they can sail, and they'll be wanting their breakfasts, of course. I'd better go down and mix the corn bread." She took one more look through the glass, announced that the other boat had some more of the shipwrecked men on board, she guessed, and that Abner Folger was steering; then she ran down the ladder, followed by her mother, and Davy was left to watch the boats in.

When he too went down, the kitchen was full of good smells of boiling coffee and frying eggs, and his uncle and Sam and the "very wet man" were just entering the door together. The wet man, it appeared, was the captain of the wrecked vessel; the rest of the crew had been taken home by other people.

The captain was a long, brown, sinewy Maine man. He was soaked with sea-water and looked haggard and worn, as a man well might who had just spent such a terrible night; but he had kind, [116] melancholy eyes, and a nice face, Davy thought. The first thing to be done was to get him into dry clothes, and Uncle Si carried him up to Davy's room for this purpose. Davy followed them. He felt as if he could never see enough of this, his first shipwrecked sailor.

When the captain had been made comfortable in Uncle Silas's flannel shirt and spare pea-jacket and a pair of Sam's trousers, he hung his own clothes up to dry, and they all went down to breakfast. Aunt Patty had done her best. She was very sorry for the poor man who had lost his ship, and she even brought out a tumbler of her best grape jelly by way of a further treat; but the captain, though he ate ravenously, as was natural to a man who had fasted so long, did not seem to notice what he was eating, and thus disappointed kind Aunt Patty. She comforted herself by thinking what she could get for dinner which he would like. Uncle Si and Sam were almost as hungry as the Maine captain, so not much was said till breakfast was over, and then they all jumped up and hurried out, for there was a deal to be done.

Davy felt very dull after they had gone. He had never heard of such a thing as "reaction," but [117] that was what he was suffering from. The excitement of the morning had died out like a fire which has no more fuel to feed it, and he could not think of anything that he wanted to do. He hung listlessly round, watching Aunt Patty's brisk operations about the kitchen, and at last he thought he would go upstairs and see if the captain's clothes were beginning to dry. Wet as they were, they seemed on the whole the most interesting things in the house.

The clothes were not nearly dry, but on the floor, just below where the rough pea-jacket hung, lay a little shining object. It attracted Davy's attention, and he stooped and picked it up.

It was a tiny bottle full of some sort of perfume, and set in a socket of plated filagree shaped like a caster, with a filagree handle. The bottle had a piece of white kid tied over its cork with a bit of blue ribbon. It was not a thing to tempt a boy's fancy, but Davy saw that it was pretty, and the idea came into his head that he should like to carry it home, to his little sister Bella. Bella was fond of perfumes, and the bottle had cologne in it, as Davy could smell without taking out the [118] cork. He was sure that Bella would like it.

Davy had been brought up to be honest. I am sure that he did not mean to steal the cologne-bottle. The idea of stealing never entered his mind, and it would have shocked him had it done so. He was an imaginative little fellow, and the tiny waif seemed to him like a shell or a pebble, something coming out of the sea, which any one was at liberty to pick up and keep. He did not say to himself that it probably belonged to the captain, who might have a value for it, he did not think about the captain at all, he only thought of Bella. So after looking at the pretty toy for a

while, he put it carefully away in the drawer where he kept his things, pushing it far back, and drawing a pair of stockings in front of it, so that it might be hidden. He did not want anybody to meddle with the bottle; it was his now, or rather it was Bella's. Then he went up to the walk once more, and was so interested in watching the wreck and the boats, which, as the wind moderated, came and went between her and the shore, picking up the barrels and casks which were floated [119] out of her hold, that he soon forgot all about the matter.

It was nearly dark before the two captains and Sam came back to eat the meal which had been ready for them since the middle of the afternoon. Aunt Patty had taken off her pots and saucepans more than once and put them on again, to suit the long delay; but nothing was spoiled and everything tasted good, which showed how cleverly she had managed. The Maine captain—whose name it appeared was Joy—seemed more cheerful than in the morning, and more inclined to talk. But after supper, when he had gone upstairs and put on his own clothes, which Aunt Patty had kept before the fire nearly all day and had pressed with hot irons so that they looked almost as good as ever, his melancholy seemed to come on again. He sat and puffed at his pipe till Aunt Patty began to ask questions about the wreck. Captain Joy, it appeared, was part owner of the ship, whose name was the "Sarah Jane."

"She was called after my wife's sister," he told them, "and my little girl to home has the same name, 'Sarah Jane.' She is about the age of that boy there, or a mite older maybe,"—nodding toward Davy. "She wanted to come with me this vy'age, but her mother wouldn't hear of it, and [120] I'm mighty thankful she wouldn't, as things have turned out. No child could have stood the exposure of such a night as we had and come out alive; and Sarah Jane, though she's as spry as a cricket and always on the go, isn't over strong."

The captain took a long pull at his pipe and looked dreamily into the fire.

"I asked her, just as I was coming off, what I should bring her," he went on, "and she had a wish all fixed and ready. I never knew such a child for knowing her own mind. She's always sure what she wants, Sarah Jane is. The thing she wanted was a cologne-bottle, she said, and it must be just so, shaped like one of them pepper and vinegar what d' you call em's, that they put on hotel tables. She was very pertikeler about the kind. She drew me a picter of it on her slate, so 's to have no mistake, and I promised her if New York could furnish it she should have that identical article, and she was mighty pleased."

Nobody noticed that at the mention of the cologne-bottle, Davy gave a guilty jump, and shrank back into the shadow of Uncle Si's broad shoulders. Oh, if he could only put it back into the [121] pocket of the pea-jacket! But how could he when the captain had the jacket on?

"I was kind of fearful that there wouldn't be any bottles of that pertikeler shape that Sarah Jane had in her mind," continued Captain Joy, "but the town seemed to be chock-full of 'em. The very first shop I come to, there they stood in the window, rows of 'em, and I just went in and bought one for Sarah Jane before I did anything else, and when I'd got it safely stowed away in the locker, I felt kind of easy in my mind. We come down with a load of coal, but I hadn't more 'n a quarter cargo to take back, mostly groceries for the stores up to Bucksport and Ellsworth,—and it's lucky it was no more, as things have happened. The schooner was pretty old and being so light in ballast, I jedged it safest, when the blow come on so hard from the nor'-east, to run it under the lee of Cape Cod and ride it out there if we could. But we hadn't been anchored more 'n three hours—just about nine o'clock it was—when the men came to tell me that we was taking in water terrible fast. I suppose the ship had kind of strained her seams open in the gale. It want no [122] use trying to pump her out in such a storm, and if we didn't want to go down at our anchorage, there wasn't anything for it but to cut her loose and drive across the Haven in hopes of going aground on the sand before she sank. I can tell you if ever a man prayed, I prayed then, when I thought every minute she'd founder in deep water before we struck the shoal. And just as she was settling I heard the sand grate under the keel, and you may believe I was thankful, though it meant the loss of pretty much all I've got in the world. I shouted to the men to get to the rigging in the mainmast, for I knew she'd go to pieces pretty soon, and there wasn't no way of signalling for help till daylight, and I gave one dive for the cabin, got the papers out of the locker, and Sarah Jane's cologne-bottle, buttoned them up inside my pea-coat, and just got back again in time to see the foremast go over the side and the sea make a clean sweep of the decks. The mainmast stayed, and we lashed ourselves, and managed to hold on till sunrise, when we see you a-coming out to us, and glad we were.

"Every now and then in the night, when the water was washing over us, I put my fingers inside [123] my coat and made sure that Sarah Jane's bottle was there, and wasn't broken. I didn't want the child to be disappointed, you see. It was safe when we come ashore, I'm certain of that, but—" The captain paused.

"Now don't say it got broken after all!" cried Myra sympathetically.

"No, it wasn't broken, but it's just as bad," said Captain Joy. "Either I dropped it getting out of the boat and trod it down in the sand, or else some one has took it. It's gone, any way, and do you know, it's a foolish thing to say, but I feel nigh as bad about that there little dud as wasn't worth more 'n fifty cents, as I do about the loss of the hull cargo, on account of Sarah Jane."

There was a pause as he ceased. Aunt Patty and Myra were too sorry for the captain to feel like speaking at once. Suddenly into the silence there fell the sound of a sob. Everybody started, and Uncle Si caught Davy's arm and pulled him into the firelight where his face could be seen.

"Why, what are you crying for, little 'un?" asked Uncle Si.

"I'm so sorry. I didn't know it was the captain's," said Davy, in a tear-choked voice. [124]

"Didn't know what was the captain's? Now, Davy Crocker, 'twasn't ever you who took that bottle?" cried Aunt Patty.

"I found it on the floor," sobbed Davy. "I thought it was washed ashore from the shipwreck. I didn't suppose it belonged to anybody, and I wanted it for Bella. Oh, I'm so sorry."

"Why, then it ain't lost after all," cried Captain Joy, brightening up. "Well, how pleased Sarah Jane *will* be! Don't cry any more, my lad. I can see how it was, and that you didn't think it was stealing to take anything that had been in the sea."

Aunt Patty and Myra, however, still were deeply shocked, and could not look as lightly at Davy's offence as did the captain. Davy crept upstairs, brought down the cologne-bottle and slid it into Captain Joy's hand; then he crept away and sat in a dark corner behind the rest, but his conscience followed him, and Myra's reproachful look.

"Oh, Davy!" she whispered, "I never thought you'd be so mean as to take anything from a shipwrecked sailor!"

This was Davy's punishment, and rankled in his mind long after everybody else had forgotten [125] the matter, after the sands had swallowed up all that was left of the "Sarah Jane," and after the captain had returned to Bucksport and made the real Sarah Jane happy by the gift of the bottle she had wished for so much. It rankles occasionally to this day, though he is now a stout lad of fifteen. That he, he of all boys, should have done such a thing to a man just saved from the sea! He consoles himself by resolving to be particularly kind to shipwrecked sailors all the rest of his life; but unluckily, the "Sarah Jane" is, so far, his sole experience of a wreck, and the only sailor he has as yet had any chance to do anything for is Captain Joy, and what he did for him we all know. One does not always have the opportunity to make up for a blunder or a fault, and I am afraid Davy may live his life out and never again have the good luck to show his good intentions by *not* picking up and hiding a Shipwrecked Cologne-Bottle!

UNDER A SYRINGA-BUSH. [126]

THE old syringa at the foot of the Wade's lawn was rather a tree than a bush. Many years of growth had gone to the thickening of its interlaced boughs, which grew close to the ground, and made an impervious covert, except on the west side, where a hollow recess existed, into which a small person, boy or girl, might squeeze and be quite hidden.

Sundry other small persons with wings and feathers had discovered the advantages of the syringa. All manner of unsuspected housekeepings went on within its fastnesses, from the lark's nest, in a tuft of grass at the foot of the main stem, to the robin's home on the topmost bough. Solicitous little mothers brooded unseen over minute families, while the highly decorative bird papa sat on a neighboring hedge, carrying out his mission, which seemed to be to distract attention from the secreted family by the sweetness of his song and the beauty of his plumage. In [127] the dusk of the evening, soft thrills and twitters sounded from the bush, like whispered conversation; and very entertaining it must have been, no doubt, to any one who understood the language. So, altogether, the old syringa-bush was an interesting little world of itself.

Elly Wade found it so, as she sat in the green hiding-place on the west side, crying as if her heart would break. The syringa recess had been her favorite "secret" ever since she discovered it, nearly two years before. No one else knew about it. There she went when she felt unhappy or was having a mood. Once the boughs had closed in behind her, no one could suspect that she was there,—a fact which gave her infinite pleasure, for she was a child who loved privacies and mysteries.

What are moods? Does any one exactly understand them? Some people attribute them to original sin, others to nerves or indigestion; but I am not sure that either explanation is right. They sweep across the gladness of our lives as clouds across the sun, and seem to take the color out of everything. Grown people learn to conceal, if not to conquer, their moods; but children [128] cannot do this, Elly Wade least of all.

As I said, this was by no means her first visit to the syringa-bush. It has witnessed some stormy moments in her life, when she sat there hot and grieved, and in her heart believing everybody cruel or unjust. Ralph had teased her; or Cora, who was older than she, had put on airs; or little Kitty had been troublesome, or some schoolmate "hateful." She even accused her mother of unkindness at these times, though she loved her dearly all the while.

"She thinks the rest are always right, and I wrong," she would say to herself. "Oh, well! she'll be sorry some day." What was to make Mrs. Wade sorry Elly did not specify; but I think it was to

be when she, herself, was found dead, somewhere on the premises, of a broken heart! Elly was very fond of depicting this broken heart and tragical ending,—imaginative children often are. All the same, if she felt ill, or cut her finger, she ran to mamma for help, and was as much frightened as if she had not been thinking these deadly thoughts only a little while before.

To-day Elly had fled to the syringa-bush with no idea of ever coming out again. A great wrong [129] had been done her. Cora was going with a yachting-party, and she was not. Mamma had said she was too young to be trusted, and must wait till she was older and steadier.

"It is cruel!" she said with a fresh burst of sobs, as she recalled the bitter moment when she heard the verdict. "It was just as unkind as could be for her to say that. Cora is only four years the oldest, and I can do lots of things that she can't. She doesn't know a bit about crocheting. She just knits. And she never made sponge-cake, and I have; and when she rows, she pulls the hardest with her left hand, and makes the boat wabble. I've a much better stroke than she has. Papa said so. And I can swim just as well as she can!

"Nobody loves me," was her next reflection,—"nobody at all. They all hate me. I don't suppose anybody would care a bit if I *did* die."

But this thought was too hard to be borne.

"Yes, they would," she went on. "They'd feel remorse if I died, and they ought to. Then they would recollect all the mean things they've done to me, and they would groan, and say, 'Too late [130] —too late!' like the bad people in story-books."

Comforted by this idea, she resolved on a plan of action.

"I'll just stay here forever, and not come out at all. Of course, I shall starve to death. Then, all summer long they'll be hunting, and wondering and wondering what has become of me; and when the autumn comes, and the leaves fall off, they'll know, and they'll say, 'Poor Elly! how we wish we'd treated her better!'"

She settled herself into a more comfortable position,—it isn't necessary to have cramps, you know, even if you *are* starving to death,—and went on with her reflections. So still was she that the birds forgot her presence, and continued their twittering gossip and their small domestic arrangements undisturbed. The lark talked to her young ones with no fear of being overheard; the robins flew in and out with worms; the thrush, who occupied what might be called the second story of the syringa, disciplined a refractory fledgling, and papa thrush joined in with a series of musical expostulations. Elly found their affairs so interesting that for a moment she forgot her [131] own,—which was good for her.

A big bumble-bee came sailing through the air like a wind-blown drum, and stopped for a minute to sip at a syringa blossom. Next a soft whir drew Elly's attention, and a shape in green and gold and ruby-red glanced across her vision like a flying jewel. It was a humming-bird,—the first of the season. Elly had never been so near one before, nor had so long a chance to look, and she watched with delight as the pretty creature darted to and fro, dipping its needle-like bill into one flower-cup after another, in search of the honey-drop which each contained. She held her breath, not to startle it; but its fine senses seemed to perceive her presence in some mysterious fashion, and presently it flew away.

Elly's mind, no longer diverted, went back to its unhappiness.

"I wonder how long it is since I came here," she thought. "It seems like a great while. I guess it must be as much as three hours. They're all through dinner now, and beginning to wonder where I am. But they won't find me, I can tell them!"

She set her lips firmly, and again shifted her position. At the slight rustle every bird in the bush [132] became silent.

"They needn't," she said to herself. "I wouldn't hurt them. I'm not like Ralph. He's real bad to birds sometimes. Once he took some eggs out of a dear, cunning, little song-sparrow's nest, and blew the yolks. I'd never do such a mean thing as that."

But though she tried to lash herself up to her old sharpness of feeling, the interruption of wrathful thoughts had somewhat soothed her mood. Still, she held firmly to her purpose, while an increasing drowsiness crept over her.

"I shall stay here all night," she thought, "and all to-morrow, and to-morrow night. And then"—a yawn—"pretty soon I shall be dead, I suppose, and they'll be—sorry"—another yawn—"and—"

Elly was asleep.

When she woke, the bright noon sunshine had given place to a dusky light, which made the syringa recess very dark. The robins had discovered her whereabouts, and, hopping nearer and nearer, had perched upon a branch close to her feet, and were talking about her. She was dimly [133] conscious of their voices, but had no idea what they were saying.

"Why did it come here, any way?" asked Mrs. Robin. "A great heavy thing like that in *our* bush!"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Mr. Robin. "It makes a strange noise, but it keeps its eyes shut while it makes it."

"These great creatures are so queer!" pursued Mrs. Robin. "There,—it's beginning to move! I wish it would go away. I don't like its being so near the children. They might see it and be frightened."

The two birds flitted hastily off as Elly stretched herself and rubbed her eyes.

A very uncomfortable gnawing sensation began to make itself evident. It wasn't exactly pain, but Elly felt that it might easily become so. She remembered now that she fled away from the table, leaving her breakfast only half finished, yesterday morning,—was it yesterday, or was it the day before that? It felt like a long while ago.

The sensation increased.

"Dear me!" thought Elly, "the story-books never said that starving to death felt so. I don't like it a bit!" [134]

Bravely she fought against the discomfort, but it gained upon her.

She began to meditate whether her family had perhaps not been sufficiently punished.

"I've been away a whole day," she reflected, "and a whole night, and I guess they've felt badly enough. Very likely they've all sat up waiting for me to come back. They'll be sorry they acted so, and, any way, I'm so dreadfully hungry that I must have something to eat! And I want to see mamma too. Perhaps she'll have repented, and will say, 'Poor Elly! She *may* go.'"

In short, Elly was seized with a sudden desire for home, and, always rapid in decision, she lost no time in wriggling herself out of the bush.

"There, it's gone!" chirped the female robin. "I'm glad of it. I hope it will never come back."

Very cautiously Elly crept through the shrubbery on to the lawn. It still seemed dark, but she now perceived that the gloom came from a great thunder-cloud which was gathering overhead. She could not see the sun, and, confused with her long sleep, was not able to make out what part of the day it was; but, somehow, she felt that it was not the early morning as in the bush she had supposed. [135]

Across the lawn she stole, and upon the piazza. No one was visible. The open window showed the dining-table set for something,—was it tea? Upstairs she crept, and, looking in at the door as she went by, she saw her mother in her room taking off her bonnet.

"My poor child, where did you think we had gone?" she called out. "Papa was kept in town till the second train, and that was late, so we have only just got back. You must be half starved, waiting so long for your dinner. I hope nurse gave you some bread and milk."

"Why,—what day is it?" stammered the amazed Elly.

"Day? Why, Elly, have you been asleep? It's to-day, of course,—Thursday. What did you think it was?"

Elly rubbed her eyes, bewildered. Had the time which seemed to her so long really been so short? Had no one missed her? It was her first lesson in the comparative unimportance of the individual! A sense of her own foolishness seized her. Mamma looked so sweet and kind! Why had she imagined her cruel? [136]

"Did you go to sleep, dear?" repeated Mrs. Wade.

"Yes, mamma," replied Elly, humbly; "I did. But I'm waked up now."

TWO GIRLS—TWO PARTIES. [137]

A GREAT bustle and confusion had reigned the whole week long in the old house at the top of the hilly street, known to the neighborhood as "the Squire's." All the slip-covers had been taken from the furniture in the best parlor. All the company china had been lifted off its top shelf and washed. All the spare lamps had been filled, all the rooms swept and dusted, all the drawers in the bureaus freshly arranged, for—as Milly said to herself—"who knew but some one might take a fancy to peep in?"

Milly Grace, the Squire's daughter, had sat for hours in a cold woodshed tying up wreaths of ground-pine and hemlock with fingers which grew more chilly every hour. These wreaths now ornamented the parlor, festooning curtains, chimney-piece, and door-frames, and making green edges to the family portraits, which were two in number, neither of them by Copley or Stuart, as was plain to the most casual observation. [138]

One of these portraits represented the Squire's father in a short-waisted, square-tailed blue coat, and a canary-colored waistcoat. His forefinger was inserted in a calf-bound volume of

Blackstone, and his eyes were fixed with a fine judicial directness upon the cupola of the court-house seen through a window in the background. The other was his wife, in a sad-colored gown and muslin tucker, with a countenance which suggested nothing except saleratus and the renunciation of all human joys.

The Squire did not care much for this picture. It made him feel badly, he said, just the feeling he used to have when he was a boy and was sent every Sunday by this orthodox parent to study the longer answers of the Shorter Catechism on the third step of the garret-stairs, with orders not to stir from that position till he had them perfectly committed to memory. It was this strict bringing-up, perhaps, which made him so indulgent to Milly,—a great deal too indulgent her step-mother thought.

In the buttery stood a goodly row of cakes little and big, loaves whose icings shone like snow-crust on a sunny day, little cakes with plums and little cakes without plums; all sorts of cakes. On [139] the swinging shelf of the cellar were moulds of jelly clear and firm. In the woodhouse stood three freezers of ice-cream, "packed" and ready to turn out. Elsewhere were dishes of scalloped oysters ready for the oven, each with its little edging of crimped crackers, platters of chicken-salad, forms of blanc-mange, bowls of yellow custard topped with raspberry-and-egg like sunset-tinted avalanches, all that goes to the delectation of a country party: for a party there was to be, as after this enumeration I need hardly state. It was Milly's party, and all these elaborate preparations were her own work,—the work of a girl of nineteen, with no larger allowance of hands, feet, and spinal-vertebræ than all girls have, and no larger allowance of hours to her day; but with a much greater share of zeal, energy, and what the Squire called "go" than most young women of her age can boast of.

