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Richards**

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QUICKSILVER SUE



READING CLARICE'S LETTER.

QUICKSILVER SUE

BY
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QUICKSILVER SUE

CHAPTER I

1

SOMETHING EXCITING

Mother! Mother! he has a daughter! Isn't that perfectly fine?"

Mrs. Penrose looked up wearily; her head ached, and Sue was so noisy!

"Who has a daughter?" she asked. "Can't you speak a little lower, Sue? Your voice goes through my head like a needle. Who is it that has a daughter?"

Sue's bright face fell for an instant, and she swung her sunbonnet impatiently; but the next moment she started again at full speed.

"The new agent for the Pashmet Mills, Mother. Everybody is talking about it. They are going to live at the hotel. They have taken the best rooms, and Mr. Binns has had them all painted and papered,—the rooms, I mean, of course,—and new curtains, and everything. Her name is Clarice, and she is fifteen, and very pretty; and he is real rich—"

2

"*Very* rich," corrected her mother, with a little frown of pain.

"Very rich," Sue went on; "and her clothes are simply fine; and—and—oh, Mother, isn't it elegant?"

"Sue, where have you been?" asked her mother, rousing herself. (Bad English was one of the few things that did rouse Mrs. Penrose.) "Whom have you been talking with, child? I am sure you never hear Mary Hart say 'isn't it elegant!'"

"Oh! Mary is a schoolma'am, Mother. But I never did say it before, and I won't again—truly I won't. Annie Rooney told me, and she said it, and so I didn't think. Annie is going to be waitress at the hotel, you know, and she's just as excited as I am about it."

"Annie Rooney is not a suitable companion for you, my daughter, and I am not interested in hotel gossip. Besides, my head aches too much to talk any more."

3

"I'll go and tell Mary!" said Sue.

"Will you hand me my medicine before you go, Sue?"

But Sue was already gone. The door banged, and the mother sank back with a weary, fretful sigh. Why was Sue so impetuous, so unguided? Why was she not thoughtful and considerate, like Mary Hart?

Sue whirled upstairs like a breeze, and rushed into her own room. The room, a pleasant, sunny one, looked as if a breeze were blowing in it all day long. A jacket was tossed on one chair, a dress on another. The dressing-table was a cheerful litter of ribbons, photographs, books, papers, and hats. (This made it hard to find one's brush and comb sometimes; but then, it was convenient to have the other things where one could get at them.) There was a writing-table, but the squirrel lived on that; it was the best place to put the cage, because he liked the sun. (Sue never would have thought of moving the table somewhere else and leaving the space for the cage.) And the closet was entirely full and running over. The walls were covered with pictures of every variety, from the Sistine Madonna down to a splendid four-in-hand cut out of the "Graphic." Most of them had something hanging on the frame—a bird's nest, or a branch of barberries, or a tangle of gray moss. Sometimes the picture could still be seen; again, it could not, except when the wind blew the adornment aside. Altogether, the room looked as if some one had a good time in it, and as if that some one were always in a hurry; and this was the case.

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"Shall I telephone," said Sue, "or shall I send a pigeon? Oh, I can't stop to go out to the dove-cote; I'll telephone."

She ran to the window, where there was a curious arrangement of wires running across the street to the opposite house. She rang a bell and pulled a wire, and another bell jingled in the distance. Then she took up an object which looked like (and indeed was) the half of a pair of opera-glasses with the glass taken out. Holding this to her mouth, she roared softly: "Hallo, Central! Hallo!"

5

There was a pause; then a voice across the street replied in muffled tones: "Hallo! What number?"

"Number five hundred and seven. Miss Mary Hart."

Immediately a girl appeared at the opposite window, holding the other barrel of the opera-glass to her lips.

"Hallo!" she shouted. "What do you want?"

"Oh, Mary, have you heard?"

"No. What?"

"Why, there 's a girl coming to live at the hotel—coming to stay all summer! Her father is agent of the Pashmet Mills. She is two years older than we are. Isn't that perfectly fine, Mary? I'm just as excited as I can be about it. I can't stand still a minute."

"So I see," said Mary Hart, who had a round, rosy, sensible face, and quiet blue eyes. "But do try to stand still, Sue! People don't jump up and down when they are telephoning, you know."