She it was who had pounded away at the tough sacks full of ice and salt till they were ready for the freezers. She it was who had beaten the innumerable eggs for the sponge cakes, pound cakes, fruit cakes, "one, two, three, four," jelly, nut and other cakes, who had swept the rooms, [140] washed the china, rearranged, changed, brightened everything. Like most other families on Croydon Hill, the Graces kept but one "help," a stout woman, who could wash, iron, and scrub with the best, and grapple successfully enough with the simple daily *menu*, but who for finer purposes was as "unhandy" as a gorilla. All the embellishments, all the delicate cookeries, fell to the share of the ladies of the household, which meant Milly as a general thing, and in this case particularly, for the party was hers, and she felt bound to take the burden of it on her own shoulders as far as possible, especially as her step-mother did not quite approve, and considered that the Squire had done a foolish thing in giving consent. "Milly should have her way for once," the Squire had announced.

So Milly had her way, and had borne herself bravely and brightly through the fatigues of preparation. But somehow when things were almost ready, when the table was set, lacking only the last touches, and the fire lighted, a heavy sense of discouragement fell upon her. It was the natural reaction after long overwork, but she was too inexperienced to understand it. She only [141] knew that suddenly the thing she had wished for seemed undesirable and worth nothing, and that she felt perfectly miserable, and "didn't care what became of her." She laid her tired head on the little table by which she was sitting, and, without in the least intending it, began to cry.

Mrs. Grace was lying down, the Squire was out; there was no one to note her distress or sympathize with it excepting Teakettle, the black cat. He was sorry for Milly after his cat-fashion, rubbed his velvet head against her dress for a little while as if wishing to console her, but when she took no notice, he walked away and sat down in front of the door, waiting till some one should open it and let him through. Cats soon weary of the role of comforter, and escape to pleasanter things,—sunshine, bird-shadows on the grass, light-hearted people who will play with them and make no appeal to their sympathies.

Milly's tears did her no good. She was too physically worn out to find relief in them. They only deepened her sense of discouragement. The clock struck six; she roused herself wearily and went [142] upstairs to dress. There were still the lamps to light and last things to do.

"And no one to do them but me," thought poor Milly. "Oh dear, how dreadfully my feet ache! How glad I shall be when they all go away and I can go to bed!"

This was indeed a sad state of mind to be in on the eve of a long-anticipated pleasure!

Everything looked bright and orderly and attractive when the guests arrived a little after half-past seven. The fire snapped and the candles shone; a feeling of hospitable warmth was in the air. Milly's arrangements, except so far as they regarded her own well-being, had been judicious and happy. The pretty girls in their short-sleeved blue and crimson merinos, with roses and geranium-leaves in their hair (I need not say that this was at a far-back and old-fashioned date), looked every whit as charming as the girls of to-day in their more elaborate costumes.

Cousin Mary Kendal, who, for all her grown-up sons and daughters liked fun as much as any girl among them, had volunteered to play for the dancing, and the spirit with which she dashed at [143] once into "The Caspian Waltz" and "Corn Rigs are Bonny" was enough to set a church steeple to capering.

Everybody seemed in a fair way to have a delightful evening except one person. That one was poor Milly, usually the merriest in every party, but now dull, spiritless, and inert. She did not even look pretty! Color and sparkle, the chief elements of beauty in her face, were, for the moment, completely quenched. She was wan and jaded, there were dark rings under her eyes,

and an utter absence of spring to her movements, usually so quick and buoyant. She sat down whenever she had the chance, she was silent unless she must speak; half-unconsciously she kept a watch of the clock and was saying to herself, "Only two hours more and I can go to bed." Her fatigued looks and lack of pleasure were a constant damper to the animation of the rest. Every one noticed, and wondered what could be the matter; but only Janet Norcross dared to ask.

"Have you got a headache?" she whispered; but the "No" which she received by way of answer sounded so cross that she did not venture on further inquiries.

"Why won't you dance with me?" urged Will Benham; "you said you would when we were [144] talking about the party after the Lecture—don't you remember?"

"I'd rather the others had the chance—it's my party, you know," replied Milly.

"But they *are* having a chance. Everybody is dancing but you. Come, Milly."

"Oh, Will, don't tease," cried Milly irritably. "I never saw such an evening. Do please to leave me alone and go and ask some of the others."

Weariness sharpened her voice. Till the words were out of her lips she had no idea that she was going to speak so petulantly to Will. It sounded dreadfully even to herself.

"Oh, certainly," said Will with freezing dignity. He crossed the room, and presently Milly saw him take Helen Jones out to the set of Lancers just forming. He did not look at Milly again, or come near her, and the sense of his displeasure was just the one drop too much. Milly felt herself choke, a hot rush of tears blinded her eyes, she turned, and being fortunately near the door, got out of it and upstairs without suffering her face to be seen.

Janet found her half an hour later lying prone across the bed, and sobbing as if her heart would [145] break.

"What *is* the matter?" she cried in alarm. "Are you ill, dear Milly? has anything dreadful happened? I came up to look for you. Will Benham got worried because you were away so long, and came to me to ask what had become of you. I told him I guessed you were taking out the ice-creams, but Katy said you hadn't been in the kitchen at all, so I came up here. What is the matter —do tell me?"

"Oh, nothing is the matter at all, except that I am a perfect idiot, and so tired that I wish I were dead," said Milly. "It was awfully good of Will to care, for I spoke so crossly to him. You can't think. It was horrid of me, but somehow I felt so dreadfully tired that the words seemed to jump out of my mouth against my will. Dear Janet—and I was cross to you, too," added Milly penitently. "Everything has gone wrong with me to-night. Oh, and there is that horrible ice-cream! I must go and get it out of the freezers. But my back aches so, Janet, and the soles of my feet burn like fire."

"You poor thing, you are just tired out," said her friend. "No wonder. You must have worked [146] like a horse to make everything so nice and pretty as it is. Don't worry about the ice-cream. Just tell me what dishes to put it in, and I'll see to it. It won't take five minutes. But do rouse yourself now, and keep up a little while longer. The others will wonder so if you don't go down. You *must* go down, you know. Here is a wet towel for your eyes, and I'll smooth your hair."

Even so small a lift as having the ice-cream taken out for her was a relief, and Janet's kindness, and the sense that Will was not hopelessly alienated by her misconduct, helped Milly to recover her equilibrium. Soothed and comforted she went downstairs, and got through the rest of the evening tolerably well.

But when the last good-night had been said, and the last sleigh-bell had jingled away from the door, she found herself too tired to rest. All night long she tossed restlessly on her hot pillows, while visions of pounding ice and stirring cake, of Will's anger, and Janet's surprise when she found her in tears, whirled through her thoughts. When morning came she was so "poorly" that [147] the doctor was sent for.

"Too much party, no doubt," was his inward commentary when he received the summons; and his first words to Milly were, "Well, Missy, so you are down with fruit cake and mottoes, are you?"

"Oh, Doctor, no, I never ate a mouthful of the cake. I only made it," was poor Milly's disclaimer.

"That sounds serious," said the doctor. But when he had felt her pulse he looked graver.

"You've done a good deal too much of something, that is evident," he said. "I shall have to keep you in bed awhile to pay you for it."

Milly was forced to submit. She stayed in bed for a whole week and the greater part of another, missing thereby two candy-pulls on which her heart was set, and the best sleighing frolic of the season. Everybody was kind about coming to see her, and sending her flowers and nice things, and Janet, in particular, spent whole hours with her every day.

"The whole thing seems such a dreadful pity," Milly said one day. She was really better now, able to sit up, and equal to a calm discussion of her woes. "I had looked forward so much to my party, and I wanted to have it as nice as could be, and I worked so hard; and then, when the time [148] came, I didn't enjoy it a bit. If I could only have it over again now when I am all rested and fresh,

I should have as good a time as anybody. Doesn't it seem a pity, Janet?"

"Yes, it does," replied Janet, after which she fell into a little musing-fit.

"One can't have company without taking some trouble," she said at last. "But I wonder if one need take so much?"

"I don't see what else I could have done," said Milly. "You must give people nice things when they come to see you, and somebody has got to make them. And besides that, there is so much to see to about the house,—dusting, and washing china, and making the rooms nice."

"I know," went on Janet reflectively. "Mrs. Beers half killed herself, I remember, when she had that quilting two years ago, in giving the whole house a thorough house-cleaning beforehand. She said as like as not somebody would want to run up into the garret-chamber after something, and she should have a fit if it wasn't in order. And after all, not a soul went anywhere except to the [149] parlor and dining-room, and into Mrs. Beers's bedroom to take off their things; so the fuss was all thrown away, and Mrs. Beers had inflammation of the lungs afterward, and almost died."

"I recollect. But then they might have gone to the attic—she couldn't tell. It was natural that Mrs. Beers should think of it."

"Well, and suppose they had, and that there had been a trifle of dust on the top of some old trunk, what difference would it have made? People who are busy enjoying themselves don't stop to notice every little thing. I am going to think the thing over, Milly. It's all wrong somehow."

Janet herself was meditating a party. Her father had given permission, and Aunt Esther, who managed the housekeeping, was only too glad to fall in with any plan which pleased Janet. Judge Norcross was the richest man on the Hill. There was no reason why Janet's entertainment should not out-shine Milly's. In fact, she had felt a little ambitious to have it do so, and had made certain plans in her private mind all of which involved labor and trouble; but now she hesitated.

"If I'm going to be as tired out as Milly was, and not enjoy it, what's the use of having a party at [150] all?" she said to herself. "I'd *like* to have it as nice as hers; but whatever I have, I have got to do it all myself. I'm not as strong as Milly, I know, and it has half killed *her*; perhaps it would quite kill me. A party isn't worth that!"

She discussed the matter within herself, reasonably. She *could* wind herself up and make eight kinds of cake if she liked. There were the recipes and the materials and she knew how; moreover, Aunt Esther would help her. She could have as much jelly and syllabub and blanc-mange as Milly, she could turn the house upside down if she desired, and trim and beautify and adorn. It was a temptation. No girl likes to be outdone, least of all by her intimate friend. "But is it worth while?" Janet queried. And I think she proved herself possessed of a very "level head" when, at last, she decided that it was not.

"I'll be sensible for once," she told herself. "A party is not a duty, it is a pleasure. If I get so tired that I spoil my own pleasure, I spoil my company's too, for they will be sure to find it out just as they did at Milly's. I couldn't half enjoy anything that night, because she looked so [151] miserable; and I won't run the risk of having the same thing happen at our house. I'll just do what is necessary, and leave off the extras."

The "necessary," when Janet came to analyze it, proved to be quite as much as she was able to undertake; for, as she had admitted to herself, she was not nearly so strong as Milly Grace. It meant an ample supply of two sorts of cake, freshly made and delicate, with plenty of ice-cream, salad, scalloped oysters, and rolls. There was extra china to wash, the table to set, and the rooms to dust and arrange, and Janet was quite tired enough before it was done. She sent to Boston for some preserved ginger to take the place of the jelly which she didn't make, she made no attempt at evergreen wreaths, and she wisely concluded that rooms in their usual state of cleanliness would pass muster with young people intent on dancing and amusement, that no one would find time to peep into holes and corners, and that the house could wait to have its "thorough cleaning" administered gradually after the occasion was over.

There was really a great deal of steady good sense in holding to this view of the matter, and [152] Janet found her reward in the end. The preparations, even thus simplified, taxed her strength; the extra touches which she had omitted would have been just the "straw too much." She gave herself a good margin for rest on the afternoon preceding the party, and when she came downstairs in her pretty dress of pale blue cashmere and swan's-down, ready to meet her guests, her cheeks and eyes were as bright as usual, and her spirits were ready for the exhilaration of excitement.

The tone of any gathering depends in great measure on its hostess. If she is depressed or under the weather, her visitors are pretty sure to catch her mood and be affected by it. Janet's sunny looks and gay laughs set the key-note of her party. Nobody missed the wine jelly or the six absent sorts of cake, no one wasted a thought on the evergreen wreaths. All was fun and merriment, and nothing seemed wanting to the occasion.

"What a good time we *have* had!" said Helen Jones to Alice Ware as they stood at the door of the dressing-room waiting for their escorts. "It's been ever so much jollier than it was at Milly's, [153] and I can't think why. That was a beautiful party, but somehow people seemed to feel dull." Helen had no idea of being overheard, but as it happened Milly was nearer to her than she thought.

"I'll tell you why it was, Helen," she said, coming forward frankly. "Don't look so shocked. I know you didn't mean me to hear, but indeed I don't mind a bit. And it's quite true besides. Janet's party has been a great deal nicer, and it's because I was such a goose about mine. I did a great deal too much and got dreadfully tired, so tired that I couldn't enjoy it, and you all found it out of course, so you couldn't enjoy it either. I'm sure I don't wonder, but it was all my own fault. Janet took warning by my experience and made her party easier, and you see how nice it has been. We have all had a beautiful time, and so has she. Well—I've learned a lesson by it. Next time I give a party I shall just do what I can to make it pleasant for you all, and not what I can't, and I hope it will turn out better for everybody concerned."

THE PINK SWEETMEAT.

[154]

ONLY three pairs of stockings were left in the shop. It was a very little shop indeed, scarcely larger than a stall. Job Tuke, to whom it belonged, was not rich enough to indulge in the buying of any superfluous wares. Every spring he laid in a dozen dozen of thin stockings, a bale of cheap handkerchiefs, a gross of black buttons, a gross of white, a little stationery, and a few other small commodities. In the autumn he added a dozen dozen of thick stockings, and a box full of mittens and knitted comforters. Besides these he sold penny papers, and home-made yeast made by Mrs. Tuke. If the stock of wearables grew scant toward midwinter, Job rejoiced in his heart, but by no means made haste to replenish it. He just laid aside the money needed for the spring outfit, and lived on what remained. Thus it went year after year. Trade was sometimes a little better, sometimes a little [155] worse, but whichever way it was, Job grew no richer. He and his old wife lived along somehow without coming on the parish for support, and with this very moderate amount of prosperity they were content.

This year of which I write, the supply of winter stockings had given out earlier than usual. The weather had been uncommonly cold since October, which may have been the reason. Certain it is, that here at Michaelmas, with December not yet come in, only three pairs of stockings were left in the little shop. Job Tuke had told his wife only the week before that he almost thought he should be forced to lay in a few dozen more, folks seemed so eager to get 'em. But since he said that, no one had asked for stockings, as it happened, and Job, thinking that trade was, after all, pretty well over for the season, had given up the idea of replenishing his stock.

One of the three pairs of stockings was a big pair of dark mixed gray. One pair, a little smaller, was white, and the third, smaller still and dark blue in color, was about the size for a child of seven or eight years old.

Job Tuke had put up the shutters for the night and had gone to bed. The stockings were talking [156] together in the quiet darkness, as stockings will when left alone. One pair had been hung in the window. It had got down from its nail, and was now straddling carelessly with one leg on either side of the edge of the box in which the others lay, as a boy might on the top of a stile. This was the big gray pair.

"Our chances seem to be getting slim," he said gloomily.

"That is more than you seem," replied the White Stockings, in a tart voice. "Your ankles are as thick as ever, and your mesh looks to me coarser than usual to-night."

"There are worse things in the world than thickness," retorted the Gray Stockings angrily. "I'm useful, at any rate, I am, while you have no wear in you. I should say that you would come to darning about the second wash, if not sooner."

"Is that my fault?" said the White Pair, beginning to cry.

"No; it's your misfortune. But people as unfortunate as you are should mind their P's and Q's, [157] and not say disagreeable things to those who are better off."

"Pray don't quarrel," put in the Little Blues, who were always peacemakers. "Think of our situation, the last survivors of twelve dozen! we ought to be friends. But, as you say, matters *are* getting serious with us. Of course we are all thinking about the same thing."

"Yes; about the Christmas, and the chimney corner," sighed the White Pair. "What a dreadful thing it would be if we went to the rag-bag never having held a Christmas gift. I could not get over such a disgrace. My father, my grandfather—all my relations had their chance—some of them were even hung a second time!"

"Yes; Christmas is woven into our very substance," said the Gray Stockings. "The old skeins and the ravellings tell the story to the new wool,—the story of the Christmas time. The very sheep in the fields know it. For my part," he added proudly, "I should blush to lie in the same ash-heap even with an odd stocking who had died under the disgrace of never being hung up for Christmas, and I will never believe that my life-long dream is to be disappointed!"

"Why will you use such inflated language?" snapped the White Pair. "You were only woven last July. As late as May you were running round the meadow on a sheep's back." [158]

"Very well; I don't dispute it. I may not be as old as Methuselah, but long or short, my life is my life, and my dream is my dream, and you have no call to criticise my expressions, Miss!" thundered the Big Pair.

"There you are again," said the Little Blues. "I *do* wish you wouldn't dispute. Now let us talk about our chances. What day of the month is it?"

"The twenty-seventh of November," said the Gray Stockings, who, because they hung over the penny papers in the window, always knew the exact date.

"Little more than four weeks to the holidays," said the White Pair dolorously. "How I wish some one would come along and put us out of suspense."

"Being bought mightn't do that," suggested the Little Blues. "You might be taken by a person who had two pairs of stockings, and the others might be chosen to be hung up. Such things do happen."

"Oh, they wouldn't happen to me, I think," said the White Pair vaingloriously.

As it happened, the three pairs of stockings were all sold the very day after this conversation, and all to one and the same person. This was Mrs. Wendte, an Englishwoman married to a Dutch shipwright. She had lived in Holland for some years after her marriage, but now she and her husband lived in London. They had three children. [159]

The stockings were very much pleased to be bought. When Job Tuke rolled them up in paper and tied a stout packthread round them, they nestled close, and squeezed each other with satisfaction. Besides, the joy of being sold was the joy of keeping together and knowing about each other's adventures.

The first of these adventures was not very exciting. It consisted in being laid away in the back part of a bureau-drawer, and carefully locked in.

"Now, what is this for?" questioned the White Stockings. "Are we to stay here always?"

"Yes; that is just what I should like to know," grumbled the Big Grays.

"Why, of course not! Who ever heard of stockings being put away for always?" said the wise Little Blues. "Wait patiently and we shall see. I think it is some sort of a surprise."

But day after day passed and nothing happened, surprising or otherwise, till even the philosophical Little Blue Stockings began to lose heart and hope. At last, one evening they heard the key click in the lock of the drawer, a stream of light flashed into their darkness, and they were seized and drawn forth. [160]

"Well, mother, let us see thy purchase. Truly fine hosen they are," said Jacob Wendte, whose English was rather foreign.

"Yes," replied his wife. "Good, handsome stockings they are, and the children will be glad, for their old ones are about worn out. The big pair is for Wilhelm, as thou knowest. Those must hang to the right of the stove."

The Big Gray Pair cast a triumphant glance at his companions as he found himself suspended on a stout nail. This *was* something like life!

"The white are for Greta, and these small ones for little Jan. Ah, they are nice gifts indeed!" said Mrs. Wendte, rubbing her hands. "A fine Christmas they will be for the children."

The stockings glowed with pleasure. Not only were they hung up to contain presents, but they themselves were Christmas gifts! This was promotion indeed. [161]

"Hast thou naught else?" demanded Jacob Wendte of his wife.

"No great things; a kerchief for Greta, this comforter for Wilhelm, for the little one, mittens. That is all."

But it was not quite all, for after her husband had gone to bed, Mrs. Wendte, a tender look on her motherly face, sought out a small, screwed-up paper, and with the air of one who is a little ashamed of what she is doing, dropped into each stocking a something made of sugar. They were not sugar almonds, they were not Salem Gibraltars,—which delightful confections are unfamiliar to London shops,—but irregular lumps of a nondescript character, which were crumbly and sweet, and would be sure to please those who did not often get a taste of candy. It was of little Jan that his mother had thought when she bought the sweetmeats, and for his sake she had yielded to the temptation, though she looked upon it as an extravagance. There were three of the sweetmeats—two white, one pink—and the pink one went into Jan's stockings. Mrs. Wendte had not said anything about them to her husband. [162]

"Well, this is satisfactory," said the Gray Pair, when Mrs. Wendte had left the room, and he was sure of not being overheard. "Here we are all hanging together on Christmas Eve. My dream is accomplished."

"Mine isn't," said the White Pair plaintively. "I always hoped that I should hold something valuable, like a watch or a pair of earrings. It is rather a come-down to have nothing but a bit of candy inside, and a pocket handkerchief pinned to my leg. I don't half like it. It gives me an uncomfortable pricking sensation, like a stitch in the side."

"It's just as well for you to get used to it," put in the Gray. "It doesn't prick as much as a darning-needle, I fancy, and you'll have to get accustomed to that before long, as I've remarked before."

"I'm the only one who has a pink sweetmeat," said the Little Blues, who couldn't help being pleased. "And I'm for a real child. Wilhelm and Greta are more than half grown up."

"Real children are very hard on their stockings, I've always heard," retorted the White Pair, who never could resist the temptation to say a disagreeable thing. [163]

"That may be, but it is all in the future. This one night is my own, and I mean to enjoy it," replied the contented Little Blues.

So the night went, and now it was the dawn of Christmas. With the first light the door opened softly and a little boy crept into the room. This was Jan. When he saw the three pairs of stockings hanging by the stove, he clapped his hands together, but softly, lest the noise should wake the others. Then he crossed the room on tiptoe and looked hard at the stockings. He soon made sure which pair was for himself, but he did not take them down immediately, only stood with his hands behind his back and gazed at them with two large, pleased eyes.

At last he put his hand up and gently touched the three, felt the little blue pair, gave it a pat, and finally unhooked it from its nail. Then he sat down on the floor, and began to put them on. His toe encountering an obstacle, he pulled the stocking off again, put his hand in, and extracted the pink sweetmeat, with which he was so pleased that he laughed aloud. That woke up the others, who presently came in. [164]

"Ah, little rogue that thou art! Always the first to waken," said his mother, pleased at his pleasure.

"See, mother! see what I found!" he cried. "It is good—sweet! I have tasted a crumb already. Take some of it, mother."

But Mrs. Wendte shook her head.

"No," she said. "I do not care for sugar. That is for little folks like thee. Eat it thyself, Jan."

It was her saying this, perhaps, which prevented Wilhelm and Greta from making the same offer,—at least, I hope so. Certain it is that neither of them made it. Greta ate hers up on the spot, with the frank greediness of a girl of twelve who does not often get candy. Wilhelm buttoned his up in his trousers pocket. All three made haste to put on the new stockings. The three pairs had only time to hastily whisper as they were separated,—

"To-night perhaps we may meet again."

The pink sweetmeat went into the pocket of Jan's jacket, and he carried it about with him all the morning. He did not eat it, because once eaten it would be gone, and it was a greater pleasure to have it to look forward to, than to enjoy it at the moment. Jan was a thrifty little boy, as you perceive. [165]

Being Christmas, it was of course an idle day. Jacob Wendte never knew what to do with such. There was his pipe, and there was beer to be had, so in default of other occupation, he amused himself with these. Mrs. Wendte had her hands full with the dinner, and was frying sausages and mixing Yorkshire pudding all the morning. Only Greta went to church. She belonged to a parish-school where they gave Christmas prizes, and by no means intended to lose her chance; but, apart from that, she really loved church-going, for she spoke English and understood it better than either of the other children. Wilhelm went off on errands of his own. Little Jan spent the morning in admiring his stockings, and in wrapping and unwrapping his precious sweetmeat, and taking it out of his pocket and putting it in again.

"Why dost thou not eat it, dear?" asked his mother, as she lifted the frying-pan from the stove.

But he answered: "Oh! not yet. When once it is eaten, it is over. I will wait."

"How long wilt thou wait?" she asked. [166]

Jan said bashfully, "I don't know."

In truth, he had not made up his mind about the sweetmeat, only he felt instinctively that he did not want to hurry, and shorten his pleasure.

Dinner over, he went out for a walk. Every now and then, as he marched along, his hand would steal into his pocket to finger his precious candy and make sure that it was safe.

It was a gray afternoon, but not snowing or raining. Hyde Park was not too far away for a walk, and Jan went there. The Serpentine was skimmed over with ice just strong enough to bear boys, and quite a little crowd was sliding or skating upon it. Jan could skate very well. He had learned in Holland, but he made no attempt to join the crowd. He was rather shy of English boys, for they

sometimes laughed at his Hollander clothes or his Dutch accent, and he did not like to be laughed at.

So he strolled away, past the Serpentine and the skaters, and watched the riders in the Row for a while. There were not a great many, for people who ride are apt to be out of London at the Christmas time; but there were some pretty horses, and one fair little girl on a pony who took [167] Jan's fancy very much. He stood for a long time watching her trot up and down, and the idea occurred to him that he would like to give her his sweetmeat. He even put his hand into his pocket and half pulled it out; but the little girl did not look his way, and presently her father, with whom she was riding, spoke to her, and she turned her horse's head and trotted off through the marble arch. Jan dropped the sugarplum again into his pocket, and felt as if his sudden fancy had been absurd; and indeed I think the little girl would have been surprised and puzzled what to do had he carried out the intention.

After the pony and his little mistress had departed, Jan lost his interest in the riders, and walked away across the park. Once he stopped to look at a dear little dog with a blue collar, who seemed to have lost his master, for he was wandering about by himself, and smelling everybody and everything he met, as if to recover a lost trail. Jan called him. He came up in a very friendly way and allowed himself to be patted; and once more the sweetmeat was in danger, for Jan had taken it out with the intention of dividing it with this new friend, when a whistle was heard which [168] the little dog evidently recognized, and he darted off at once to join his master. So again the pink sweetmeat was put back into Jan's pocket, and he walked on.

He had gone quite a distance when he saw a number of people collected round the foot of a tree. A ladder was set against one of the lower branches, and a man had climbed up nearly to the top of the tree. Jan, like a true boy, lost no time in joining the crowd, but at first he could not make out what was going on. The boughs were thick. All that he could see was the man's back high up overhead, and what he was doing he could not guess.

A benevolent-looking old gentleman stood near, and Jan heard him exclaim with great excitement:

"There, he's got him! No, he's not; but it was a close shave!"

"Got what, sir?" he ventured to ask.

"Why, the rook, to be sure."

Then, seeing that Jan still looked puzzled, he took the trouble to explain.

"You see that rook up there, my lad, don't you?" Jan had not seen any rook at all! "Well it is caught in some way, how, I can't tell you, but it can't get away from the tree. It has been there [169] three days, they say, and all that time the other rooks have brought food to it, and kept it from starving. Now some one has gone up to see what is the difficulty, and, if possible, to set the poor thing free."

"Thank you, sir," said Jan.

And the old gentleman looked at him kindly, and said to himself:—

"A very civil, tidy little lad! I like his face."

Jan had now become deeply interested in what was going on. He stood on tiptoe, and stretched his neck; but all he could see was the man's back and one of his feet, and now and then the movement of a stick with which the man seemed to be trying to hit something. At last there was a great plunge and a rustling of branches, and people began to hurrah. Jan hurrahed too, though he still saw nothing very clearly; but it is easier to shout when other boys shout, if you happen to be a boy, than it is to keep still.

Slowly the man in the tree began to come down. He had only one hand to help himself with now, for the other held the heavy rook. We in America do not know what rooks are like, but in [170] England they are common enough. They are large black birds, something like our crows, but they look wiser, and are a good deal bigger.

As the man neared the ground, every one in the crowd could see what had been the matter with the rook. A kite-string, caught among the tree branches, had tangled his legs and held him fast. He had pulled so hard in his efforts to escape that the string had cut into one of his legs and half broken it. It was stiff and bleeding, and the rook could neither fly nor hop. People searched in their pockets, and one little girl, who had a half biscuit, began to feed the rook, who, for all the kindly efforts of his friends, seemed to be half-famished. The poor thing was too weak to struggle or be frightened, and took the crumbs eagerly from the girl's hand.

Jan thought of his sweetmeat, and took it out for the third time. Everybody was crowding round the man who held the rook, and he could not get near. A very tall policeman stood in front of him. Jan pulled his arm, and when he turned, handed him the sweetmeat, and said in his soft foreign English:—

"For the bird, sir." [171]

"Thank you, my dear," said the policeman.

He had not understood what Jan said, and in an abstracted way, with his eyes still fixed on the

rook, he bit the pink sweetmeat in two, and swallowed half of it at a mouthful. Fortunately Jan did not see this, for the policeman's back was turned to him; but observing that the man made no attempt to go forward, he pulled his sleeve for the second time, and again said:—

"For the bird, I said, sir."

This time the policeman heard, and taking one step forward, he held the remaining half of the sweetmeat out to the rook, who, having by this time grown used to being fed, took the offered dainty greedily. Jan saw the last pink crumb vanish into the long beak, but he felt no regret. His heart had been touched by the suffering of the poor bird, and he was glad to give what he could to make it forget those painful days in the tree.

So that was the end of the pink sweetmeat, or not quite the end. The kind old gentleman to whom Jan had spoken, had noticed the little transaction with the policeman. He was shrewd as well as kind. He guessed by Jan's clothes that he was a working-man's son, to whom sweets were [172] not an every-day affair, and the generous act pleased him. So he put his hand into *his* pocket, pulled out a half-crown, and watching his opportunity, dropped it into Jan's pocket, quite empty now that the sweetmeat was gone. Then, with a little chuckle, he walked away, and Jan had no suspicion of what had been done to him.

Gradually the crowd dispersed, Jan among the rest walking briskly, for he wanted to get home and tell his mother the story. It was not till after supper that he discovered the half-crown, and then it seemed to him like a sort of dream, as if fairies had been at work, and turned the pink sweetmeat into a bit of silver.

That night the three pairs of stockings had another chance for conversation. The blue ones and the gray ones lay close together on the floor of the room where Jan slept with his brother, and the white ones, which Greta had carelessly dropped as she jumped into bed, were near enough the half-opened door to talk across the sill.

"It has been an exciting day," said the White Pair. "My girl got a Keble's 'Christian Year' at her [173] school. It was the second-best prize. It is a good thing to belong to respectable people who take prizes. Only one thing was painful to me: she wriggled her toes so with pleasure that I feel as if I were coming to an end in one of my points."

"You probably are," remarked the Big Gray. "Yes, now that I examine, I can see the place. One stitch has parted already, and there is quite a thin spot. You know I always predicted that you would be in the rag-bag before you knew it."

"Oh, don't say such dreadful things," pleaded the Little Blues. "Mrs. Wendte will mend her, I am sure, and make her last. What did your girl do with her sweetmeat?"

"Ate it up directly, of course. What else should one do with a sweetmeat?" snapped the White Pair crossly. "Oh, dear! my toe feels dreadfully ever since you said that; quite neuralgic!"

"My boy was not so foolish as to eat his sweetmeat," said the Big Gray stockings. "Only girls act in that way, without regard to anything but their greedy appetites. He traded his with another boy, and he got a pocket-knife for it, three screws, and a harmonica. There!" [174]

"Was the knife new?" asked the Blue.

"Could the harmonica play any music?" demanded the White.

"No; the harmonica is out of order inside somehow, but perhaps my boy can mend it. And the knife isn't new—quite old, in fact—and its blade is broken at the end; still, it's a knife, and Wilhelm thinks he can trade it off for something else. And now for your adventures. What did *your* boy do with his sweetmeat, Little Blues? Did he eat it, or trade it?"

"It is eaten," replied the Blue Stockings cautiously.

"Eaten! Then of course he ate it. Why don't you speak out? If he ate it, say so. If he didn't, who did?"

"Well, nobody ate the whole of it, and my boy didn't eat any. It was divided between two persons—or rather, between one person and—and—a thing that is not a person."

"Bless me! What are you talking about? I never heard anything so absurd in my life. Persons, [175] and things that are not persons," said the White Pair; "what do you mean?"

"Yes; what *do* you mean? What is the use of beating about the bush in this way?" remonstrated the Big Gray Pair. "Who did eat the sweetmeat? Say plainly."

"Half of it was eaten by a policeman, and the other half by a rook," replied the Little Blues, in a meek voice.

"Ho, ho!" roared the Gray Stockings, while the White Pair joined in with a shrill giggle. "That beats all! Half by a policeman, and half by a rook! A fine way to dispose of a Christmas sweetmeat! Your boy must be a fool, Little Blues."

"Not a fool at all," said the Blue Pair indignantly. "Now just listen to me. Your girl ate hers up at once, and forgot it. Your boy traded his away; and what has he got? A broken knife, and a harmonica that can't play music. I don't call those worth having. My boy enjoyed his sweetmeat

all day. He had more pleasure in giving it away than if he had eaten it ten times over! Besides, he got half a crown for it. An old gentleman slipped it into his pocket because he was pleased with his kind heart. I saw him do it." [176]

"Half a crown!" ejaculated the White Pair, with amazement.

"That *is* something like," admitted the Big Gray Stockings. "Your boy did the best of the three, I admit."

The Little Blues said no more.

Presently the others fell asleep, but she lay and watched Jan as he rested peacefully beside his brother, with his wonderful treasure—the silver coin—clasped tight in his hand. He smiled in his sleep as though his dreams were pleasant.

"Even if he had no half-crown, still he would have done the best," she whispered to herself at last.

Then the clock struck twelve, and the day after Christmas was begun.

ETELKA'S CHOICE. [177]

ETELKA lived on the very borders of the Fairy Country.

It may be that some of you do not believe that there are any such beings as fairies. In fact, it is not easy to hold to one's faith in them when one lives in such a country as this of ours. Fairies are the shyest of creatures; shyer than the wood-dove, shyer than the glancing dragon-fly. They love silence, seclusion, places where they can sport unseen with no intruding voice or step to startle them: when man comes they go. And I put it to you whether it is likely that they can enjoy themselves in the United States, where every forest with any trees in it worth cutting down is liable at any moment to be attacked by an army of wood-choppers; where streams are looked upon as "water power," lakes as "water supply," and ponds as suitable places for the breeding of fish; where distance is brought near by railroads, and [178] solitudes only mean a chance for a settler; where people are always poking about the hills and mountains in search of coal mines or silver mines, and prodding the valleys in hopes of oil wells, and where silence generally means an invitation to a steam-whistle of one kind or another?

But where Etelka lived no one doubted the reality of fairies any more than they did that of human beings. Her home was in Bohemia, in the outskirts of the *Boehmer-wald*, a vast, unpeopled tract of mountainous country thickly wooded, full of game, and seldom visited except by hunting-parties in pursuit of stags or wild boars. Etelka's people were of mixed Sclavonic and gypsy origin. They cultivated a patch of land under the stewardship of a lord who never came near his estate, but this was only their ostensible occupation; for poaching or smuggling goods across the frontier brought in a great deal more money to them than did farming. There were three sons, Marc, Jocko, and Hanserl; Etelka was the only girl. They were lithe, sinewy young fellows, with the swarthy skins and glittering black eyes which belonged to their gypsy blood, and [179] something furtive and threatening in their looks, but she was different. Her hair and eyes were of a warm brown, her features were delicate, and their expression was wistful and sweet. All summer long she ran about with her slender feet and ankles bare. A thin little cotton gown and a bead necklace composed her wardrobe for the warmer months. In winter she wore woollen stockings and wooden shoes, a stuff petticoat and a little shawl. She was always shabby, often ragged, and on cold days scarcely ever warm enough to be comfortable; but she somehow looked pretty in her poor garments, for beauty is the gift of Heaven, and quite as often sent to huts as to palaces. No one had ever told Etelka that she was pretty, except indeed young Sepperl of the Mill, whom she had seen now and again on her semi-annual visits to the neighboring village to dispose of her yarn, and he had said more with his eyes than with his tongue!

To her family it made no difference whatever whether she was pretty or not. They preferred to have her useful, and they took care that she should be so. She spun and sewed, she cleaned the pots and pans, cooked the rye porridge and the cabbage soup, and rarely got a word of thanks for [180] her pains. Her brothers flung her their jackets to mend or their game to dress, without a word of ceremony; if she had refused or delayed to attend to their wants she would have got a rough word, a curse, or perhaps a blow. But Etelka never refused; she was a willing little creature, kindly and cheerful, and had no lazy blood in her veins. So early and late she worked for them all, and her chief, almost her only pleasure was when, her tasks despatched, she could escape from the hut with its atmosphere of smoke and toil, and get away into the forest by herself.

When once the green and fragrant hush of the high-arched thickets closed her in, she would give a sigh of relief, and a sense of being at home took possession of her. She did not feel it in the hut, though she called that home, and it was the only one she had ever known.

Did Etelka believe in fairies? Indeed she did! She had a whole volume of stories about them at

her tongue's end. Her great-grandmother had seen them often; so had her great-aunt. The mother of Dame Gretel, the wise woman of the village, who herself passed for a witch, had been on intimate terms for a long time with a hoary little kobold who had taught her all manner of [181] marvellous things. The same fortunate woman had once seen Rubesal, the mountain demon, and had left an account of him and his looks, which were exactly those of a charcoal-burner. Etelka knew the very hollow where Dame Gretel's mother used to sit and listen to the teachings of the kobold, and could point out the ring where a number of the "good people" had once been seen moving a mystic dance, their wings glancing in the darkness like fire-flies. She, herself, had never seen a fairy or a kobold, it is true; everybody was not thus fortunate, but she might some day, who knew? And meantime she had often heard them whispering and sighing in their odd little voices close beside her. You may be sure that Etelka believed in fairies. It was one reason why she liked so well to go to the great forest, which was their well-known abiding-place.

One day the desire to escape from home was unusually strong upon her. Her mother was out of sorts for some reason and had been particularly harsh. Her father, who sometimes stood her friend, had gone to the village with a bundle of hare-skins which he hoped to trade for oil and [182] brandy. Her brothers, who had some private expedition on foot, had kept her running since early morning. She had grown tired and a little cross at their many exactions, and when, finally, all was made ready, and they set out with their guns and snares and a knapsack full of food, and her mother, sitting with her pipe beside the fire, had fallen into a doze, Etelka gladly closed the door behind her and stole away. The soup was simmering in its pot, the bowls were ready set on the table. She would not be missed. For an hour or two she might feel that she belonged to herself.

The forest felt deliciously cool and still as she walked fast up the little glade which led to the Fairy Spring. This was a small pool of clear water, bubbling strongly up from a sandy bottom, and curiously walled round with smooth stones, which seemed fitted and joined by the labor of man, though in reality they were a freak of nature.

Etelka sat herself down on this stony rim, dipped her hands in the water and sprinkled a little on her hot forehead. A tall spear of feathery grass grew just by. Presently it began to bend and sway as if wind-blown, and dance lightly up and down before her face. She took no notice at first; [183] then it occurred to her, as no wind was blowing anywhere else, it was odd that this particular grass-blade should be in such active motion.

"How queer," she said, looking hard at the grass-blade; "it seems to be alive!"

A shrill, small laugh echoed her words, and suddenly, as if her eyes had been magically opened to see, she became aware that a tiny shape in green, with a pointed cap on its head, was sitting upon the blade of grass and moving it to and fro with hand and foot. The little countenance under the cap was full of mischief and malice, and the bright eyes regarded her with a strange glee. Etelka knew instantly that her wish had come true, and that at last she was face to face with a veritable fairy.

"Oh!" was all she could say in her amazement.

"Well, stupid, do you know who I am?" asked the creature in a voice as shrill as its laugh.

"Yes, mein Herr," faltered Etelka.

"Here you have gone about all your days wishing you could see a fairy," continued the small creature, "and there we were close by all the time, and you never opened your eyes to look. How [184] do you like me now you do see me?"

"Very much, Herr Fairy," replied Etelka, gaining courage. "I think you are beautiful."

The fairy seemed pleased at this compliment, which was evidently sincere.

"Thou art a good maiden enough, as maidens go," he said, accosting her more familiarly. "I have long had my eye on thee, Etelklein. I have sat up in the roof-thatch and heard Jocko and Hanserl scold and hector, and the mother order thee about, and I have noted that thou wast almost always kind and humble, and seldom answered them back again. Thou art neat-handed, too, and that we fairies think much of. Many a drink of good new milk have I had, which I should have missed hadst thou forgotten to scour the pail. So now in return I will do something for thee. Listen.

"Thou must know that each fairy of the *Boehmer-wald* has the privilege once every hundred years of granting one wish to a mortal. All do not exercise it. Some crabbed ones do not like the human folk enough to be willing to do them a good turn, others again are too lazy or too pleasure-loving to go out of their way for the purpose. I am neither of these. Now, hearken. I will [185] give thee the power that every time thou dancest a piece of gold shall lie under thy foot—or, instead of the gold, a flower shall spring up out of the ground; which wilt thou have?"

"Yes; which wilt thou have?" cried another sharp voice, and a second fairy appeared, out of the air as it were, and seated himself on the very tip of the grass-blade. "Don't be in a hurry. Think a bit before you choose, Etelka. Why, child, what are you looking so scared about?"

For Etelka had grown pale, and had not been able to repress a little scream at this sudden apparition. She rallied her courage and tried to look brave, but her heart misgave her. Was the wood full of these unseen creatures?

"It is only my gossip," explained fairy number one. "Thimblerig is his name. Mine is Pertzal. He usually comes after me wherever I go. You needn't be afraid of *him*. Now, gold-piece or flower—decide."

Etelka was in a whirl of confusion. It was dreadful to have to make up her mind all in a moment about such an important thing. Her thoughts flew to Sepperl of the Mill. He was fond of flowers, she knew; the mill garden was always full of blue flax, poppies, and lavender, and Sepperl spent all his spare hours in working over it. Suppose—suppose—the thing over which she had sometimes shyly glowed and blushed were to happen, how pleasant it would be to dance flowers all day long for Sepperl! [186]

Then her mind reverted to the hut, to her mother and the boys, who were always craving after the luxuries of life which they could not have, and fiercely envying those who were better off than themselves. Would they not be happier and better and kinder for the gold which she had it in her power to give them? They would not forgive her if she lost such a chance, that she knew. And even so far as Sepperl went, gold never came amiss to a poor man's door. So many things could be bought with it.