"Oh! I can't help it, Mary. My feet just seem to go of themselves. Isn't it perfectly splendid, Mary? You don't seem to care one bit. I'm sorry I told you, Mary Hart." 6

"Oh, no, you're not!" said Mary, good-naturedly. "But how can I tell whether it is splendid or not, Sue, before I have seen the girl? What is her name?"

"Oh! didn't I tell you? Clarice Packard. Isn't that a perfectly lovely name? Oh, Mary, I just can't wait to see her; can you? It's so exciting! I thought there was never going to be anything exciting again, and now just see! Don't you hope she will know how to act, and dress up, and things? I do."

"Suppose you come over and tell me more about it," Mary suggested. "I must shell the peas now, and I'll bring them out on the door-step; then we can sit and shell them together while you tell me."

"All right; I'll come right over."

Sue turned quickly, prepared to dash out of the room as she had dashed into it, but caught her foot in a loop of the wire that she had forgotten to hang up, and fell headlong over a chair. The chair and Sue came heavily against the squirrel's cage, sending the door, which was insecurely fastened, flying open. Before Sue could pick herself up, Mister Cracker was out, frisking about on the dressing-table, and dangerously near the open window. 7

"Oh! what shall I do?" cried Sue. "That horrid old wire! Cracker, now be good, that's a dear fellow! Here, I know! I had some nuts somewhere—I know I had! Wait, Cracker, do wait!"

But Cracker was not inclined to wait, and while Sue was rummaging various pockets which she thought might contain the nuts, he slipped quietly out of the window and scuttled up the nearest tree, chattering triumphantly. Sue emerged from the closet, very red in the face, and inclined to be angry at the ingratitude of her pet. "After all the trouble I have had teaching him to eat all kinds of things he didn't like!" she exclaimed. "Well, at any rate, I sha'n't have any more eggs to boil hard, and Katy said I couldn't have any more, anyhow, because I cracked the saucepans when I forgot them. And, anyhow, he wasn't very happy, and I know I should just hate to live in a cage, even with a whirligig—though it must be fun at first." 8

Consoling herself in this wise, Sue flashed down the stairs, and almost ran over her little sister Lily, who was coming up.

"Oh, Susie," said Lily, "will you help me with my dolly's dress? I have done all I can without some one to show me, and Mamma's head aches so she can't, and Katy is ironing."

"Not now, Lily; don't you see I am in a terrible hurry? Go and play, like a good little girl!"

"But I've no one to play with, Susie," said the child, piteously.

"Find some one, then, and don't bother! Perhaps I'll show you about the dress after dinner, if I have time."

Never stopping to look at the little face clouded with disappointment, Sue ran on. There was no cloud on her own face. She was a vision of sunshine as she ran across the street, her fair hair flying, her hazel eyes shining, her brown holland dress fluttering in the wind. 9

The opposite house looked pleasant and cheerful. The door stood open, and one could look through the long, narrow hall and into the garden beyond, where the tall purple phlox seemed to be nodding to the tiger-lilies that peeped round the edge of the front door. The door was painted green, and had a bright brass knocker; and the broad stone step made a delightful seat when warmed through and through by the sun, as it was now. The great horse-chestnut trees in front of the house made just enough shade to keep one's eyes from being dazzled, but not enough to shut out the sunbeams which twinkled down in green and gold, and made the front dooryard almost a fairy place.

Mary came out, bringing a basket of peas and a shining tin dish; she sat down, and made room for Sue beside her with a smile.

"This is more satisfactory than telephoning," she said. "Now, Sue, take a long breath and tell me all about it."

Sue breathed deep, and began again the wonderful tale:

"Why, I met Annie Rooney this morning, when I went down for the mail. You remember Annie, who used to live with us? Mamma doesn't like her much, but she was always nice to me, and she always likes to stop and talk when I meet her. Well! and so she told me. They may be here any day now, Mr. Packard and his daughter. Her name is Clarice—oh! I told you that, didn't I? Don't 10

you think it 's a perfectly lovely name, Mary? It sounds like a book, you know, with long, golden hair, and deep, unfathomable eyes, and—"

"I never saw a book with golden hair," said Mary, "to say nothing of unfathomable eyes."