"One cannot eat flowers," said Etelka to herself with a sigh; yet still she hesitated, and her heart felt heavy within her.

"Choose," repeated the two fairies, each echoing the other.

"I choose the gold-piece," said Etelka. The fairy faces clouded over as she spoke, and she knew she had chosen wrong. [187]

"Very well," said Pertzal, "have thy wish." He vanished as he spoke. Etelka sat alone by the bubbling spring, and she rubbed her eyes and asked herself if it were not all a dream.

"I will put it to the test," she thought; and jumping up she began to dance beneath the trees, slowly and doubtfully at first, and then with swift and joyful bounds and steps, for as she danced, ever and anon upon the ground beneath her feet appeared a glittering coin. She danced so long that when at last she ceased she sank down exhausted. The beautiful yellow pieces lay thickly around her, some larger, some smaller, as if their size depended upon the vigor of her movements. She had never dreamed of such wealth before, and she gathered them up and tied them in the corner of her shawl, half-fearing they might turn to brass or pebbles; but when she neared home and looked at them again they were still gold.

Her mother was standing at the door with a black look on her face.

"Where hast thou been, thou idle baggage?" she demanded. "I drop asleep for one moment, and when I wake the fire is well-nigh out." [188]

Etelka glanced at the setting sun. In her excitement she had not marked the flight of time. It was much later than she had supposed.

"I am sorry," she faltered. Then, to appease her mother's anger, she untied the corner of her shawl and showed the fairy money.

"See what I have brought," she said; "they are all for thee."

The old woman fairly gasped in her surprise.

"Gold!" she cried, clutching the coins which Etelka held out. "Real gold! More than I ever saw before. Where didst get it, girl? Who gave it thee?"

"The fairies!" exclaimed Etelka joyfully. "And they taught me how to get more when we are again in need."

"Do you dare to make a mock of me?" screamed her mother, aiming a blow at her with the staff which she held in her hand. "Fairies indeed! A fine story! Tell the truth, hussy. Didst thou meet some count in the forest—or the landgrave himself?"

"I met nobody," persisted Etelka, "no one at all except the fairy and the other fairy, and it was they who gave me the gift." [189]

Her mother's staff descended with a whack on her shoulder.

"Get thee in," she said harshly. "Thou are lying." But she held fast to the gold all the same, and when Etelka's back was turned she hid it secretly away.

So the first fruit of the fairy gift was a blow!

Later, when the father came back from the village, there was another scene of severity and suspicion. Neither of Etelka's parents believed her story. They treated her like a culprit who will not confess his guilt. It was worse yet when her brothers returned the following day. In vain she wept and protested, in vain she implored them to believe her.

"It's easy enough to talk," Jocko declared at last, "but to prove thy words is not so easy. If thou hast the power to dance gold-pieces into existence, why, face to work and dance! Then we shall know whether or not to believe thee."

Strange to say, this method of proving her veracity had not occurred to Etelka's mind. After her [190]

troubled sleep and unhappy day she had begun to feel that the interview with the fairies was no more than a dream, and she scarcely ventured on the test, dreading that the strange gift bestowed upon her might have been withdrawn.

Slowly and fearfully she began to dance, while her family watched every movement with eyes of scornful incredulity. Suddenly Marc, uttering a great oath, stooped and picked up something from the hard-trodden earthen floor. It was a gold-piece!

"By Heavens!" he exclaimed, "the girl spoke true! or"—with a return of suspicion—"is it one of those she gave thee which thou hast dropped?" turning to his mother.

But as Etelka, with heart suddenly grown lighter, went on bounding and twirling, one shining coin after another shone out on the floor beneath her feet, and with howls and screams of joy her relatives precipitated themselves upon them. It seemed as if they could never have enough. If Etelka paused to rest they urged her on.

"Dance thou!" they cried. "Dance, Etelklein, liebchen, susschen, darling of our hearts, do not stop! Keep on till we are all rich."

One hour, two, passed, and still Etelka obeyed their eager behest and danced on. The boys' [191] pockets, her father's pouch, her mother's lap were full, and yet they demanded more.

At last, quite worn out, she sank in a heap on the ground.

"I cannot take another step," she sighed.

"Oh, well," Jocko reluctantly admitted, "that may do for to-night. To-morrrow we will have some more of it."

From that day all was changed for the family in the forest hut. Every one, except Etelka, fell to work straightway to squander the fairy gold. The sons made expeditions to the distant town, and came back laden with goods of the most incongruous kinds,—silks, velvets, tobacco, gold-embroidered caps, bonbons, carved pipes, gayly painted china, gilt clocks, toys of all descriptions; anything and everything which had pleased their untutored fancy. The father and mother smoked all day long, till the air of the hut was dense and stifling. Brandy and *kirsch-wasser* flowed in streams. Etelka alone profited nothing from the fairy gift. To be sure she had her share of the dainties which the others devoured, and her brothers now and then tossed her a [192] ribbon or a brightly colored handkerchief; but for these she did not much care, and her liberty, for which she did care, was greatly abridged. No longer was she suffered to wander at will in the forest. She had become too precious for that. Something might happen to her, they all declared, a bear or a wolf might come along and attack her, or she might slip and sprain her ankle, which, so far as they were concerned, would be just as bad! No, Etelka must run no risks; she must stay at home, and be ready to dance for them whenever they needed her.

The slender limbs grew very weary, and the heart which gave them life was often heavy, as time went on, and more and more gold was needed to satisfy the exactions of her family. Money easily won is still more easily spent. The fairy gold melted fast in the rapacious fingers which clutched it. Soon—for appetite grows by what it feeds upon—the little hut no longer sufficed the growing ambition of Etelka's brothers. It was too poor, too lonely, too everything, they declared; they must all remove to Budweis or Linz; the city was the only fit place for people to live in who had money to spend.

Etelka was not consulted. She was ordered to pack this and that, and to leave the other behind, [193] that was all, and was made to dance a few extra hours to pay the travelling expenses. All the homely old furniture was left in the hut, as not smart enough for the grand city home they were going to. They took only the things they had bought since their good luck began; but these filled a great cart, on the top of which Etelka and her mother were perched. She cast one last look toward her beloved forest, to which she had not been allowed a farewell visit. Jocko cracked his long whip, the oxen slowly moved forward. "Good-by to everything," said Etelka in her heart, but she dared not say it aloud.

A quick pang shot through her as they passed the mill garden, gay with flowers, where Sepperl, hoe in hand, was standing. His eyes met hers with deep and silent reproach, then were averted. She did not understand, but it made her very sad. No one had told her that a few weeks before, Sepperl had asked her in marriage of her father, and had been roughly refused. Such an offer would have been looked upon as unheard-of good fortune six months previously; now it was [194] regarded almost as an insult! Marry Etelka! Take their gold-earner away from them! It was out of the question. What was the fool thinking of? But Etelka heard nothing of all this.

Haunted by the recollection of Sepperl's wistful glance, she went her way with the others. Little heart had she for the new home which seemed to them so fine. It was high up in an old building, overlooking a crowded street. The rooms seemed very large and empty after the forest hut, and the first care of the family was to furnish them. With reckless disregard of good taste as well as of expense, Marc and Jocko and Hanserl rushed away to the market and the shops, and presently the stairs began to fill with porters bringing up all manner of things,—beds and chairs and tables, gaudy carpets for the floors, ill-painted pictures in showy frames for the walls, a piano on which none of them knew how to play, a music-box of extraordinary size which could play without assistance, looking-glasses, lamps, wonderful china figures, a parrot in a gilded cage, with a dreadful command of profane language. The rooms were filled and more than filled in no time, [195]

and for the payment of all these things Etelka must dance!

And dance she did, but with a heavy heart and no spring in her feet. Accustomed to the quiet of the forest neighborhood, the sounds and smells of the city oppressed her greatly. The crowd and bustle frightened her, the roar of noise kept her awake at night, she felt as if she could not breathe. Things grew worse rather than better. Their extravagance provoked notice, and the fame of their riches and their ignorance soon brought about them a crew of tempters and needy adventurers. Men with evil eyes and sly greedy faces began to appear at all hours, to smoke and drink with Marc and Jocko, to gamble with them and win their money. Much money did they win, and all that was lost Etelka must make good. With her will or without it, she must dance,—dance always to content her rapacious kindred. They could hardly endure to spare her for the most needful rest. Time and again when she had sunk exhausted on her bed to sleep, while dice rattled and glasses clinked in the next room, Hanserl or Jocko had rushed in to awaken her roughly and demand that she should get up at once and dance. Stumbling and half blind with drowsiness the [196] poor girl would do her best, but her movements being less brisk and buoyant, the coins would be of smaller value, and she would be sworn at for her pains, and threatened with dire penalties if she did not do better next time.

No wonder that under this treatment she grew pale and thin. The pretty cheeks lost their roundness, the pink faded from them, her eyes were dull and lustreless. A great homesickness took possession of her. Night and day she pined for the forest hut. So wan and unhappy was she, that even the hard hearts of those who profited by her should have been touched by it; but no one noticed her looks or cared that she was unhappy, so long as she would keep on dancing and coin gold for them.

At last came a day when she could not rise from her bed. Marc came and threatened her, he even pulled her on to her feet, but it was in vain; she fell down with weakness and could not stand. Alarmed at last, Jocko hastened after a doctor. He came, felt Etelka's pulse, shook his head.

"What has she been doing?" he asked.

Nothing, they told him, nothing at all! Then he shook his head still more portentously. [197]

"Ah, well, in that case it is all of no use," he said. "She is all given out. She must die."

And now indeed those who had let Etelka tire herself to death for them were thoroughly frightened. With her would perish all their hopes, for the gold she had earned for them had been spent as fast as made; nothing had been laid up. They took wonderfully good care of her now. There was nothing she fancied that they would not willingly have brought her; but all the poor child asked for was to be left alone and suffered to lie still, not to be forced to keep on with that weary dancing!

Gradually the spent flame of life flickered feebly upward within her, and as she gained a little in strength, a longing after the forest took possession of her. The wish seemed utterly foolish to her family, but they would not refuse it, for their one desire was to have her get well and able to earn gold for them again. So the big wagon and the oxen were hired, Etelka on her bed was laid carefully in it, Marc took the goad, and slowly, slowly, the sick girl was carried back to her old home.

All was unchanged there. Dust lay thickly on the rude furniture which had been left behind, on [198] the pots and pans which hung upon the wall, but no one had meddled with them or lifted the latch of the door since the family went away. The cool hush and stillness of the place was like a balm to Etelka's overstrained nerves. She slept that night as she had not slept for weeks, and on the morrow was visibly stronger. Marc did not stay with her long. The quiet of the hut disgusted him, and after enduring it for a day or two he went back to the others in the city, leaving Etelka alone with her father and mother. He gave strict orders that he was to be sent for the moment that Etelka was able to use her feet again. Then, indeed, she must fall to work and dance to make up for all this wasted time.

Poor Etelka rejoiced to see him go. She had learned to fear her brothers and almost to dislike them.

The day after he went, she begged her father to carry her in his arms to the edge of the forest and lay her under a tree. She wanted to feel the wind in her face again, she said. He consented at last, though grumbling a little at the trouble. Etelka was comfortably placed on a bear-skin under [199] the shade of a spreading fir, and after a while, as her eyes were closed and she seemed to be asleep, her father stole away and left her. She was in full sight of the hut, so there seemed no danger in leaving her alone.

But Etelka was not asleep. She was thinking with all her might, thinking of the fairy, wishing she could see him again and ask him to undo the fatal gift which had brought such misery into her life.

Suddenly, as she lay thinking these thoughts, her cheek was tickled sharply. She opened her eyes. There stood the same odd little figure in green which she had seen before; as then a grass-blade was in his hand, and leaning over his shoulder was his gossip Thimblerig. Etelka almost screamed in her joy.

"Thou seemest pleased to see us," remarked Pertzal with a mocking smile.

"Oh, I am glad, indeed I am," cried poor Etelka. "Dear kind Herr Fairy, have pity! Don't let me dance gold any more!"

"What! Tired already? What queer creatures mortals be!" began Pertzal teasingly; but the kinder Thimblerig interposed.

"Tired of her gift, of course she is! You knew she would be when you gave it, Gossip! Don't [200] plague the poor child. Look how thin she has grown. But, Etelka, I must tell thee that when once a fairy has granted to a mortal his wish, he has no power to take it back again."

"What!" cried Etelka in despair, "must I then go on dancing forever till I die?"

"He cannot take it back," repeated Thimblerig. "But do not cry so; there is another way. A second fairy can grant a wish which will contradict the first, and so all may be made right. Now, Etelka, I have a kindness for thee as well as Pertzal here, and like him I have the right to grant a favor to a mortal. Now, listen. Dance thee never so well or dance thee never so long, from henceforward shall never gold-piece lie under foot of thine for all thy dancing! And, furthermore, if ever thou art married to a man whom thou lovest, I endow thee with this gift, that when thou dancest with will and because thy heart is light, violets and daisies and all sweet blossoms shall spring at thy tread, till all about thee is as a garden."

"Now I will add this piece of advice," said Pertzal, grinning maliciously. "If ever this does happen, hold thy tongue about thy gift to thy husband. The best of men can hardly resist the [201] temptation of making money out of their womenkind,—safety lies in silence."

"Oh, how can I thank you?" sighed Etelka.

"Thank us by being happy," said Thimblerig. Then the fairies faded from sight, and Etelka was alone.

I have not time to tell of the wrath of Etelka's father and mother and brothers, when, as she grew strong enough to dance again for their bidding, it was found that no gold-pieces followed her light steps, and that the fairy gift had been withdrawn. Their ill-humor and discontent made the life of the hut worse than ever it had been before. Etelka sank into her former insignificance. Very willingly and faithfully she worked for them all, but she could not win them to content. One after another the boys departed from home. Marc enlisted as a soldier, Jocko joined a party of smugglers and disappeared over the Italian frontier, Hanserl took service with the charcoal-burners high up on the mountains. When Sepperl of the Mill asked again for Etelka's hand in marriage the following year, there was no question as to what answer should be given him. Her [202] father was only too glad to say yes. Etelka was made happy at last.

She had been a wife several months before she made trial of her second fairy gift. It was one evening when she and Sepperl were in their garden, and he was telling her his plans with regard to a bit of waste land which he had lately fenced in.

"It will take many roots and seeds to make it like the rest," he remarked, "but little by little we can do it without feeling the cost, and in the end it will be the best of all."

Then, with a sudden flash in her eyes, Etelka left her husband and began to dance. To and fro over the bare earth she sped with quick graceful steps, now advancing, now retreating, now describing circles, with her arm poised above her head like wings and her laughing eyes fixed on Sepperl. He was puzzled by this freak on the part of his pretty wife, but stood watching her with great admiration, her cheeks were so flushed, and her movements so light and dainty.

She stopped at last, came to him, and laid her hand on his arm.

Then with a sudden flash in her eyes, Etelka left her husband and began to dance.—*Page 202*.

"Now look," she said. [203]

And lo! where had been bare, brown earth a half-hour before, was now a green sward enamelled all over with buttercups, violets, pink-and-white Michaelmas daisies, and pansies of every shade of gold and purple.

Sepperl stood transfixed. "Hast thou commerce with the elves?" he asked.

But Etelka did not reply. The words of Pertzal recurred to her memory, "Silence is safety," and they were like a wise hand laid on her lips. She only laughed like a silver bell, shook her head, and left on Sepperl's cheek a happy kiss!

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[204]

THE FIR CONES.

AN IDYL OF CHRISTMAS EVE.

"WELL, the old tree has gone at last," said the farmer, as he latched the heavy door and began to stamp the snow from his boots.

"What tree?" cried a girl's voice, as the whir of the busy wheel suddenly slackened. "Oh, father, not the Lovers' Tree,—the old fir? Surely thou canst not mean *that*?"

"No other, Hilda; the Lovers' Tree, under which thy mother and I exchanged our troth-plight more than twenty years back. Hey, dame?" And he turned with a smile to where his wife sat in the sunset light, humming a low tune to the accompaniment of her clicking needles. She smiled back in answer.

"Yes, Paul, and my mother as well; and thine too, I'll be bound, for she also was a Brelau girl. All Brelau knows the fir,—a hundred years old it was, they say." [205]

"More than that," said the farmer. "My grandfather courted his lass under its shade, and his father did the same. Add a hundred and fifty to your hundred, and it won't be so far amiss, wife. But it has fallen at last. There'll be no more maidens wooed and won under the Lovers' Tree. Thou hast lost thy chance, Hilda." And he turned fondly to his girl.

"That was indeed a terrible wind last night," went on the dame. "It rocked the bed till it waked me from my sleep. Did it rouse thee also, Liebchen?"

But Hilda responded neither to word nor look. She had left her wheel, had crossed the room, and now stood gazing from the window to where across the valley the green obelisk of the old fir had risen. Men were moving about the spot where once it stood, and the ring of axes on the frosty air told that already the frugal peasantry were at work; and the pride of the village, confidant of many secrets, was in process of reduction to the level of vulgar fire-wood.

In rushed two children. "Hast thou heard the news?" they cried. "The Lovers' Tree is blown down! All the people are up there chopping. May we go too, and see them chop? We will bring home all the cones to build the Christmas fire. Ah, do let us go, mother; fir cones blaze so magnificently." [206]

"You are such little ones, you will get in the way of the axes and be hurt," replied their mother, fondling them.

But the farmer said,—

"Yes, let them go; we will all go. Get thy cloak, Ursula, and thy woollen hood. We will see the old tree once more before it is carried away. Wilt thou come too, Hilda?"

But Hilda shook her head, and did not turn or answer. The children rioted about, searching for baskets and fagot strings; but she neither moved nor spoke. Then the door closed, and all was quiet in the cottage. But still Hilda stood in the window, looking with dreamy, unseeing eyes across the valley to the opposite hillside.

She was looking upon a picture,—a picture which nobody would ever see again; upon the venerable tree, beloved of all Brelau, which for more years than men could count, had stood there watching the tide of human life ebb and flow, as some majestic old man might stand with children playing about his kindly knees. Whole generations of lovers had held tryst under its shade. Kisses had been interchanged, vows murmured,—the old, old story of human love, of human joy, of hope, of longing, of trust, had been repeated and repeated there, age after age, and still the old tree guarded its secrets well, as in days of greenest youth, and still bent to listen like a half-human friend. White arms clasped its trunk, soft cheeks were laid there, as if the rough bark could feel responsive thrill. Two centuries of loving and listening had mellowed its heart. The boughs seemed to whisper meanings to those who sought their shade,—gay songs to the young, counsels to the burdened, benedictions to those who, bowed down with trouble, came, black-clad and sorrowful, to look across the valley where once the purple lights of hope had met their eyes. "Wait," the rustling murmur seemed to say to such; "only wait—wait, as I have waited, and you shall be made exceedingly glad. Behold, the day dawns and the shadows fly away!" And though the heavy heart might not comprehend the whispered words, something seemed lifted from the weight of sadness, and the mourners departed comforted, knowing not why. [207] [208]

But not upon a vague picture only did Hilda look. German girls can keep their own counsel as well as girls of other nations, and for all her father's joking she had not "lost her chance" under the Lovers' Tree. Often had she sat there—sat there not alone—and now in thought she was there again. She heard a voice—she leaned to meet a kiss. "Wilhelm," she faltered, and then the vision dissolved in a mist of hot and rushing tears. In the old fir she seemed to lose a friend, an intercessor. Oh, why had this unhappy quarrel arisen? Why had she and Wilhelm loved at all, if only to be so unhappy in the end?

But, in truth, it is very easy for lovers to quarrel. Like particles of electric matter, the two natures near, attract, repel. The fire that leaps from either soul, responsive to kindred fire, fuses or destroys. A hint, a suspicion, jealousy, mistrust, the thousand and one small chances of life, come between, and all is over. Only—

"The little pitted speck in garnered fruit"

is needful. A trifle, or what seemed a trifle, had been the beginning of mischief between Hilda and Wilhelm, but the breach had slowly widened till now; when for weeks they had neither met nor spoken, and the idyl begun under summer boughs was withering in time of frost like summer flowers. [209]

To the old tree, and to him alone, did the girl confide her wretchedness. In his dumb ear she owned herself in the wrong. "Why do you not say so?" the responsive murmur seemed to breathe. "Wilhelm is true! Wilhelm is kind! only a word, and all will be well." But pride laid his finger on her lips. She neglected the kindly monitor, the word came not, and now the dear old fir was gone; and thinking of all these things, Hilda's heart was very sad.

Meantime upon the hillside a great crowd of people were assembled about the fallen trunk. Old men and women, with wistful eyes, stood there; comely middle-aged pairs, surrounded by children; young girls and their bachelors; boys with fresh rosy faces and wondering eyes,—all alike had come to see once more the face of the village friend. Merrily rang the axes upon the wood. Some looked sad, some merry, as the work went on. There was much interchange of "Do you remembers," much laughing and joking, a few tears. The children with their baskets ran about picking up the bright cones which once hung like a coronet upon the forehead of the fir. Here and there a woman stooped for a chip or a small twig to carry away as relic. And then it began to grow dark. The people recollected themselves, as people will after doing a sentimental thing, and saw that it was time to go home. So in contented crowds they descended the hill to their suppers, and threw billets of the old fir on the fire, and beside the blaze partook of sausage and cheese, and laughed and gossiped no less merrily than usual, and the funeral of the old tree was over. [210]

"We will keep all our cones, and the big fagot which Fritz tied up, until day after to-morrow," said little Gretchen; "because, you know, day after to-morrow comes Christmas eve, and the Christ-child must be sure to find a good fire."