"Mary, now stop teasing me! You know perfectly well what I mean. I am sure she must be beautiful with a name like that. Oh, dear! I wish I had a name like that, instead of this stupid one. Susan! I don't see how any one could possibly be so cruel as to name a child Susan. When I grow up, Mary, do you know what I am going to do? I made up my mind as soon as I heard about Clarice Packard. I'm going to appear before the President and ask him to change my name."

"Sue, what do you mean?"

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"My dear, it's true! It's what they do. I've read about it somewhere. It has to be done by act of legislature, and of course the President tells Congress, and they see about it. I should *like* to have that same name—Clarice. It's the prettiest name I ever heard of; don't you think so, Mary? But of course I can't be a copy-cat, so I am going to have it Faeroline—you remember that story about Faeroline? Faeroline Medora, or else Medora Faeroline. Which do you think would be prettiest, Mary?"

"I like Sue better than either!" said Mary, stoutly.

"Oh, Mary, you do discourage me sometimes! Well, where was I?"

"You had got as far as her name," said Mary.

"Oh, yes. Well, and her father is rich. I should think he must be enormously rich. And she must be beautiful,—I am quite sure she must; and—she dresses splendidly, Annie says; and—and they are coming to live at the hotel; and she is fifteen—I told you that? And—well, I suppose that is all I really know just yet, Mary; but I *feel* a great, *great* deal more. I feel, somehow, that this is a very serious event in my life, Mary. You know how I have been longing for something exciting to happen. Only yesterday, don't you remember, I was saying that I didn't believe anything would ever happen, now that we had finished 'Ivanhoe'; and now just see!"

12

"I should think they would try to get a house, if they are well off," said practical Mary. "It must be horrid, living at a hotel."

"Oh, Mary, you have *no* imagination! I think it would be perfectly delightful to stay at a hotel. I've always just longed to; it has been one of my dreams that some day we might give up housekeeping and live at the hotel; but of course we never shall."

"For pity's sake! I should hope not, Sue, with a good home of your own! Why, what would there be to like about it?"

"Oh, it would be so exciting! People coming and going all the time, and bells ringing, and looking-glasses everywhere, and—and never knowing what one is going to have for dinner, and all kinds of good things in little covered dishes, just like 'Little Kid Milk, table appear!' Don't you remember? And—it would be so exciting! You know I love excitement, Mary, and I just hate to know what I am going to have for dinner."

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"I know I am going to have peas for dinner," said Mary,—"*at least*, I want them. Sue, you haven't shelled a dozen peas; I shall have to go and get Bridget to help me."

"Oh, no; I will, I truly will!" cried Sue; and she shelled with ardor for a few minutes, the pods flying open and the peas rattling merrily into the tin basin.

"Do you remember the three peas in the Andersen story?" she said presently. "I always used to wish I had been one of those—the one that grew up, you know, and made a little garden for the sick girl. Wouldn't it be lovely, Mary, to come up out of the ground, and find you could grow, and put out leaves, and then have flowers? Only, I would be sweet peas,—not this kind,—and look so lovely, just like sunset wings, and smell sweet for sick people, and—Mary! Mary Hart! who is that?"

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Sue was looking down the street eagerly. Mary looked too, and saw a carriage coming toward them with two people in it.

"No one we know, I think," said Mary.

"They are strangers!" cried Sue, in great excitement,—"*a man and a girl*. Mary Hart, I do believe it is Mr. Packard and Clarice! It must be. They are strangers, I tell you! I never saw either of them in my life. And look at her hat! Mary, *will* you look at her hat?"

"I *am* looking at it!" said Mary. "Yes, Sue; I shouldn't wonder if you were right. Where are you going?"

"Indoors, so that I can stare. You wouldn't be so rude, Mary, as to stare at her where she can see you? You aren't going to stare at all! Oh, Mary, what's the use of not being *human*? You are too poky for anything. A stranger,—and that girl, of all the world,—and not have a good look at her? Mary, I do find you trying sometimes. Well, I am going. Good-by."

And Sue flew into the house, and flattened herself behind the window-curtain, where she could see without being seen. Mary was provoked for a moment, but her vexation passed with the

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cracking of a dozen pods. It was impossible to be long vexed with Sue.

As the gay carriage passed, she looked up quietly for a moment, to meet the unwinking stare of a pair of pale blue eyes, which seemed to be studying her as a new species in creation. A slender girl, with very light hair and eyebrows, a pale skin, and a thin, set mouth—not pretty, Mary thought, but with an "air," as Sue would say, and very showily dressed. The blouse of bright changeable silk, with numberless lace ruffles, the vast hat, like a flower-garden and bird-shop in one, the gold chain and lace parasol, shone strangely in the peaceful village street.

Mary returned the stare with a quiet look, then looked down at her peas again.

"What, oh, what shall we do,"

she said to herself, quoting a rhyme her father had once made,—

"What, oh, what shall we do
With our poor little Quicksilver Sue?"

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CHAPTER II

THE NEW-COMER

Sue Penrose went home that day feeling, as she had said to Mary, that something serious had happened. The advent of a stranger, and that stranger a girl not very far from her own and Mary's age, was indeed a wonderful thing. Hilton was a quiet village, and it happened that she and Mary had few friends of their own age. They had never felt the need of any, being always together from babyhood. Mary would never, it might be, feel the need; but Sue was always a dreamer of dreams, and always longed for something new, something different from every-day pleasures and cares. When the schooners came up the river, in summer, to load with ice from Mr. Hart's great ice-houses, Sue always longed to go with them when they sailed. There were little girls on them sometimes; she had seen them. She had gone so far as to beg Mr. Hart to let her go as stewardess on board the "Rosy Dawn." She felt that a voyage on a vessel with such a name must be joy indeed. But Mr. Hart always laughed at her so, it would have been hard to have patience with him if he were not so dear and good. She longed to go away on the trains, too, or to have the pair of cream-colored horses that were the pride of the livery-stable—to take them and the buckboard, and drive away, quite away, to new places, where people didn't have their dresses made over every year, and where they had new things every day in the shop-windows. Her dreams always took her away from Hilton; for it seemed impossible that anything new or strange should ever come there to the sleepy home village. She and Mary had always made their plays out of books, and so had plenty of excitement in that way; but Hilton itself was asleep,—her mother said so,—and it would never wake up. And now, all in a moment, the scene was changed. Here, into the very village street, had come a stranger—a wonderful girl looking like a princess, with jewels and gold chains and shimmering silk; and this girl was going to lead a kind of fairy life at a marvelous place called a hotel, where the walls were frescoed, and you could make up stories about them all the time you were eating your dinner; and the dinner itself was as different as possible from a plain brown leg of mutton, which Katy would always do over three times in just the same order: first a pie, then a fricassee, then mincemeat. Katy was so tiresome! But this girl with the fair hair and the beautiful name would have surprises three times a day, surprises with silver covers,—at least, they looked like silver,—and have four kinds of pie to choose from. And she came from New York! That was perhaps the most wonderful part of all. Sue sat down on her window-seat, gave a long sigh, and fell into a dream of New York.

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18

They drove curricles there, glittering curricles like those in books. (Sue was very fond of books, provided they were "exciting.")

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And the houses—well, she knew something about those, of course; she had heard them described; and of course it was stupid to have them all alike outside, row upon row of brownstone; but, on the other hand, perhaps it made the mystery of the inside all the more amazing. To go in at a plain brown door in a plain brown house, and find—find—oh! what would not one find? There would be curtains of filmy lace—lace was always filmy when it was not rich and creamy; well, on the whole, she would have the curtains rich and creamy, and keep the filmy kind for something else. And the carpets were crimson, of course, and so thick your feet sank quite out of sight in them. ("I don't see how you could run," Sue admitted to herself; "but no matter.") The walls were "hung," not papered—hung with satin and damask, or else with Spanish leather, gilded, like those in the Hans Andersen story. Sue had begged piteously, when her room was done over last year, to have it hung with gilded Spanish leather. She had quoted to her mother the song the old hangings sang after they had been there for ages and ages:

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"The gilding decays,
But hog's leather stays."

But it made no difference; the room was papered. Sue had chosen the paper, to be sure, and it

was certainly pretty; but—she sighed as she looked around and fancied the Spanish leather creaking in the wind; then sank into her dream again.