No one gainsaid this, so the fagot was laid aside.

All next day, and the next, did Hilda labor busily, throwing herself with feverish energy into the Christmas preparations. There was a plenty to do. The furniture must shine its brightest, veal and puddings must be made ready for spit and oven, green boughs be hung everywhere, and, above [211] all, the tree must be prepared. Hard and continually she worked, and as the sun set on the blessed eve all was in order. A vast fire crackled on the hearth of the "big room," thrown open in honor of the festival. Its bright blaze was reflected back from the polished panels of the tall corner clock, and danced on the rosy apples and glossy filberts of the still unlighted tree, which stood, green and magnificent, beyond. Little fruit of value did this wonderful tree bear. Jackets, stockings, leather shoes, loaded the lower boughs; above was a flowering of warm hoods and gay neck-cloths, there was a wooden cow for Gretchen, a trumpet of red tin for little Paul; but the useful and the necessary predominated. Tender hands had arranged all, had hung the many-colored tapers, crowned the whole with bright-berried stems, and, in the moss at the foot, laid reverently a tiny straw cradle, with waxen occupant, in memory of that resting-place in the Bethlehem manger where once a "young child lay." And now, pale and tired, Hilda stood gazing upon her finished work.

"Sister, sister!" clamored eager voices through the closed door, "hasn't the Christ-child come yet?"

"No, dears, not yet. Go away and play quietly in the kitchen. I'll call you when he comes." [212]

The little footsteps retreated, and Hilda seated herself before the fire with a weary sigh. It would be an hour or more before her father would return, and the lighting of the tree begin; so, leaning back in the high carved chair, she gave herself up to rest of body, leaving her mind to rove listlessly as it would.

The basket of cones stood beside the hearth. Half mechanically she stooped for a handful, and threw them on the blaze. Then a certain drowsy peace came over her, broken only by the flickering noise of the burning cones. They did not burn like other cones, she thought, and even as the idea floated through her brain, a strange, phantasmal change passed over them. Moving and blending, they began to build a picture in the heart of the fire,—the picture of a tree, drawn in flaming lines. Hilda knew the tree. It was the old fir of Brelau, complete in limb and trunk. And, as she gazed, figures formed themselves beneath the boughs,—figures as of people sitting there, which moved and scintillated, and, swaying toward each other, seemed to clasp and kiss. [213] She uttered a low cry of pain. At the sound the scene shifted, the tree dissolved as in fiery rain, and the cones, raising themselves and climbing upward, stood ranged in a group on the topmost log, like a choir of musicians about to play. Strange notes seemed to come from the blaze, low and humming, like a whispered prelude, then voices began to speak, or to sing—which was it?—in tones which sounded oddly near, and yet infinitely far away. It was like a chorus of elves sung to the accompaniment of rustling leaves. And all the time it went on, certain brightly flaming cones, which took precedence, emphasized the music with a succession of quick, glancing sparks, darting out like tiny finger-points, as if to attract attention.

"Look at us! look at us!" were the words of the strange *staccato* chant which sounded from the fire. "We are all light and glorious as your love used to be,—used to be. It isn't so any longer." Then other cones, half burned and crusted over with white ashes, pushed forward and took up the strain in sad recitative: "Look at us! look at us, Hilda! We are as your love is now,—is now. Ah, there will be worse to come ere long!" And all the time they sang, glowing strongly from [214] within, they fixed what seemed eyes, red and winking, on Hilda's face. Then the ashes from below, drifting upward in an odd, aimless way, formed themselves into a shadowy shape, and began to sing in low, muffled tones, full of sadness. "We are dead, Hilda," was their song; "all dead! dead as your love will be—will be—before long." And at the close of the strain all the cones closed together, and emitted a sigh so profound and so melancholy that Hilda started from her chair. Tears stood upon her cheeks. She stared at the fire with strange excitement. It was burning quietly now, and without noise. She was certainly awake. Had she been dreaming?

Just at that moment the latch of the door clicked slightly, and somebody entered, slowly, hesitatingly, propelled from behind by a childish figure. "Hilda," said Gretchen's voice, "here's Wilhelm wanting to see the father. I told him to come in, because *perhaps* the father was here, or else the mother." And Gretchen's eyes explored the room in search of the Christ-child, for a glimpse of whom she had resorted to this transparent device. Then, alarmed by Hilda's stony silence, she suddenly hung her head, and, rushing out, clapped the door behind her, and left the [215] two alone.

Hilda gave a gasp of bewilderment. She could not move. Was this part of the vision? Wilhelm stole one furtive glance at her face, then dropped his eyes. For a moment perfect stillness prevailed, then, shifting uneasily from one leg to the other in his embarrassment, the young man muttered something undistinguishable, and turned. His hand was on the door,—a moment more and he would be gone. Hilda started forward.

"Wilhelm!" she exclaimed, with the hoarse utterance of one who seeks to escape from some frightful dream.

Wilhelm turned. He saw the pale, agitated face, the eyes brimmed with tears, the imploring, out-stretched hands. Another second and he held her in his arms. The familiar touch melted the ice of Hilda's heart, her head sank upon his breast, and in a few broken words all was spoken and

explained.

So brief an interval and all life changed! The same intense feeling which drove them asunder drew them as inevitably together now that once the returning tides had chance to flow. Clasped in close embrace, with tears and smiles and loving self-reproachings, they stood before the fire; [216] and as they bent for their first reconciled kiss, the fir cones, flashing once more into life and activity, rose upon the topmost log. Even the burned and blackened ones glowed with fresh fire. Hand in hand, as it were, they climbed into position, and leaped and capered side by side as if merrily dancing, while little jubilant cracks and clicks and sounds, as of small hands clapped for joy, accompanied the movement. Then suddenly the splendor faded, and sinking with one consent into ashes, the cones sifted through the logs and vanished forever, their mission accomplished, their work done.

With eyes of amazement the lovers gazed upon the spectacle to its close. As the last spark faded, Hilda laid her head again on Wilhelm's breast.

"Ah!" she said, tenderly sighing, "the dear old fir! He loved us well, Wilhelm, and that was his 'good-by.'"

Perhaps it was!

A BALSAM PILLOW. [217]

NOW that fir-needles and hemlock-needles have become recognized articles of commerce, and every other shop boasts its row of fragrant cushions, with their inevitable motto, "Give Me of Thy Balm, O Fir-tree," I am reminded of the first pillow of the sort that I ever saw, and of what it meant to the girl who made it. I should like to tell you the little story, simple as it is. It belongs to the time, eight or nine years since, before pine pillows became popular. Perhaps Chateaubriand Dorset may be said, for once in her life, to have set a fashion.

Yes, that was really her name! Her mother met with it in a newspaper, and, without the least idea as to whether it appertained to man or woman, adopted it for her baby. The many syllables fascinated her, I suppose, and there was, besides, that odd joy in a piece of extravagance that costs nothing, which appeals to the thrifty New England nature, and is one of its wholesome [218] outlets and indulgences.

So the Methodist elder baptized the child "Chateaubriand Aramintha," making very queer work of the unfamiliar accents; and then, so far as practical purposes are concerned, the name ceased to be. How can a busy household, with milk to set, and milk to skim, and pans to scald, and butter to make, and pigs to feed, find time for a name like that? "Baby," the little girl was called till she was well settled on her feet and in the use of her little tongue. Then she became "Brie," and Brie Dorset she remained to the end. Few people recollected that she possessed any other name, unless the marriage, birth, and death pages of the family Bible happened to be under discussion.

The Dorsets' was one of those picturesque, lonely, outlying farms, past which people drive in the summer, saying, "How retired! how peaceful!" but past which almost no one drives in the winter. It stood, with its environment of red barns and apple-orchards, at the foot of a low granite cliff whose top was crowned with a fir wood; and two enormous elm-trees met over its roof and made a checker-work of light and shade on its closely blinded front. No sign of life appeared to [219] the city people who drew their horses in to admire the situation, except, perhaps, a hen scratching in the vegetable-beds, or a lazy cat basking on the doorstep; and they would drive on, unconscious that behind the slats of the green blinds above a pair of eyes watched them go, and a hungry young heart contrasted their lot with its own.

Hungry! There never was anything like the starvation which goes on sometimes in those shut-up farmhouses. Boys and girls feel it alike; but the boys are less to be pitied, for they can usually devise means to get away.

How could Brie get away? She was the only child. Her parents had not married young. When she was nineteen, they seemed almost elderly people, so badly does life on a bleak New England farm deal with human beings. Her mother, a frail little woman, grew year by year less fit for hard labor. The farm was not productive. Poverty, pinch, the inevitable recurrence of the same things to be done day after day, month after month, the same needs followed by the same fatigues,—all these Brie had to bear; and all the while the child had that love and longing for the beautiful [220] which is part of the artist's equipment, and the deprivation of which is keen suffering. Sweet sights, sounds, smells,—all these she craved, and could get only in such measure as her daily work enabled her to get them from that world of nature which is the satisfaction of eager hearts to whom all other pleasures are denied.

The fir wood on the upper hill was the temple where she worshipped. There she went with her Bible on Sunday afternoons, with her patching and stocking-mending on other days. There she

dreamed her dreams and prayed her prayers, and while there she was content. But all too soon would come the sound of the horn blown from below, or a call from the house, "Brie, Brie, the men are coming to supper; make haste!" and she would be forced to hurry back to the workaday world.

Harder times followed. When she was just twenty, her father fell from his loaded hay-wagon, and fractured his thigh. There was no cure for the hurt, and after six months of hopeless tendance, he died. Brie and her mother were left together on the lonely farm, with the added burden of a large bill for doctoring and medicines, which pressed like a heavy weight on their [221] honorable hearts.

The hired man, Reuben Hall, was well disposed and honest, but before Mr. Dorset's death he had begun to talk of going to the West, and Brie foreboded that he might not be willing to stay with them. Mrs. Dorset, broken down by nursing and sorrow, had become an invalid, unable to assist save in the lightest ways. The burden was sore for one pair of young shoulders to bear. Brie kept up a brave face by day, but at night, horrors of helplessness and apprehension seized her. The heavens seemed as brass, against which her feeble prayers beat in vain; the future was barred, as it were, with an impassable gate.

What could they do? Sell the farm? That would take time; for no one in particular wanted to buy it. If Reuben would stand by them, they might be able to fight it out for another year, and, what with butter and eggs and the corn-crop, make enough for his wages and a bare living. But would Reuben stay?

Our virtues sometimes treat us as investments do, and return a dividend when we least expect it. It was at this hard crisis that certain good deeds of Brie's in the past stood her friend. She had [222] always been good to Reuben, and her sweet ways and consideration for his comfort had gradually won a passage into his rather stolid affections. Now, seeing the emergency she was in, and the courage with which she met it, he could not quite find the heart to "leave the little gal to make out by herself." Fully purposing to go, he stayed, putting off the idea of departure from month to month; and though, true to his idea of proper caution, he kept his good intentions to himself, so that the relief of having him there was constantly tempered by the dread lest he might go at any time, still it *was* relief.

So April passed, and May and June. The crops were planted, the vegetables in. Brie strained every nerve. She petted her hens, and coaxed every possible egg out of them, she studied the tastes of the two cows, she maintained a brave show of cheer for her ailing mother, but all the time she was sick at heart. Everything seemed closing in. How long could she keep it up?

The balsam firs of the hill grove could have told tales in those days. They were Brie's sole confidants. The consolation they gave, the counsel they communicated, were mute, indeed, but [223] none the less real to the anxious girl who sat beneath them, or laid her cheek on their rough stems. June passed, and with early July came the answer to Brie's many prayers. It came, as answers to prayer often do, in a shape of which she had never dreamed.

Miss Mary Morgan, teacher in grammar school No. 3, Ward Nineteen, of the good city of Boston, came, tired out from her winter's work, to spend a few days with Farmer Allen's wife, her second cousin, stopped one day at the Dorset's door, while driving, to ask for a drink of water, took a fancy to the old house and to Brie, and next day came over to propose herself as a boarder for three months.

"I can only afford to pay seven dollars a week," she said; "but, on the other hand, I will try not to make much trouble, if you will take me."

"Seven dollars a week; only think!" cried Brie, gleefully, to her mother after the bargain was completed, and Miss Morgan gone. "Doesn't it seem like a fortune? It'll pay Reuben's wages, and leave ever so much over! And she doesn't eat much meat, she says, and she likes baked potatoes and cream and sweet baked apples better than anything. And there's the keeping-room chamber [224] all cleaned and ready. Doesn't it seem as if she was sent to us, mother?"

"Your poor father never felt like keepin' boarders," said Mrs. Dorset. "I used to kind of fancy the idea of it, but he wasn't willin'. I thought it would be company to have one in the house, if they was nice folks. It does seem as if this was the Lord's will for us; her coming in so unexpected, and all."

Two days later Miss Morgan, with a hammock and a folding canvas chair and a trunk full of light reading, arrived, and took possession of her new quarters. For the first week or two she did little but rest, sleeping for hours at a time in the hammock swung beneath the shadowing elms. Then, as the color came back to her thin face and the light to her eyes, she began to walk a little, to sit with Brie in the fir grove, or read aloud to her on the doorstep while she mended, shelled peas, or picked over berries; and all life seemed to grow easier and pleasanter for the dwellers in the solitary farmhouse. The guest gave little trouble, she paid her weekly due punctually, and the steady income, small as it was, made all the difference in the world to Brie.

As the summer went by, and she grew at home with her new friend, she found much relief in [225] confiding to her the perplexities of her position.

"I see," Miss Morgan said; "it is the winter that is the puzzle. I will engage to come back next summer as I have this, and that will help along; but the time between now and then is the

difficulty."

"Yes," replied Brie; "the winter is the puzzle, and Reuben's money. We have plenty of potatoes and corn and vegetables to take us through, and there's the pig to kill, and the chickens will lay some; if only there were any way in which I could make enough for Reuben's wages, we could manage."

"I must think it over," said Miss Morgan.

She pulled a long branch of the balsam fir nearer as she spoke, and buried her nose in it. It was the first week of September, and she and Brie were sitting in the hill grove.

"I love this smell so," she said. "It is delicious. It makes me dream."

Brie broke off a bough.

"I shall hang it over your bed," she said, "and you will smell it all night."

So the fir bough hung upon the wall till it gradually yellowed, and the needles began to drop. [226]

"Why, they are as sweet as ever,—sweeter," declared Brie, smelling a handful which she had swept from the floor. Then an idea came into her head.

She gathered a great fagot of the branches, and laid them to dry in the sun on the floor of a little-used piazza. When partly dried, she stripped off the needles, stuffed with them a square cotton bag, and made for that a cover of soft sage-green silk, with an odd shot pattern over it. It was a piece of what had been her great-grandmother's wedding gown.

Voilà! Do you realize the situation, reader? Brie had made the first of all the many balsam pillows. It was meant for a good-by gift to Miss Morgan.

"Your cushion is the joy of my life," wrote that lady to her a month after she went home. "Every one who sees it, falls in love with it. Half a dozen people have asked me how they could get one like it. And, Brie, this has given me an idea. Why should you not make them for sale? I will send you up some pretty silk for the covers, and you might cross-stitch a little motto if you liked. I copy [227] some for you. Two people have given me an order already. They will pay four dollars apiece if you like to try."

This suggestion was the small wedge of the new industry. Brie lost no time in making the two pillows, grandmother's gown fortunately holding out for their covers. Then came some pretty red silk from Miss Morgan, with yellow *filoselle* for the mottoes, and more orders. Brie worked busily that winter, for her balsam pillows had to be made in spare moments when other work permitted. The grove on the hill was her unfailing treasury of supply. The thick-set twigs bent them to her will; the upper branches seemed to her to rustle as with satisfaction at the aid they were giving. In the spring the old trees renewed their foliage with vigorous purpose, as if resolved not to balk her in her purpose.

The fir grove paid Reuben's wages that winter. Miss Morgan came back the following June, and by that time balsam pillows were established as articles of commerce, and Brie had a munificent offer from a recently established Decorative Art Society for a supply of the needles, at three [228] dollars the pound. It was hard, dirty work to prepare such a quantity, but she did not mind that.

As I said, this was some years since. Brie no longer lives in her old home. Her mother died the third year after Miss Morgan came to them, the farm is sold, and Brie married. She lives now on a ranch in Colorado, but she has never forgotten the fir-grove, and the memory of it is a help often in the desponding moments that come at times to all lives.

"I could not be worse off than I was then," she says to herself. "There seemed no help or hope anywhere. I felt as if God didn't care and didn't hear my prayers; and yet, all the time, there was dear Miss Morgan coming to help us, and there were the trees, great beautiful things, nodding their heads, and trying to show me what could be made out of them. No, I never will be faithless again, nor let myself doubt, however dark things may look, but remember my balsam pillows, and trust in God."

COLONEL WHEELER. [229]

COLONEL WHEELER, as any one might see at a glance, had been a gallant officer in his day. It was true that he no longer had anything to do with military movements, but his very face suggested a martial past. So did his figure, which, though thin to an almost incredible degree, was unmistakably that of a military man, and also his dress, for the colonel invariably appeared in full uniform, with a scarlet, gold-laced coat, epaulettes, and a cocked hat and feathers, seldom removed even at meal-times. His moustache waved fiercely half-way across his cheeks, his eyes were piercing, and his eyebrows black and frowning; in short, it would be difficult to imagine a more warlike

appearance than he presented on the most peaceful occasions.

Like all truly brave men, Colonel Wheeler was as gentle as he was valiant, and nothing pleased him better in the piping times of peace than to be detailed on escort duty, and made of use to the [230] ladies of his acquaintance. So it came to pass that again and again he was asked to take charge of large family parties on long journeys. You might see him starting off with a wife or two, half a dozen sisters-in-law, and from eight to fourteen children, all of them belonging to somebody else; not one of them being kith or kin to the gallant colonel. They made really a formidable assemblage when collected, and it took the longest legal envelope which Liz—

There! I have let out the secret. Colonel Wheeler was a paper doll, and these ladies and children who travelled about with him were paper dolls also. They belonged to Lizzie Bruce and her cousin Ernestine, who between them owned several whole families of such. These families were all large. None of the mamma dolls had less than twelve children, and some of them had as many as twenty. Lizzie and Ernestine despised people not made of paper, who had only two or three little boys and girls. In fact, Lizzie was once heard to say of some neighbors with eleven children, "They are the only really satisfactory people I ever knew,—just as good as paper dolls;" [231] and this was meant as the highest possible compliment.

Lizzie lived in Annapolis, Md., and Ernestine in Hingham, Mass., so, as you will see, there was a long distance between their homes. It took a day and a half to make the journey, and the little cousins did not visit each other more than once or twice a year. But the dolls went much oftener. *They* travelled by mail, in one of those long yellow envelopes which lawyers use to put papers in, and Colonel Wheeler always went in the same envelope to take care of them. When they came back from these trips, Lizzie or Ernestine, whichever it chanced to be, would unpack them, and exclaim delightedly, "How well the dear things look! So much better for the change! See, mamma, how round and pink their faces have grown!"

"I wouldn't advise you to depend so much on Colonel Wheeler," Lizzie's mother would sometimes say. "These military men are rather uncertain characters. I wouldn't send off all the dolls at once with him, if I were you. And really, Lizzie, such constant journeys are very expensive. There is never a stamp in my desk when I want one in a hurry."

"But, mamma, the children really *had* to have a change," Lizzie would protest, with tears in her [232] eyes. "And as for the colonel, he is such a good man, truly, mamma! He would never steal anybody else's family! He takes beau-tiful care of the dolls, always."

"Very well, we shall see," answered mamma, with a teazing smile. But she saw that Lizzie was in earnest, so she did not say anything more to trouble her, and the very next day contributed seven postage-stamps to pay for the transportation of a large party which Lizzie wanted to send on to Hingham for a Christmas visit.

This party included, besides Colonel Wheeler, who as usual acted as escort, Mrs. Allen, the wife of Captain Allen, her fourteen children, her sister-in-law Miss Allen, her own sister Pauline Gray, —so called because her only dress happened to be made of gray and blue tissue-paper,—and Mrs. Adipose and her little girl. Mrs. Adipose, whose name had been suggested by papa, was the fattest of all the dolls. Her daughter was fat, too, and Ernestine had increased this effect by making her a jacket so much too large for her that it could only be kept on with a dab of glue. [233] Captain Allen was a creature who had no real existence. Lizzie meant to make a doll to represent him some day. Meanwhile, he was kept persistently "at the front," wherever that might be, and Mrs. Allen travelled about as freely as if she had no husband at all. This Lizzie and Ernestine considered an admirable arrangement; for, as Captain Allen never came home and never wrote, he was as little of an inconvenience to his family as any gentleman can ever hope to be.