The rooms, downstairs, at least, were in suites, opening out of each other in long vistas ("vista" was a lovely word! there were no houses in Hilton big enough to have vistas, but probably they would have them at the hotel), with long French windows opening on to velvet lawns— No! Sue shook herself severely. That was the other kind of house—the kind that was embosomed in trees, in Miss Yonge's stories. Of course they wouldn't have French windows in New York; the burglars could get in. An adventure with a burglar would be terribly exciting, though! There might be just one French window. Sue's mind hovered for a moment, tempted to wander into a dream of burglary; but she rejected it, and went on with the house. The furniture would be just perfectly fine—rosewood and satinwood, and one room all ebony and pale yellow satin. You wore a yellow crape dress when you sat there, with—yes; now came in the filmy lace, lots and lots of it round your snowy neck, that rose out of it like a dove,—no, like a swan, or a pillar, or something. Then, upstairs—oh! she hadn't got to upstairs yet, but she must just take a peep and see the silver bedstead, all hung with pale blue velvet. Oh, how lovely! And—why, yes, it might be—in the bed there would be a maiden sleeping, more beautiful than the day. Her long, fair hair was spread out on the pillow (when Sue was grown up she was never, never going to braid her hair at night; she was always going to spread it out), and her nightgown was all lace, every bit, and the sheets were fine as a cambric handkerchief, and her eyelashes were black, and so long that they reached half-way down her nose, like that paper doll Mrs. Hart made. Well, and Sue would go up and look at her. Oh! if she herself were only a fairy prince in green and gold, or could change into one just for a little while! But, anyhow, she would look at the lovely maiden and say:

"Love, if thy tresses be so dark,—

But these tresses were fair! Well, never mind; she could change that:

"Love, if thy tresses be so fair,
How bright those hidden eyes must be!"

That was really almost as good as the real way. It would be just lovely to be a poet, and say that kind of thing all the time! Sue wondered how one began to be a poet; she thought she would try, when she got through with this. And then the maiden would wake up and say: "Hallo!" and Sue would say: "Hallo! what's your name?" and she would say, soft and low, like the wind of the western sea:

"Clarice!" And then they would be friends for life, the dearest friends in the world—except Mary, of course. But then, Mary was different. She was the dearest girl that ever was, but there was nothing romantic about her. Clarice! It was a pity the other name was Packard! It ought to have been Atherton, or Beadesert. Clarice Beadesert! That was splendid. But Mr. Packard didn't look as if he belonged to that kind of people. Well, then, when Clarice grew up she would have to marry some one called Beadesert—or Clifford. Clarice Clifford was beautiful! And he would be a lord, of course, because there was the good Lord Clifford, you know. And—and—well, anyhow, Clarice would get up, and would thrust her tiny feet into blue velvet slippers embroidered with pearls (if there had really been fairies, the very first thing Sue would have asked for would have been small feet, instead of these great things half a yard long), and throw round her (they always threw things round them in books, instead of putting them on) a—let me see—a long robe of pale blue velvet, to match the bed, and lined with ermine all through; and then she would take Sue round and show her the rest of the house. That would be perfectly lovely! And they would tell each other the books they liked best; and perhaps Clarice would ask her to stay to tea, and then they would sit down to a small round ebony table, with a snowy cloth,—no; bare would be finer if it was real ebony,—and glittering with crystal and silver (they always do that), and with rose-colored candle-shades, and—and—

Tinkle, tinkle! went the dinner-bell. "Oh, dear!" said Sue. "Just as I was going to have such a delightful feast! And it's mincemeat day, too. I hate mincemeat day!"

When she was not dreaming, Sue was planning how she could make the much-desired acquaintance of the new-comer. Mary advised waiting a little, and said her father was going to call on Mr. Packard, and the meeting might perhaps come about naturally in that way. But this was altogether too prosaic for Sue. She must find a way that was not just plain being introduced; that was stupid and grown-up. She must find a way of her own, that should belong entirely to her.

Of course, the best thing, the right and proper and story-book thing, would be for Mr. Packard's horse to run away when only Clarice was in the carriage. Then Sue could fling herself in the path of the infuriated animal, and check him in mid-career by the power of her eye—no; it was lions you did that to. But, anyhow, she could catch him by the bridle, and hang on, and stop him that way. It didn't sound so well, but it was more likely. Or if Clarice should fall into the river, Sue could plunge in and rescue her, swimming with one hand and upholding the fainting form of the lovely maiden with the other, till, half-unconscious herself, the youthful heroine reached the bank, and placed her lovely—no; said that before!—her beauteous burden in the arms of her distracted parent. Oh, dear, how exciting that would be! But nobody ever did fall into the river in Hilton, and the horses never ran away, so it was not to be expected. But there must be some way; there should be!

So it came to pass that on the Sunday after the Packards' arrival, Miss Clarice Packard, rustling into her father's pew in all the conscious glory of a flowered organdie muslin and the biggest hat in town, found in the corner of the pew something that made her open her pale blue eyes wider than usual. It was a large heart of red sugar, tied round with a true-lover's knot of white satin ribbon. Looking round, she became aware of a pair of eyes fixed eagerly on her, the brightest eyes she had ever seen. They belonged to a little girl—well, not so very little, either; rather a tall girl, on the whole, but evidently very young—sitting across the aisle. This girl was ridiculously dressed, Miss Packard thought, with no style at all about her; and yet, somehow—well, she was pretty, certainly. It seemed to be one of the best pews in the church. Her mother—that must be her mother—was "real stylish," certainly, though her gown was too plain; and, after all, the girl had style, too, in her way. It would be nice to have some one to speak to in this dreadful, poky little place that "Puppa" would insist on bringing her to. The idea of his not trusting her to stay alone at the boarding-house! Clarice had wept tears of vexation at being "cruelly forced," as she said, to come with her father to Hilton. She had called it a hole, and a desert, and everything else that her rather scanty vocabulary could afford. But now, here was a pretty little girl, who looked as if she were somebody, evidently courting her acquaintance. There was no mistaking the eager, imploring gaze of the clear hazel eyes. Clarice nodded slightly, and smiled. The younger girl flushed all over, and her face seemed to quiver with light in a way different from anything Clarice had ever seen. There might be some fun here, after all, if she had a nice little friend who would adore her, and listen to all her stories, which the other girls were sometimes disagreeable about.

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"MISS CLARICE PACKARD RUSTLED INTO HER FATHER'S PEW."

Two people in church, that Sunday, heard little of the excellent sermon. Sue could not even take her usual interest in the great east window, which was generally her mainstay through the parts of the sermon she could not follow. To begin with, there were the figures that made the story; but these were so clear and simple that they really said less, when once one knew the story by heart, than some other features. There were the eight blue scrolls that looked almost exactly like knights' helmets; and when you looked at them the right way, the round blue dots underneath made the knights' eyes; and there you had them, all ready for tournaments or anything. Scruples of conscience obliged Sue to have them always Templars or Knights of Malta, and they only fought against infidels. One of the knights had lost an eye; and the number of ways and places in which he had lost it was amazing: Saladin had run a lance into it at Acre; he had been tilting, just for fun, with Tancred, and Tancred hit him by mistake and put his eye out; and so on and so on. Then, there were the jewels, high up in the window; the small, splendid spots of ruby and violet and gold, which Sue was in the habit of taking out and making into jewels for her own adornment. The tiara of rubies, the long, dangling ear-rings of crystal set in gold, the necklace of sapphires—how often had she worn them to heart's content! And to-day she did, indeed, make use of them, but it was to adorn her new beauty, her new friend. She would bring them all to Clarice! She would put the tiara on her head, and clasp the necklace round her slender neck, and say, "All is yours!" And then she, Sue, would go by dale and would go by down with a single rose in her hair, just like Lady Clare; but Clarice would call her back and say: "Beloved, let us share our jewels and our joys!"

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Oh! Sue quivered at the thought, and looked so brightly and earnestly at the minister that the good old man was surprised and pleased, and said to himself that he should hardly have supposed his comments on Ezra would so impress even the young and, comparatively speaking, thoughtless!

When Clarice Packard came out of church, she found her would-be acquaintance dimpling and quivering on the door-step.

"Hallo!" said Clarice, with kind condescension, just exactly as she had done when Sue waked her up, in the dream!