Well, this large and mixed company started off gayly in the mail-bag, and in due time Lizzie heard of their safe arrival, that they were all well, and that the baby "already looked better for the change." About three weeks later another letter came, and she opened it without the least qualm of anxiety, or any suspicion of the dreadful news it was to bring. It ran thus:—

> Dear Liz,—Mrs. Adipose grew a little home-sick. She began to worry about Mr. Adipose. She was afraid he would have trouble with the servants, or else try to clean house while she was away, and make an awful mess all over everything. You never could tell what men would do when they were left alone, she said. So, [234] as I saw she wasn't enjoying herself any more, and as the baby and little Ellen seemed to have got as much good out of the visit as they were likely to get, I sent them back last week Friday, and hope you got them safely.

Lizzie dropped the letter with a scream of dismay. This was Saturday. Last week Friday was more than a week ago. Where, oh, where were the precious dolls?

She flew with her tragic tale to mamma, who, for all she was very sorry, could not help laughing.

"You know I warned you against trusting too much to Colonel Wheeler," she said.

"Oh, mamma, it isn't his fault, I am sure it isn't," pleaded Lizzie. "I have perfect confidence in him. Think how often he has gone to Hingham, and never once didn't come back! He *would* have fetched them safely if he hadn't been interfered with, I know he would! No, something dreadful has happened,—it's that horrid post-office!" and she wrung her hands.

Mamma was very sorry for Lizzie. Papa wrote to the postmaster, and Ernestine's papa inquired at the Hingham post-office, and there was quite a stir over the lost travellers. [235]

Time went on. A month, six weeks, two months passed, and no tidings came, and Mr. Adipose still sat in the lonely baby-house, watching the cook brandishing a paper saucepan—always the same saucepan—over the toy stove, and Bridget, the "housemaid," forever dusting the same table-top, and never getting any farther on with her work. Mamma proposed that Lizzie should make some new dolls to take the place of the lost ones, and offered help and the use of her mucilage bottle; but Lizzie shook her head sorrowfully.

"I can't help feeling as if the Allens may come back some day," she said. "Colonel Wheeler is such a good traveller; and what would they think if there was a strange family in their rooms? Besides, it's almost as much fun to play without them, because there is Mr. Adipose, a widower, you know, which is very interesting, and the two pairs of twins, which Mrs. Allen forgot to take. Besides, I can always make believe that they are coming to-morrow."

The very next morning after this conversation, as mamma sat writing in her room upstairs, she heard a wild shriek at the front door. The postman had rapped a moment before, and Lizzie had [236] rushed down to meet him, as she had each day since the dolls were lost. The shriek was so loud and sudden that Mrs. Bruce jumped up; but before she could get to the door in flew Lizzie, holding in her hand a wild huddle of battered blue envelopes with "Dead Letter Office" stamped on their corners, and a mass of pink and gray and green gowns and funny tumbled capes and hats. It was the doll party, returned at last!

"Mamma, mamma," she cried, "what did I tell you? Colonel Wheeler didn't run away with them; he has brought them all home."

There they were indeed; Mrs. Adipose as fat as ever, Mrs. Allen, and all her children, the sister, the sister-in-law, and Colonel Wheeler, erect and dignified as usual, in spite of a green crease across both his legs, and a morsel of postage-stamp in his eye, and wearing an air of conscious merit, which the occasion fully warranted. As Lizzie rapturously embraced him, she cried: "Dear old Colonel, nobody believed in you but me, not even mamma! I knew you hadn't run away with nineteen people. Mamma laughed at me, but she doesn't know you as well as I do. Nobody shall [237] ever laugh at you again."

And nobody did. Colonel Wheeler had earned public confidence, and from that day to this no one has dared to say a word against him in Lizzie's hearing. He has made several journeys to Hingham without the least misadventure, and papa says he would trust him to escort Lizzie herself if it were necessary. He is the hero of the dolls' home, and poor old Mr. Adipose, who never stirs from home, is made miserable by having him held up as a perpetual model for imitation. But unlike the generality of heroes, Colonel Wheeler lives up to his reputation, and is not less modest, useful, and agreeable in the domestic circle because of being so exceptionally meritorious!

NINETY-THREE AND NINETY-FOUR. [238]

NINETY-THREE and Ninety-four were two houses standing side by side in the outskirts of a country town, and to all outward appearance as like each other as two peas. They were the pioneer buildings of a small brick block; but as yet the rest of the block had not been built, which was all the better for Ninety-three and Ninety-four, and gave them more space and outlook. Both had French roofs with dormer windows; both front doors "grained" to represent oak, the graining falling into a pattern of regular stripes like a watered silk; and across the front of each, on the ground floor, ran the same little sham balcony of varnished iron,—balconies on which nothing heavier than a cat could venture without risk of bringing the frail structures down into the street.

Inside, the houses differed in trifling respects, as houses must which are under the control of [239] differing minds; but in one point they were precisely alike within,—which was, that the back room of the third story of each was occupied by a girl of seventeen.

It is of these two rooms that I want to tell the story. So much has been said and written of late years about home decoration and the methods of producing it, that I think some other girls of seventeen with rooms to make pretty may like to hear of how Eleanor Pyne and May Blodgett managed theirs.

Eleanor was the girl at Ninety-three. She and May were intimate friends, or considered themselves such. Intimacy is a word very freely used among young people who have not learned what a sacred word it is and how very much it means. They had grown up together, had gone to the same schools, shared most of their pleasures as well as their lessons, sent each other Christmas presents and birthday cards every year, and consulted in advance over their clothes, spring bonnets, and fancy work, which, taken all together, may be said to make an intimacy according to the general use of the term. So it was natural that, when May, stirred by the sense [240]

of young-ladyhood just at hand and by the modern impulse for house decoration, desired to "do over" and beautify her room, Eleanor should desire it also.

Making a room pretty nowadays would seem easy enough where there is plenty of money for the purpose. There is only the embarrassment of choice, though that is so embarrassing at times as to lead one to envy those grandmothers of ours, who, with only three or four patterns of everything to choose from, and those all ugly, had but the simple task of selecting the least ugly! But in the case of my two girls there was this further complication, that very little money could be used for adornment of the bedrooms. Mrs. Blodgett and Mrs. Pyne had consulted over the matter, and the decision was that Eleanor and May might each spend twenty dollars, and no more.

What can be done with twenty dollars? It will buy one pretty article of furniture. It will pay for a "Kensington Art Square," with perhaps enough left for cheese-cloth curtains. It will paper a room, or paint it. You can easily dispose of the whole of it, if you will, in a single portière. And here [241] were two rooms which needed renovation from floor to ceiling!

The rooms were of the same size. Both had two windows looking north and an ample closet. The most important difference lay in the fact that the builder of the houses, for some reason known only to himself, had put a small fireplace across the corner of Eleanor's room, and had put none in May's. *Per contra* May's room was papered, which she considered a counterbalancing advantage; but as the paper was not very pretty, Eleanor did not agree with her.

Many were the consultations held between the two girls. And just here, before they had actually begun operations, a piece of good luck befell both of them. Eleanor's grandmother presented her with an easy-chair, an old one, very shabby as to cover, but a good chair still, and very comfortable. And almost simultaneously a happily timed accident occurred to Mrs. Blodgett's spare-room carpet, which made the buying of a new one necessary, and the old one was given to May. It was a still respectable Brussels, with rather a large medallion figure on a green ground. It did not comport very well with the blue and drab paper on the walls, and the medallions looked very big on the smaller floor; but May cared nothing for that, and she accepted [242] her windfall gleefully.

"It will save ever and ever so much," she said, joyously. "Carpets do cost so. Poor Eleanor, you will have to get one for yourself, unless you can persuade your cook to upset an oil lamp on one of your mother's."

"Oh, Annie is too careful; she could never be persuaded to do such a thing as that," laughed Eleanor. "Besides, I don't want her to. I don't like any of mother's carpets very much."

"Well, I don't care what sort of a carpet it is so long as I don't have to buy it," said May.

"I do," replied Eleanor.

She did. There was this great point of difference between the friends. Eleanor possessed by nature that eye for color and sense of effects which belongs to what people call the "artistic" temperament. May had none of this, and did not even understand what it meant. To her all reds and olives and yellows were alike; differences of tone, inflections of tint, were lost on her untrained and unappreciative vision. She was unconscious of this deficiency, so it did not annoy [243] her, and as Eleanor had a quiet and pleasant way of differing with her, they never quarrelled. But none the less did each hold to her own point of view and her own opinion.

So, while May read eagerly all the articles in the secular and religious papers which show how girls and women have made plain homes cheaply charming by painting sunflowers and Black-Eyed Susans on ink-bottles and molasses-jugs, converting pork-barrels into arm-chairs with the aid of "excelsior" and burlaps, and "lighting up" dark corners with six-cent fans, and was fired with an ambition to do the same, Eleanor silently dissented from her enthusiasms. She was ready to help, however, even when she did not agree; and May, glad of the help, did not notice much the lack of sympathy. It is often so in friendships. One does the talking and one the listening. One kisses while the other holds out the cheek, as the French proverb puts it; one lays down the law and the other differs without disputing it, so both are satisfied.

It was so in this case. Eleanor was doing a great deal of quiet thinking and planning while May chattered by the hour over her projects.

"What I want my room to be," she told her friend, "is gay and dressy. I hate dull-looking rooms, [244] and having no carpet or paper to buy I can get lots of chintz. There's a lovely pattern on the bargain counter at Shell's for fourteen cents, all over roses. I am going to have a whole piece of it, and just cover up all that awful old yellow furniture of mine entirely. The bureau is to have little rods across the front and curtains to hide the drawers, like that picture in the 'Pomologist,' and I shall make a soapbox footstool and a barrel chair, and have lambrequins and a drapery over my bed, and a coverlet and valances. The washstand I have decided to do in burlaps with cat-tails embroidered on the front, and a splasher with a pattern of swans and, 'Wash and be clean.' Won't it be lovely?

"You know those black-walnut book-shelves of mine," she went on, after a pause; "well, I am going to cover them in white muslin with little pleated ruffles on the edges and pink satin bows at the corners. Sarah Stanton has promised to paint me a stone bottle with roses to put on top, and Bell Short is working me a wall banner. It's going to be the gayest little place you ever saw."

"Won't the white muslin soil soon, and won't so much chintz get very dusty?" objected Eleanor. [245]

"Oh, they can be washed," replied May, easily.

So the big roll of chintz was ordered home, and for a fortnight she and Eleanor spent all their spare time in hemming ruffles, tacking pleatings on to wooden shelves, and putting up frills and curtains. When all was done the room looked truly very fresh and gay. The old yellow "cottage furniture" had vanished under its raiment of chintz and was quite hidden. Even the foot-board of the bed had its slip-cover and flounce. The books were ranged in rows on the muslin shelves with crisp little ruffles above and below. Flowers and bright-colored zig-zags of crewels adorned everything. Wherever it was possible, a Japanese fan was stuck on the wall, or a bow of ribbon, or a little embroidered something, or a Christmas card. Scarfs of one sort or another were looped across the corners of the pictures, tidies innumerable adorned the chair-backs and table-tops. There was a general look of fulness and of an irresistible tendency in things to be of no particular use except to make spots of meaningless color and keep the eye roving restlessly to and fro.

"Isn't it just lovely?" said May, as she stood in the doorway to take in the effect. "Now, Eleanor Pyne, do say it's lovely." [246]

"It's as bright as can be," answered Eleanor, cordially. "Only I can't bear to think of all these pretty things getting dusty. They're so nice and fresh now."

"Oh, they can easily be dusted," said May. "You are a perfect crank about dust, Elly. Now, here is my account. I think I have managed pretty well, don't you?"

The account ran thus:—

Sixty yards of chintz at 14 cents a yard	$8.40
Burlaps, cheese-cloth, white muslin	3.25
Fans, ribbons, crewels	1.60
Stamping a tidy	.30
One wicker-work chair	5.00
Hanging-basket	1.25
Total	$19.80

"There's twenty cents left over," explained May, as she finished reading the items. "That will just get a yellow ribbon to tie round the handle of my clothes-brush. Eleanor, you've been ever so good to help me so much. When are you going to begin your room? You must let me help you now." [247]

"I began this morning."

"Have you really begun? What did you get?"

"Oh, I didn't get anything. This first thing isn't to cost anything at all."

"Why, what is it?"

"You know that ugly fire-board in front of my fireplace? I have taken it upstairs to the attic, and mother has lent me some cunning little andirons and a shovel and tongs which grandmamma gave her, and I am going to have an open fire."

"But you don't need one. The room is warm enough, with your register."

"Oh, I know that. And I didn't mean that I was going to *light* the fire, only have it all ready for lighting. I rubbed the brass knobs myself with Puit's Pomade, and they shine *beautifully*, and I painted the bricks with red-ochre and water, and arranged the wood and kindlings, and it has such a cosy, homelike look, you can't think!"

"Well, I confess I don't see the cosiness of a fire that you're never going to light."

"Oh, mamma says if I ever am sick in bed, or there is any particular reason for it, I may light it. [248] And even if it doesn't happen often, I shall have the comfort of knowing that it's all ready."

"I call it cold comfort. What a queer girl you are! Well, what are you going to do next, Elly?"

"You will laugh when I tell you. I'm going to paper my room myself."

"Not really! Why, you can't. Papering is very difficult; I have always heard so. People have to get men to do it, always."

"I don't believe it's so very difficult. There was a piece about it once in the 'Family Friend' which I cut out and saved. It told how to make the paste and everything, and it didn't seem hard at all. Mother thinks I can. I'm going to begin to-morrow. In fact, I began yesterday, for old Joyce came and mended the crack in the ceiling and kalsomined it, and oh, May, I did such a *thrifty* thing! He had a nice big brush and a roller to smooth out the paper with, and don't you think, I made a bargain with him to hire them out to me for three cents an hour, so I sha'n't have to buy any."

"Didn't he laugh?"

"Yes, he laughed, and Ned laughed too; but I don't care. 'Let those laugh who win,'" concluded [249] Eleanor, with a bright, confident smile.

"Come in to-morrow afternoon and see how I get on," she called out from the door of Ninety-three.

May went at the appointed time. The papering was done, and for a beginner very well done, though an expert might easily have found faulty places here and there. The paper Eleanor had chosen was of a soft, warm yellow like pale sunshine, which seemed to neutralize the cold light of the north windows. It looked plain when seen in shadow, but where the light struck it revealed a pattern of graceful interlaced disks. And the ceiling was tinted with a much lighter shade of the same yellow. A chestnut picture-rod separated wall and ceiling.

"Putting the paper on myself saved *lots*," announced Eleanor, gleefully. "It only cost fifteen cents a roll, so the whole room came to exactly a dollar eighty. Then I am to pay Joyce eighteen cents for six hours' use of his brush and roller, and mother isn't going to charge anything for the flour for the paste, because I boiled it myself. I had to get the picture-moulding, though, and that was rather dear,—nearly two dollars. Ned nailed it up for me."

"Why didn't you have a paper border; it would not have cost nearly as much?" [250]

"No, but I should have had to drive nails and tacks in every time I wanted to hang up anything, and that would have spoiled the paper. And I want that to last a long, long time."

"What are you going to do with your furniture?" asked May, casting an eye of disfavor at the articles in question, a so-called "cottage" set, enamelled, of a faded, shabby blue.

"I am going to paint them," replied Eleanor, daringly.

"Eleanor Pyne! you can't!"

But Eleanor could and did. Painting is by no means the recondite art which some of its professors would have us suppose. Eleanor avoided one of the main difficulties of the craft, by buying her paint ready mixed and qualified with "dryers." She chose a pretty tint of olive brown. Ned took her bedstead apart for her, and one by one she carried the different articles to a little-used attic, where, equipped in a long-sleeved apron and a pair of old cotton gloves to save her fingers, she gradually coated each smoothly with the new paint. It took some days to finish, for [251] she did not work continuously, but when done she felt rewarded for her pains; for the furniture not only looked new, but was prettier than it had ever been before during the memory of man. Her brother Ned was so pleased with her success, that he volunteered, if she would pay for the "stuff," to make a broad pine shelf to nail over the narrow shelf of her chimney-piece, and some smaller ones above, cut after a pretty design which he had seen in an agricultural magazine. This handsome offer Eleanor gladly accepted, and when the shelves were done, she covered them with two coats of the same useful olive-brown paint.

There was still some paint left; and grown bold with practice and no longer afraid of her big brush, Eleanor essayed a bolder flight. She first painted her doors and her window-frames, then she attacked her floor, and, leaving an ample square space in the middle, executed a border two feet and a half wide all round it, in a pattern of long diamonds done in two shades of olive, the darker being obtained by mixing a little black with the original tint.

"You see I have to buy my own carpet," she explained to the astonished and somewhat [252] scandalized May; "and with this border a little square one will answer, instead of my having to get a great big thing for the whole floor."

"But sha'n't you hate to put your feet on bare boards?"

"That's just what I sha'n't do. Don't you see that the bureau and washstand and the bedstead and towel-frame and all the rest fill up nearly all the space I have left for a border. What's the use of buying carpet for *them* to stand on?"

May shook her head. She was not capable of such original reasoning. In her code the thing that generally had been always should be.

"Well, it seems rather queer to me—and not very comfortable," she said. "And I can't think why you painted those shelves over the mantel instead of covering them with something,—chintz, now. They would have looked awfully pretty with pinked ruffles, you know, and long curtains to draw across the front like that picture you saw in 'Home made Happy.'"

"Oh, I shouldn't have liked that at all. I should hate the idea of calico curtains to a mantel-piece. It would always seem as if they were going to catch fire." [253]

"But they *couldn't*. You don't have any fire," persisted May.

"No, but they would seem so. And I want my fire to look as if it could be lighted at any minute."

Eleanor's instinct was based on an "underlying principle." It is a charming point in any fireplace to look as if it were constantly ready for use. Inflammable draperies, however pretty, militate against this look, and so are a mistake in taste, especially in our changeful New England climate, where, even in midsummer, a little blaze may at any moment be desirable to cheer a dull

day or warm a chilly evening.

But May herself was forced to admit that the room looked "comfortable" when the square of pretty ingrain carpeting of a warm golden brown was tacked into its place, and the furniture brought back from the attic and arranged. Things at once fell into harmonious relation with each other, as in a well-thought-out room they should do. The creamy, bright paper made a pleasant background; there was an air of cheerfulness even on cloudy days. May could not understand the reason of this, or why on such days her reds and pinks and drabs and greens and blues never seemed to warm her out of dulness. [254]

"I am sure my colors are a great deal brighter than yours," she would say; "I cannot imagine why they don't light up better."

Eleanor did not try for many evanescent prettinesses. In fact, she could not, even had she wished to do so, for her money was all spent; so, as she told her mother, she contented herself with having secured things that would wear, and a pretty color. She put short curtains of "scrim" at her windows, and plain serviceable towels which could be often washed on her bureau and table-tops. The bureau was enlivened by a large, square scarlet pincushion, the only bit of finery in which Eleanor indulged. Amid the subdued tone of its surroundings it looked absolutely brilliant, like the famous red wafer which the great Turner stuck in the foreground of his dim-tinted landscape, and which immediately seemed to take the color out of the bright pictures on either side.

Later, when Eleanor had learned to do the pretty Mexican work, now in fashion, she decorated some special towels for her table and bureau, with lace-like ends, and a pair of pillow-covers. Meanwhile, she bore very well the knowledge that May and most of the other girls of their set considered her room rather "plain and bare." It suited her own fancy, and that satisfied her. [255]

"I do like room to turn about in and not too many things, and not to smell of dust," she told her mother.

Here is Eleanor's budget of expenses, to set against May's:—

Wall-paper, twelve rolls	$1.80
Use of brush and roller	.18
Kalsomining ceiling	1.75
Picture-moulding	2.00
Two gallons of mixed paint, at $1.80 per gallon	3.60
Brush	.30
Nine yards of ingrain carpeting at sixty-five cents a yard	5.85
Carpet thread and tacks	.20
Pine shelving	1.00
Chintz for chair-cover put on by Eleanor herself	1.75
Satin and ribbon for cushion	1.12
Total	$19.86

This was two years ago. If you could take a peep at the rival rooms in Ninety-three and Ninety-four to-day, you would find Eleanor's looking quite as pretty as when new, or prettier; for she has used it carefully, and each year has added something to its equipments, as years will. When a girl has once secured a good foundation for her room, her friends are apt to make their gifts work in toward its further beautification. [256]

With May it is different. Her room has lost the freshness which was its one good point. The chintz has become creased and a little faded, the muslin and scrim from repeated washings are no longer crisp, and look limp and threadbare; all the ribbons and scarfs are shabby and tumbled; while the green carpet and the blue wall "swear" as vigorously at each other as they did at first. May sighs over it frequently, and wishes she had tried for a more permanent effect. Next time she will do better, she avers; but next times are slow in coming where the family exchequer has not the recuperative powers of Fortunatus's purse.

The Moral of this simple tale may be divided into three heads. I object to morals myself as a wind-up for stories, and I dare say most of you who read this are no fonder of them than I am; still, a three-headed moral is such a novelty that it may be urged as an excuse. The three heads are these:—

1. When you have only a small sum to spend on renovations, choose those that will last. [257]

2. Ingenuity and energy count for more than mere money can.

3. Once make sure in a room of convenience, cheerfulness, and a good color, and you can afford to wait for gimcracks—or "Jamescracks"—or any of the thousand and one little duds which so many people consider indispensable features of pleasantness. Rooms have their anatomy as well as human beings. There must be a good substructure of bones rightly placed to underlie the bloom and sparkle in the one; and in like manner for the other the laws of taste, which are

immutable, should underlie and support the evanescent and passing fancies and fashions of every day.

THE SORROWS OF FELICIA.

[258]

IT was a pretty chamber, full of evidences of taste and loving care. White curtains draped the windows and the looking-glass. There was a nice writing-table, set where the light fell upon it exactly as it should for convenience to the writer. There was a book-shelf full of gayly bound books, a pretty blue carpet, photographs on the faintly tinted blue wall,—somebody had evidently taken pains to make the room charming, and just as evidently to make it charming for the use of a girl. And there lay the girl on the sofa,—Felicia, or, in schoolroom parlance, Felie Bliss. Was she basking in the comfort and tastefulness of her room? Not at all! A volume of "In Memoriam" was in her hand. Her face was profoundly long and dismal. She murmured mournful lines over to herself, only pausing now and then to reach out her hand and fill a tumbler from a big jug of lemonade which [259] stood on a little table beside her. Felie always provided herself with lemonade when she retired to her bedroom to enjoy the pleasures of woe for a season.

From the door, which was locked, sounded a chorus of knocks and irreverent voices.

"Sister, are you in there?" demanded one.

"Are you thinking about Life, sister?" asked another.

"Have you got your sharp-pointed scissors with you?" cried the first voice. "Oh, Felie, Felie, stay your rash hand."

"We like lemonade just as much as you," chimed in Dimple, the youngest of the four.

"Let us in. We are very thirsty, and we long to comfort you," said voice the second, with a stifled giggle.

Felicia paid no attention whatever to these observations, only murmured to herself,—

"But what to her shall be the end?
And what to me remains of good?
To her perpetual maidenhood—"

"Who is 'her'?" demanded that bad Jenny through the door. "If you mean Mrs. Carrington, you [260] are all wrong. May Curtis says her engagement is announced to Mr. Collins."

"Oh, children, do go away!" cried Felie in a despairing tone.

"Forgive these wild and wandering cries,
Confessions of a wasted youth;
Forgive them where they fail in truth,
And in Thy wisdom make me wise."

"Hear her!" said Betty outside. "She's having it very badly to-day. I wish I knew Tennyson. I should like to tell him what I think of his writing a horrid, melancholy, caterwauling book, and making the Bliss family miserable. Felie, if you've drunk up all your lemonade, you might at least lend us the pitcher."

It was no use. Felicia either did not, or would not, hear. So, with a last thump on the panels of the long-suffering door, the trio departed in search of another pitcher.

If anybody had told Felie Bliss, at seventeen, that she really had not a grief in the world worthy of the name, she would have resented it deeply. She was a tall girl, whose bones and frame were meant for the use of a large woman, when their owner should have arrived at all that nature [261] meant her to be, but who at this period of her life was almost startlingly long and thin. She had "outgrown her strength," as people say, which was Felie's only excuse for the almost tragic enjoyment which she took in mournful things. She was in fair health, and had an excellent appetite, and a real school-girl love for raisins, stick-cinnamon, sugar-plums, and soda-water; tastes which were highly at variance with the rôle which she wished to play,—that of a sweetly-resigned and long-suffering being, whose hopes had faded from earth, into the distant heaven toward which she was hastening. Felie's sweet-tooth was quite a trial to her; but she struggled with it, and resisted enjoyment as far as was possible with her naturally cheerful disposition.

She was an interesting perplexity to her family, who were contented, reasonable folk, of the sort which, happily for the world, is called commonplace. To her younger sisters, especially, Felicia was a never-failing and exciting conundrum, the answer to which they were always guessing, but never could find out. For days together she would be as cheerful as possible, full of

fun and contrivance, and the life of the house; then, all of a sudden, gloom would envelop her like a soft fog, and she would retire to her room with "In Memoriam," or some other introspective volume, and the fat jug of lemonade, lock the door, and just "drink and weep for hours together," as her sister Jenny expressed it. It was really unaccountable. [262]

All her books were deeply scored with lines against the woful passages, and such pencilled remarks as "Alas!" and "All too true!" She sat in church with a carefully arranged sad smile on her face; but this, as unsuitable to her natural expression, was not always a success. Felie was much aggrieved one day at being told, by an indiscriminating friend, that her face "seemed made to laugh,—no one could imagine it anything but bright." This, for a girl who was posing for "Patience on a monument smiling at grief," was rather a trial; but then the friend had never seen her reading "King John," and murmuring,—

"Here I and sorrow sit—"

with a long brown stick of cinnamon, in process of crunch, occupying the other corner of her mouth. But perhaps the friend might have found even this funny,—there are such unfeeling people in the world! [263]

Felie's letters were rather dull reading, because she told so little of what she had said or done, and hinted so liberally at her own aching heart and thwarted hopes. But her correspondents, who were mostly jolly school-girls, knew her pretty well, and dismissed these jeremiads as, "Just Felie's way. She does love to be miserable, you know, but nobody is better fun than she when she doesn't think it her duty to be unhappy."

Felie didn't come down to tea on the evening of the day on which our story opens. An afternoon of lemonade had dampened her appetite, but at bedtime she stole out in her dressing-gown and slippers, helped herself to a handful of freshly baked cookies and a large green cucumber pickle, and, by the aid of these refreshments, contrived to stave off the pangs of hunger till next morning, when she appeared at breakfast cheerful and smiling, with no sign upon her spirits of the eclipse of the day before. Her family made no allusion to that melancholy episode,—they were used to such,—only Mr. Bliss asked, between two mouthfuls of toast, "Where were you gadding to last night, child? I didn't hear you come home." [264]

"I was not out. I didn't feel very—very bright, and went to bed early."

"Oh!"—Mr. Bliss understood.

"He who makes truth unlovely commits high treason against virtue," says an old writer; but he who simulates grief, and makes it ridiculous, commits an almost equal crime against true feeling. Felie had been playing at sorrow where no sorrow was. That very day a real sorrow came, and she woke up to find her world all changed into a reality of pain and puzzle and bewilderment, which was very different from the fictitious loss and the sham suffering which she had found so much to her mind.

She had no idea, as she watched her father and mother drive off that afternoon, that anything terrible was about to happen. Only the "seers" of the Scotch legends could see the shroud drawn up over the breast of those who are "appointed to die" suddenly; the rest of us see nothing. The horse which Mr. Bliss drove was badly broken, but he had often gone out before and come back safely. It was only on this particular day that the combination of circumstances occurred which made the risky horse dangerous,—the shriek of the railroad-whistle, the sharp turn in the road, the heap of stones. There was a runaway, an overset, and two hours from the time when the youthful sisters, unexpectant of misfortune, had watched their parents off, they were brought back, Mr. Bliss dead, Mrs. Bliss with a broken arm, and injuries to the spine so severe that there was little chance of her ever being able to leave her bed again. So much can be done in one fatal moment. [265]

It is at such dark, dark times that real character shows itself. Felie's little affectations, her morbid musings and fancies, fell from her like some light, fantastic drapery, which is shrivelled in sudden heat. Her real self—hopeful, self-reliant, optimistic—rose into action as soon as the first paralyzing shock of pain was past, and she had taken in the reality of this new and strange thing. All the cares of the house, the management of affairs, the daily wear and tear of life, which has to be borne by *some one*, fell upon her inexperienced hands. Her mother was too shaken and ill to be consulted, the younger girls instinctively leaned on what they felt to be a strength superior to their own. It was a heavy load for young shoulders, and Felie was not yet eighteen! [266]

She made mistakes of course,—mistakes repented of with bitter crying and urgent resolutions. She was often tried, often discouraged; things did not smooth themselves easily, or the world go much out of its usual course, because Felie Bliss was perplexed and in trouble. There were no mornings to spare for tragedy, or Tennyson. Felie's eyeballs often longed for the relief of a good fit of tears; that troublesome little lump would come into her throat which is the price of tears resolutely held back, but there was too much to do to allow of such a weakening self-indulgence. Mother must be cared for, the house must be looked after, people on business must be seen, the "children," as she called her sisters, must not be suffered to be too sad. And then, again, "In Memoriam," beautiful as it is, and full of sweet and true and tender feeling, did not satisfy Felie now as it had done when she was forced to cultivate an artificial emotion outside of herself.

"If I had time and knew how to write poetry, I could say a great many things that Tennyson never thought of," she told Jenny, one day. It is so with all who suffer. No poet ever voiced the full [267]

and complete expression of our own personal pain. There is always something beyond,—an individual pang recognized and understood only by ourselves.

So the years went on, as years do even when their wheels seem weighted with lead. The first sharpness of their loss abated. They became used to the sight of their father's empty chair, of his closed desk; they ceased to listen for the sound of his step on the porch, his key in the door. Mrs. Bliss gradually regained a more comfortable measure of health, but she remained an invalid, the chief variation in her life being when she was lifted from bed to sofa, and back again from sofa to bed. Felie was twenty-four, and the younger ones were no longer children, though she still called them so. Even Dimple wore long dresses, and had set up something very like a lover, though Felie sternly refused to have him called so till Dimple was older. Felie was equally severe with Dr. Ernest Allen, on her own account. "She was a great deal too busy to think of such a thing," she declared; but Dr. Allen, who had faith in time, simply declared that he "didn't mind waiting," and continued to hang his hat on the hat-tree in the Bliss's entry three times a week. [268]

Indeed, looking at Felicia Bliss, now that she had rounded physically and mentally into what she was meant to become, you would not wonder that any man should be willing to wait a while in hope of winning such a prize. A certain bright cheer and helpfulness was her charm. "The room grew pleasanter as soon as she came into it," Dimple declared. Certainly Dr. Allen thought so; and as a man may willingly put off building a house till he can afford to have one which fronts the sun, so he considered it worth while to delay, for a few years, even, if need be, and secure for life a daily shining which should make all life pleasanter. He had never known Felie in her morbid days, and she could never make him quite believe her when she tried to tell of that past phase of her girlhood.

"It is simply impossible. You must exaggerate, if you have not dreamed it," he said.

"Not a bit. Ask Dimple,—ask any of them."

"I prefer to ask my own eyes, my own convictions," declared the lover. "You are the most 'wholesome' woman, through and through, that I ever knew. A doctor argues from present [269] indications to past conditions. I am sure you are mistaken about yourself. If I can detect with the stethoscope the spot in your lungs where five years back pneumonia left a trace, surely I ought to be able to make out a similar spot in your nervous temperament. The idea is opposed to all that you are."

"But not to all that I was. Really and truly, Dr. Allen, I used to be the most absurd girl in the world. If you could have seen me!"

"But what cured you in this radical and surprising manner?"

"Well," said Felie, demurely, "I suppose the remedy was what you would call homeopathic. I had revelled in a sort of imaginary sorrowfulness, but when that dreadful time came, and I tasted real sorrow, I found that it took all my strength to meet it, and I was glad enough of everything bright and cheering that I could get at to help me through.

"I wonder if there are many girls in the world who are nursing imaginary miseries as I used to do," she went on. "If there are, I should like to tell them how foolish it is, and how bad for them. But, dear me, there are so many girls and one can't get at them! I suppose each must learn the [270] lesson for herself and fight her fight out somehow, and I hope they will all get through safely, and learn, as I have, that happiness is the most precious thing in the world, and that it is so, *so* foolish not to enjoy and make the most of it while we have it. Because, you know, *some* day trouble must come to everybody. And it is such a pity to have to look back and know that you have wasted a chance."

IMPRISONED.

[271]

THE big house stood in the middle of a big open space, with wide lawns about it shaded by cherry-trees and lilac-bushes, toward the south an old-fashioned garden, and back of that the apple-orchard.

The little house was on the edge of the grounds, and had its front entrance on the road. Its doors were locked and its windows shuttered now, for no one had lived in it for several years.

Three little girls lived in the big house. Lois, who was eight years old, and Emmy, who was seven, were sisters. Kitty, their cousin, also seven, had lived with them so long that she seemed like another sister. There was, besides, Marianne, the cook's baby; but as she was not quite three, she did not count for much with the older ones, though they sometimes condescended to play with her.

It was a place of endless pleasure to these happy country children, and they needed no wider [272] world than it afforded them. All summer long they played in the open air. They built bowers in

the feathery asparagus; they knew every bird's-nest in the syringa-bushes and the thick guelder-roses, and were so busy all the time that they rarely found a moment in which to quarrel.

One day in July their mother and father had occasion to leave home for a long afternoon and evening.

"You can stay outdoors till half-past six," Mrs. Spenser said to her little girls; "then you must come in to tea, and at half-past seven you must go to bed as usual. You may play where you like in the grounds, but you must not go outside the gate." She kissed them for good-by. "Remember to be good," she said. Then she got into the carriage and drove away.

The children were very good for several hours. They played that little Marianne was their baby, and was carried off by a gypsy. Lois was the gypsy, and the chase and recapture of the stolen child made an exciting game.

At last they got tired of this, and the question arose: "What shall we do next?" [273]

"I wish mother would let us play down the road," said Emmy. "The Noyse children's mother lets them."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Lois, struck by a sudden bright idea. "Let's go down to the shut-up house. That isn't outside the gate."

"O Lois! yes, it is. You can't go to the front door without walking on the road."

"Well, who said anything about the front door? I'm going to look in at the back windows. Mother never said we mustn't do that."

Still, it was with a sense of guilt that the three stole across the lawn; and they kept in the shadow of the hedge, as if afraid some one would see and call them back. Little Marianne, with her rag doll in her arms, began to run after them.

"There's that little plague tagging us," said Kitty.

"Go back, Marianne; we don't want you." Then, when Marianne would not go back, they all ran away, and left her crying.

The shut-up house looked dull and ghostly enough. The front was in deep shadow from the tall row of elms that bordered the road, but at the back the sun shone hotly. It glowed through the [274] low, dusty window of a cellar, and danced and gleamed on something bright which lay on the floor within.

"What do you suppose it is?" said Emmy, as they all stooped to look. "It looks like real gold. Perhaps some pirates hid it there, and no one has come since but us."

"Or perhaps it's a mine," cried Lois,—"a mine of jewels. See, it's all purple, like the stones in mother's breastpin. Wouldn't it be fun if it was? We wouldn't tell anybody, and we could buy such splendid things."

"We must get in and find out," added Kitty.

Just then a wail sounded close at hand, and a very woful, tear-stained little figure appeared. It was Marianne. The poor baby had trotted all the long distance in the sun after her unkind playfellows.

"Oh, dear! You little nuisance! What made you come?" demanded Emmy.

"I 'ant to," was all Marianne's explanation.

"Well, don't cry. Now you've come, you can play," remarked Lois; and Marianne was consoled.

They began to try the windows in turn, and at last found one in a wood-shed which was [275] unfastened. Kitty scrambled in, and admitted the others, first into the wood-shed and then into a very dusty kitchen. The cellar stairs opened from this. They all ran down, but—oh, disappointment!—the jewel-mine proved to be only the half of a broken teacup with a pattern on it in gold and lilac. This was a terrible come-down from a pirate treasure.

"Pshaw!" said Kitty. "Only an old piece of crockery. I don't think it's fair to cheat like that."

Little Marianne had been afraid to venture down into the cellar, and now stayed at the top waiting for them.

"Let's run away from her," suggested Kitty, who was cross after her disappointment.

So they all hopped over Marianne, and, deaf to her cries, ran upstairs to the second story as fast as they could go. There were four bare, dusty chambers, all unfurnished.

"There she comes," cried Kitty, as Marianne was heard climbing the stairs. "Where shall we hide from her? Oh, here's a place!"

She had spied a closet door, fastened with a large old-fashioned iron latch. She flew across the room. It was a narrow closet, with a shelf across the top of it. [276]

"Hurry, hurry!" called Kitty. The others made haste. They squeezed themselves into the closet, and banged the door to behind them. Not till it was firmly fastened did they notice that there was

no latch inside, or handle of any sort, and that they had shut themselves in, and had no possible way of getting out again.

Their desire to escape from Marianne changed at once into dismay. They kicked and pounded, but the stout old-fashioned door did not yield. Marianne could be heard crying without. There was a round hole in the door just above the latch. Putting her eye to this, Lois could see the poor little thing, doll in arms, standing in the middle of the floor, uncertain what to do.

"Marianne!" she called, "here we are, in the closet. Come and let us out, that's a good baby. Put your little hand up and push the latch. You can, if you will only try."

"I'll show you how," added Kitty, taking her turn at the peep-hole. "See, come close to the door, and Kitty will tell you what to do."

But these mysterious voices speaking out of the unseen frightened Marianne too much to allow [277] of her doing anything helpful.

"I tan't! I tan't!" she wailed, not venturing near the door.

"Oh, do try, please do!" pleaded Lois. "I'll give you my china doll if you will, Marianne."

"And I'll give you my doll's bedstead," added Emmy. "You'd like that, I know. Dear little Marianne, do try to let us out. Please do. We're so tired of this old closet."

But still Marianne repeated, "Tan't, tan't." And at last she sat down on the floor and wept. The imprisoned children wept with her.

"I've thought of a plan," said Emmy at last. "If you'll break one of the teeth out of your shell comb, Lois, I think I can push it through the hole and raise the latch up."

Alas! the hole was above the latch, not below it. Half the teeth were broken out of Lois's comb in their attempt, and with no result except that they fell through the hole to the floor outside. At intervals they renewed their banging and pounding on the door, but it only tired them out, and did no good.

It was a very warm afternoon, and, as time went on, the closet became unendurably hot. Emmy [278] sank down exhausted on the floor, and she and Kitty began to sob wildly. Lois alone kept her calmness. Little Marianne had grown wonderfully quiet. Peeping through the hole, Lois saw that she had gone to sleep on the floor.

"Don't cry so, Kitty," she said. "It's no use. We were naughty to come here. I suppose we've got to die in this closet, and it is my fault. We shall starve to death pretty soon, and no one will know what has become of us till somebody takes the house; and when they come to clean it and they open the closet door, they will find our bones."

Kitty screamed louder than ever at this terrible picture.

"Oh, hush!" said her cousin. "The only thing we can do now is to pray. God is the only person that can help us. Mamma says he is close to every person who prays. He can hear us if we are in the closet."

Then Lois made this little prayer:—

"Our Father who art in heaven. We have been naughty, and came down here when mamma [279] didn't give us leave to come; but please forgive us. We won't disobey again, if only Thou wilt. We make a promise. Help us. Show us the way to get out of this closet. Don't let us die here, with no one to know where we are. We ask it for Jesus Christ's sake. Forever and forever. Amen."

It was a droll little prayer, but Lois put all her heart into it. A human listener might have smiled at the odd turn of the phrases; but God knew what she meant, and he never turns away from real prayer. He answered Lois.

How did he answer her? Did he send a strong angel to lift up the latch of the door? He might have done that, you know, as he did for Peter in prison. But that was not the way he chose in this instance. What he did was to put a thought into Lois's mind.

She stood silent for a while after she had finished praying.

"Children," she said, "I have thought of something. Kitty, you are the lightest. Do you think Emmy and I could push you up on to the shelf?"

It was not an easy thing to do, for the place was narrow; but at last, with Lois and Emmy [280] "boosting," and Kitty scrambling, it was accomplished.

"Now, Kitty, put your back against the wall," said Lois, "and when I say 'One, two, three,' push the door with your feet as hard as you can, while we push below."

Kitty braced herself, and at the word "three," they all exerted their utmost strength. One second more, and—oh, joy!—the latch gave way, and the door flew open. Kitty tumbled from the shelf, the others fell forward on the floor,—they were out! Lois had bumped her head, and Emmy's shoulder was bruised; but what was that? They were free.

"Let us run, run!" cried Lois, catching Marianne up in her arms. "I never want to see this

horrible house again."

So they ran downstairs, and out through the wood-shed into the open air. Oh, how sweet the sunshine looked, and the wind felt, after their fear and danger!

Their mother taught them a little verse next morning, after they had told her all about their adventure and made confession of their fault; and Lois said it to herself every day all her life afterward. This is it:— [281]

"God is never far away;
God is listening all the day.
When we tremble, when we fear,
The dear Lord is quick to hear,—
Quick to hear, and quick to save,
Quick to grant each prayer we make,
For the precious Gift he gave,
For his Son our Saviour's sake."

"I love that hymn," Lois used to say; "and I know it's true, because God heard us just as well in that little bit of a closet as if we had been in church!"

A CHILD OF THE SEA FOLK. [282]

THE great storm of 1430 had done its worst. For days the tempest had raged on land and sea, and when at last the sun struggled through the clouds, broken now and flying in angry masses before the strong sea wind, his beams revealed a scene of desolation.

All along the coast of Friesland the dikes were down, and the salt water washing over what but a few days before had been vegetable-gardens and fertile fields. The farm-houses on the higher ground stood each on its own little island as it were, with shallow waves breaking against the walls of barns and stoned sheepfolds lower down on the slopes. Already busy hands were at work repairing the dykes. Men in boats were wading up to their knees in mud and water, men, swimming their horses across the deeper pools, were carrying materials and urging on the work, but many days must pass before the damage could be made good; and meanwhile, how [283] were people to manage for food and firing, with the peat-stacks under water, and the cabbages and potatoes spoiled by the wet?

"There is just this one thing," said Metje Huyt to her sister Jacqueline. "Little Karen shall have her cup of warm milk to-night if everybody else goes without supper; on that I am determined."

"That will be good, but how canst thou manage it?" asked Jacqueline, a gentle, placid girl of sixteen, with a rosy face and a plait of thick, fair hair hanging down to her waist. Metje was a year younger, but she ruled her elder sister with a rod of iron by virtue of her superior activity and vivacity of mind.

"I shall manage it in this way,—I shall milk the Electoral Princess."

"But she is drowned," objected Jacqueline, opening wide a pair of surprised blue eyes.

"Drowned? Not at all. She is on that little hump of land over there which looks like an island, but is really Neighbor Livard's high clover-patch. I mean to row out and milk her, and thou shalt go with me."

"Art thou sure that it is the Electoral Princess, and not any other cow?" asked Jacqueline. [284]

"Sure? Have I not a pair of eyes in my head? Sure? Don't I know the twist of our own cow's horns? Oh, Jacque, Jacque,—what were thy blue saucers given thee for? Thee never seemest to use them to purpose. However, come along. Karen must not want for her milk any longer. The mother was making some gruel-water for her when I came away, and Karen did not like it, and was crying."

Some wading was necessary to reach the row-boat, which fortunately had been dragged up to the great barn for repairs before the storm began, and so had escaped the fate which had befallen most of the other boats in the neighborhood,—of being swept out to sea in the reflux of the first furious tide. The barn was surrounded by water now, but it was nowhere more than two or three inches deep. And pulling off their wooden shoes, the sisters splashed through it with merry laughter. Like most Friesland maidens, they were expert with the oar, and, though the waves were still rough, they made their way without trouble to the wet green slope where the Electoral Princess was grazing, raising her head from time to time to utter a long melancholy [285] moo of protest at the long delay of her milkers. Very glad was she to see the girls, and she

rubbed her head contentedly against Jacqueline's shoulder while Metje, with gentle, skilful fingers, filled the pail with foaming milk.

"Now stay quietly and go on eating Friend Livard's clover, since no better may be," she said, patting the cow's red side. "The water is going down, the dikes are rebuilding, presently we will come and take thee back to the home field. Meanwhile each day Jacque and I will row out and milk thee; so be a good cow and stay contentedly where thou art."

"What can that be?" Jacqueline asked after the sisters had proceeded a short distance on their homeward way.

"What?"

"That thing over there;" and she pointed toward a distant pool some quarter of a mile from them and still nearer to the sea. "It looks like—like—oh! Metje, do you think it can be some one who has been drowned?"

"No,—for it moves,—it lifts its arm," said Metje, shading her eyes from the level rays of the sun, [286] and looking steadily seaward.

"It is a girl! She is caught by the tide in the pool. Row, Jacqueline, row! the tide turns in half an hour, and then she will be drowned indeed. The water was very deep out there last night when the flood was full; I heard Voorst say so."

The heavy boat flew forward, for the sisters bent to the oars with all their strength. Jacqueline turned her head from time to time, to judge of their direction and the distance.

"It's no neighbor," she answered as they drew nearer. "It's no one I ever saw before. Metje, it is the strangest-looking maiden you ever saw. Her hair is long,—so long, and her face is wild to look upon. I am afraid."

"Never mind her hair. We must save her, however long it is," gasped Metje, breathless from the energy of her exertions. "Steady, now, Jacque, here we are; hold the boat by the reeds. Girl! I say, girl, do you hear me? We are come to help you."

The girl, for a girl it was who half-sat, half-floated in the pool, raised herself out of the water as one alive, and stared at the sisters without speaking. She was indeed a wild and strange-looking [287] creature, quite different from any one that they had ever seen before.

"Well, are you not going to get into the boat?" cried Metje; "are you deaf, maiden, that you do not answer me? You'll be drowned presently, though you swam like forty fishes, for the tide will be coming in like fury through yon breach in the dike. Here, let me help you; give me your hand."

The strange girl did not reply, but she seemed to understand a part, at least, of what was said to her. She moaned, her face contracted as if with pain, and, raising herself still farther from the water with an effort, she indicated by signs that she was caught in the mud at the bottom of the pool and could not set herself free.

This was a serious situation, for, as Metje well knew, the mud was deep and adhesive. She sat a moment in thought; then she took her oar, forced the boat still nearer, and, directing Jacqueline to throw her weight on the farther edge to avoid an upset, she grasped the cold hands which the stranger held out, and, exerting her full strength, drew her from the mud and over the side of the boat. It rocked fearfully under her weight, the milk splashed from the pail, but the danger was [288] over in half a minute, and the rescued girl, exhausted and half-dead, lay safely on the bottom.

"Dear me, she will freeze," cried Jacqueline hastily; for the poor thing they had saved was without clothing, save for the long hair which hung about her like a mantle. "Here, Metje, I can spare my cloak to wrap round her limbs, and she must put on thy jacket. We will row the harder to keep ourselves warm."

Rowing hard was indeed needful, for, summer as it was, the wind, as the sun sank, blew in icy gusts from the Zetland Zee, whirling the sailless windmills rapidly round, and sending showers of salt spray over the walls of the sheepfolds and other outlying enclosures. The sisters were thoroughly chilled before they had pulled the boat up to a place of safety and helped the half-drowned stranger across the wet slope of grass to the house door.

Their mother was looking out for them.

"Where hast thou been, children?" she asked. "Ach!" with a look of satisfaction as Metje slipped the handle of the milk-pail between her fingers. "That is well! Little Karen was wearying for her [289] supper. But who hast thou here?" looking curiously at the odd figure whom her daughters were supporting.

"Oh, mother, it is a poor thing that we saved from drowning in that pool over there," explained Metje, pointing seaward. "She is a stranger, from far away it must be, for she understands not our speech, and answers nothing when we ask her questions."

"Dear me! what should bring a stranger here at this stormy time? But whoever she is, she must needs be warmed and fed." And the good Vrow hurried them all indoors, where a carefully economized fire of peats was burning. The main stock of peats was under water still, and it behooved them to be careful of what remained, the father had said.

"We shall have to lend her some clothes," said Metje in an embarrassed tone. "Hers must have been lost in the water somehow."

"Perhaps she went in to bathe, and the tide carried them away," suggested Jacqueline.

"Bathe! In a tempest such as there has not been in my time! Bathe! Thou art crazed, child! It is singular, most singular. I don't like it!" muttered the puzzled mother. "Well, what needs be must [290] be. Go and fetch thy old stuff petticoat, Metje, and one of my homespun shifts, and there's that old red jacket of Jacqueline's, she must have that, I suppose. Make haste, before the father comes in."

It was easier to fetch the clothes than to persuade the strange girl to put them on. She moaned, she resisted, she was as awkward and ill at ease as though she had never worn anything of the sort before. Now that they scanned her more closely there seemed something very unusual about her make. Her arms hung down,—like flippers, Metje whispered to her sister. She stumbled when she tried to walk alone; it seemed as though her feet, which looked only half developed, could scarcely support her weight.

For all that, when she was dressed, with her long hair dried, braided, and bound with a scarlet ribbon, there was something appealing and attractive in the poor child's face. She seemed to like the fire, and cowered close to it. When milk was offered her, she drank with avidity; but she would not touch the slice of black bread which Metje brought, and instead caught up a raw shell- [291] fish from a pail full which Voorst had scooped out of the pool of sea-water which covered what had been the cabbage-bed, and ate it greedily. The mother looked grave as she watched her, and was troubled in her mind.

"She seems scarce human," she whispered to Metje, drawing her to a distant corner; though indeed they might have spoken aloud with no fear of being understood by the stranger, who evidently knew no Dutch. "She is like no maiden that ever I saw."

"Perhaps she is English," suggested Metje, who had never seen any one from England, but had vaguely heard that it was an odd country quite different from Friesland.

The mother shook her head: "She is not English. I have seen one English that time that thy father and I went to Haarlem about thy grand-uncle's inheritance. It was a woman, and she was not at all like this girl. Metje, but that thou wouldst laugh, and Father Pettrie might reprove me for vain imaginations, I should guess her to be one of those mermaidens of whom our forefathers have told us. There are such creatures,—my mother's great-aunt saw one with her own eyes, and wrote it down, and my mother kept the paper. Often have I read it over. It was off the Texel." [292]

"Could she really be that? Why, it would be better—more interesting, I mean—than to have her an Englishwoman," cried Metje. "We would teach her to spin, to knit. She should go with us to church and learn the Ave. Would it not be a good and holy work, mother, to save the soul of a poor wild thing from the waves where they know not how to pray?"

"Perhaps," replied the Vrow, doubtfully. She could not quite accustom herself to her own suggestion, yet could not quite dismiss it from her mind.

The father and Voorst now came in, and supper, delayed till after its usual time by the pressing needs of the stranger, must be got ready in haste.

Metje fell to slicing the black loaf, Jacqueline stirred the porridge, while the mother herself presided over the pot of cabbage-soup which had been stewing over the fire since early morning. Voorst, meanwhile, having nothing to do but to wait, sat and looked furtively at the strange girl. She did not seem to notice him, but remained motionless in the chimney-corner, only now and then giving a startled sudden glance about the room, like some wild creature caught in a trap. [293] Voorst thought he had never seen anything so plaintive as her large, frightened eyes, or so wonderful as the thick plait of hair which, as she sat, lay on the ground, and was of the strangest pale color, like flax on which a greenish reflection is accidentally thrown. It was no more like Metje's ruddy locks, or the warm fairness of Jacqueline's braids, than moonlight is like dairy butter, he said to himself.

Supper ready, Metje took the girl's hand and led her to the table. She submitted to be placed on a wooden stool, and looked curiously at the bowl of steaming broth which was set before her; but she made no attempt to eat it, and seemed not to know the use of her spoon. Metje tried to show her how to hold it, but she only moaned restlessly, and, as soon as the family moved after the father had pronounced the Latin grace which Father Pettrie taught all his flock to employ, she slipped from her seat and stumbled awkwardly across the floor toward the fire, which seemed to have a fascination for her.

"Poor thing! she seems unlearnt in Christian ways," said Goodman Huyt; but later, when his wife confided to him her notion as to the stranger's uncanny origin, he looked perplexed, crossed [294] himself, and said he would speak to the priest in the morning. It was no time for fetching heathen folk into homes, he remarked, still less those who were more fish than folk; as for mermaids, if such things there might be, they were no better in his opinion than dolphins or mackerel, and he did not care to countenance them.

Father Pettrie was duly consulted. He scouted the mermaid theory, and, as the Vrow had foreboded, gave her a reprimand for putting such ideas into the mind of her family.

The girl was evidently a foreigner from some far distant country, he said, a Turk it might be, or a daughter of that people, descended from Ishmael, who held rule in the land of the Holy Sepulchre. All the more it became a duty to teach her Christian ways and bring her into the true fold; and he bade Goodman Huyt to keep her till such time as her friends should be found, to treat her kindly, and make sure that she was brought regularly to church and taught religion and her duty.

[295] There was no need of this admonition as to kindness. Vrow Huyt could hardly have used a stray dog less than tenderly. And for Jacqueline and Metje, they looked upon the girl as their own special property, and were only in danger of spoiling her with over-indulgence. "Ebba," they called her, as they knew no name by which to address her, and in course of time she learned to recognize it as hers and to answer to it,—answer by looks and signs, that is, for she never learned to speak, or to make other sound than inarticulate moans and murmurs, except a wild sort of laughter, and now and then, when pleased and contented, a low humming noise like an undeveloped song. From these the family could guess at her mood, from her expressive looks and gestures they made shift to understand her wishes, and she, in turn, comprehended their meaning half by observation, half by instinct; but closer communication was not possible, and the lack of a common speech was a barrier between them which neither she nor they could overcome.

Gradually "Dumb Ebba," as the neighbors called her, was taught some of the thrifty household arts in which Dame Huyt excelled. She learned to spin, and though less expertly, to knit, and
[296] could be trusted to stir whatever was set upon the fire to cook, and not let it burn or boil over. When the family went to mass, she went too, limping along with painful slowness on her badly-formed feet, and she bowed her head and knelt with the rest, but how much or how little she understood they could not tell. Except on Sundays she never left the house. Her first attempts at doing so were checked by Metje, who could not dismiss from her memory what her mother had said, and was afraid to let her charge so much as look toward the tempting blue waves which shone in the distance; and after a while Ebba seemed to realize that she was, so to speak, a kindly treated captive, and resigned herself to captivity. Little Karen was the only creature whom she played with; sometimes when busied with the child she was noticed to smile, but for every one else her face remained pitifully sad, and she never lost the look of a wild, imprisoned thing.

So two years passed, and still Dumb Ebba remained, unclaimed by friends or kindred, one of the friendly Huyt household. The dikes were long since rebuilt, the Electoral Princess had come back to her own pasture-ground and fed there contentedly in company with two of her own
[297] calves, but the poor sea-stray whom Metje had pulled into the boat that stormy night remained speechless, inscrutable, a mystery and a perplexity to her adopted family.

But now a fresh interest arose to rival Ebba's claims on their attention. A wooer came for pretty Jacqueline. It was young Hans Polder, son of a thrifty miller in the neighborhood, and himself owner of one of the best windmills in that part of Friesland. Jacqueline was not hard to win, the wedding-day was set, and she, Metje, and the mother were busy from morning till night in making ready the store of household linen which was the marriage portion of all well-to-do brides. Ebba's services with the wheel were also put into requisition; and part of her spinning, woven into towels, which, after a fancy of Metje's, had a pattern of little fish all over them, were known for generations as "the Mermaid's towels." But this is running far in advance of my story.

Amid this press of occupation Ebba was necessarily left to herself more than formerly, and some dormant sense of loneliness, perhaps, made her turn to Voorst as a friend. He had taken a fancy to her at the first,—the sort of fancy which a manly youth sometimes takes to a helpless
[298] child,—and had always treated her kindly. Now she grew to feel for him a degree of attachment which she showed for no one else. In the evening, when tired after the day's fishing he sat half asleep by the fire, she would crouch on the floor beside him, watching his every movement, and perfectly content if, on waking, he threw her a word or patted her hair carelessly. She sometimes neglected to fill the father's glass or fetch his pipe, but never Voorst's; and she heard his footsteps coming up from the dike long before any one else in the house could catch the slightest footfall.

The strict watch which the family had at first kept over their singular inmate had gradually relaxed, and Ebba was suffered to go in and out at her will. She rarely ventured beyond the house enclosure, however, but was fond of sitting on the low wall of the sheep-fold and looking off at the sea, which, now that the flood had subsided, was at a long distance from the house. And at such moments her eyes looked larger, wilder, and more wistful than ever.

As the time for the wedding drew near, Voorst fell into the way of absenting himself a good deal from home. There were errands to be done, he said, but as these "errands" always took him
[299] over to the little island of Urk, where lived a certain pretty Olla Tronk, who was Jacqueline's great friend and her chosen bridesmaiden, the sisters naturally teased him a good deal about them. Ebba did not, of course, understand these jokings, but she seemed to feel instinctively that something was in the air. She grew restless, the old unhappy moan came back to her lips; only when Voorst was at home did she seem more contented.

Three days before the marriage, Olla arrived to help in the last preparations. She was one of the handsomest girls in the neighborhood, and besides her beauty was an heiress; for her father, whose only child she was, owned large tracts of pasture on the mainland, as well as the greater part of the island of Urk, where he had a valuable dairy. The family crowded to the door to welcome Olla. She came in with Voorst, who had rowed over to Urk for her,—tall, blooming, with

flaxen tresses hanging below her waist, and a pair of dancing hazel eyes fringed with long lashes. Voorst was almost as good looking in his way,—they made a very handsome couple.

"And this must be the stranger maiden of whom Voorst has so often told me," said Olla after the first greetings had been exchanged. She smiled at Ebba, and tried to take her hand, but the elfish [300] creature frowned, retreated, and, when Olla persisted, snatched her hand away with an angry gesture and put it behind her back.

"Why does she dislike me so?" asked Olla, discomfited and grieved, for she had meant to be kind.

"Oh, she doesn't dislike thee, she couldn't!" cried peace-loving Jacqueline.

But Ebba did dislike Olla, though no one understood why. She would neither go near nor look at her if she could help it, and when, in the evening, she and Voorst sat on the doorstep talking together in low tones, Ebba hastened out, placed herself between them, and tried to push Olla away, uttering pitiful little wailing cries.

"What does ail her?" asked Jacqueline. Metje made no answer, but she looked troubled. She felt that there was sorrow ahead for Ebba or for Voorst, and she loved them both.

The wedding-day dawned clear and cloudless, as a marriage-day should. Jacqueline in her bravery of stiff gilded head-dress with its long scarf-like veil, her snowy bodice, and necklace of many-colored beads, was a dazzling figure. Olla was scarcely less so, and she blushed and [301] dimpled as Voorst led her along in the bridal procession. Ebba walked behind them. She, too, had been made fine in a scarlet bodice and a grand cap with wings like that which Metje wore, but she did not seem to care that she was so well dressed. Her sad eyes followed the forms of Olla and Voorst, and as she limped painfully along after them, she moaned continually to herself, a low, inarticulate, wordless murmur like the sound of the sea.

Following the marriage-mass came the marriage-feast. Goodman Huyt sat at the head of the table, the mother at the foot, and, side by side, the newly-wedded pair. Opposite them sat Voorst and Olla. His expression of triumphant satisfaction, and her blushes and demurely-contented glances, had not been unobserved by the guests; so no one was very much surprised when, in the midst of the festivity, the father rose, and knocked with his tankard on the table to insure silence.

"Neighbors and kinsfolk, one marriage maketh another, saith the old proverb, and we are like to prove it a true one. I hereby announce that, with consent of parents on both sides, my son [302] Voorst is troth-plight with Olla the daughter of my old friend Tronk who sits here,"—slapping Tronk on the shoulder,—"and I would now ask you to drink with me a high-health to the young couple." Suiting the action to the word, he filled the glass with Hollands, raised it, pronounced the toast, "A High-Health to Voorst Huyt and to his bride Olla Tronk," and swallowed the spirits at a draught.

Ebba, who against her will had been made to sit at the board among the other guests, had listened to this speech with no understanding of its meaning. But as she listened to the laughter and applause which followed it, and saw people slapping Voorst on the back with loud congratulations and shaking hands with Olla, she raised her head with a flash of interest. She watched Voorst rise in his place with Olla by his side, while the rest reseated themselves; she heard him utter a few sentences. What they meant she knew not; but he looked at Olla, and when, after draining his glass, he turned, put his arm round Olla's neck, drew her head close to his own, and their lips met in a kiss, some meaning of the ceremony seemed to burst upon her. She started from her seat, for one moment she stood motionless with dilated eyes and parted lips, [303] then she gave a long wild cry and fled from the house.

"What is the matter? Who screamed?" asked old Huyt, who had observed nothing.

"It is nothing. The poor dumb child over there," answered his wife.

Metje looked anxiously at the door. The duties of hospitality held her to her place. "She will come in presently and I will comfort her," she thought to herself.

But Ebba never "came in" again. When Metje was set free to search, all trace of her had vanished. As suddenly and mysteriously as she had come into their lives she had passed out of them again. No one had seen her go forth from the door, no trace could be found of her on land or sea. Only an old fisherman, who was drawing his nets that day at a little distance from the shore, averred that just after high noon he had noticed a shape wearing a fluttering garment like that of a woman pass slowly over the ridge of the dike just where it made a sudden curve to the left. He had had the curiosity to row that way after his net was safely pulled in, for he wanted to [304] see if there was a boat lying there, or what could take any one to so unlikely a spot; but neither boat nor woman could be found, and he half fancied that he must have fallen asleep in broad daylight and dreamed for a moment.

However that might be, Ebba was gone; nor was anything ever known of her again. Metje mourned her loss, all the more that Jacqueline's departure left her with no mate of her own age in the household. Little Karen cried for "Ebbe" for a night or two, the Vrow missed her aid in the spinning, but Voorst, absorbed in his happiness, scarcely noted her absence, and Olla was glad.

Gradually she grew to be a tradition of the neighborhood, handed down from one generation to another even to this day, and nobody ever knew whence she came or where she went, or whether

it was a mortal maiden or one of the children of the strange, solemn sea folk who was cast so curiously upon the hands of the kindly Friesland family and dwelt in their midst for two speechless years.

NOTE.—The tradition on which this story is founded, and which is still held as true in some parts of Friesland, is referred to by Parival in his book, "Les Delices de Hollande."

"Now, Katy, do,—ah, do, do."—PAGE 108.

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The two illustrations mentioned in the Contents for A Little Knight of Labor includes the frontispiece.

Punctuation has been standardised. Hyphenation has been retained as in the original publication. Changes have been made as follows:

Page 39
friendship with you, "dusting girl," *changed to*
friendship with your "dusting girl,"

Page 89
aunt, who is an invalid, used *changed to*
aunt, who is an invalid, uses

Page 190
Dance, Etelklein, leibchen *changed to*
Dance, Etelklein, liebchen

Page 250
choose a pretty tint of *changed to*
chose a pretty tint of

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