"Hallo!" whispered Sue, in a rapturous whisper. This, she told herself, was the great moment of her life. Till now she had been a child; now she was—she did not stop to explain what, and it might have been difficult. 32

"Did you put this in my pew?" the new-comer went on, secretly displaying the sugar heart. Sue nodded, but could not trust herself to speak.

"It was just perfectly sweet of you!" said Clarice. "I'm real glad to have somebody to speak to; I was feeling real homesick."

Sue was dimly conscious that it was not good English to say "real" in that way; but perhaps people did say it in New York; and in any case, she could not stop to think of such trifles. She was in a glow of delight; and when Clarice asked her to walk down the street with her, the cup of happiness seemed brimming over. She, Sue Penrose, who had never in her life been out of Hilton, except now and then to go to Chester, the neighboring town—she was the one chosen by this wonderful stranger, this glittering princess from afar, to walk with her.

Sue did not see Mary at first. At length she became aware of her, gazing in wonder, and she gave a little quick, rapturous nod. There was no time to explain. She could only catch Mary's hand, in passing, and give it a squeeze, accompanied by a look of intense, dramatic significance. Mary would see, would understand. 33

Of course Mary would share her treasure, her new joy, sooner or later; but just now she could not surrender it to any one, not even to Mary. As Clarice passed her arm through hers, Sue straightened her slight figure, and looked as if the world were at her feet. And so they passed down the street; and Mary, left alone for the first time since she could remember, stood in the church porch and looked after them. 34

CHAPTER III

MARY'S VIEW

Mammy, I have seen her!"

"Well, Mary dear?"

"Oh, Mammy, it isn't well! It isn't a bit well; it 's just horrid! I don't like her a bit, and I never shall like her, I know."

Mrs. Hart made room beside her on the wide sofa in the corner of which she sat knitting. "Come and tell me, dear!" she said comfortably. "Let us take the trouble out and look at it; it may be smaller than you think. Tell Mammy all about it!"

Mary drew a long breath, and rubbed her head against her mother's arm. "Oh, Mammy, you do smooth me out so!" she said. "I feel better already; perhaps it isn't quite so bad as it seems to me, but I'm afraid it is. Well, I told you how they made friends?" 35

"Yes; Sue put a red sugar heart in the corner of the Packard pew, and she and the little girl—she isn't little? well, then, the big girl—made eyes at each other all through the service, and fell upon each other's neck afterward. My dear, it wasn't the thing to do, of course; but Sue meant no harm, and it was a truly Susannic proceeding. What came next?"

"You know I was busy all day Monday, helping you with the strawberry-jam. Well, they were together all day; and yesterday, when I went over to see Sue, she was at the hotel with Clarice, and had been invited to stay to dinner. I stayed and played with Lily, who seemed pretty forlorn; and I kept hoping Sue would come back; but she didn't. Mammy!"

"Yes, dear."

"I *do* think Lily has a forlorn time! You spoke to me about it once, and I said then I didn't think so. I—I think it was just that I didn't see, then; now I do!" 36

Mrs. Hart patted Mary's arm, but said nothing; and the girl went on:

"Well, then, this morning, about an hour ago, Sue came flying over in the wildest excitement. Clarice Packard was there at her house, and I must come over that very minute. She was the

dearest and loveliest creature in the world; and we must love each other, too; and we should be three hearts that beat as one; and she never was so happy in her life! You must have heard her, Mammy; all this was in the front entry, and she was swinging on the door all the time she was talking; she hadn't time to let go the handle, she said."

"Yes, I heard; but I was busy, and did not notice much. She seemed to be rather unusually 'quicksilvery,' I thought. And did you fly over with her?"

"Why, no; I was just going to feed the dogs,—I promised the boys I would, because they wanted to go fishing early,—and I had the chickens to see to, and I couldn't go that minute. I oughtn't to have gone at all, Mammy, for you needed me, though you would say you didn't. Well, Sue went off quite huffy; but when I did go over, she forgot all about it, and was all beaming and rippling. She is a darling, if she does provoke me sometimes! She flew downstairs to meet me, and hugged me till I had no breath left, and almost dragged me upstairs to her room. She was out of breath as well as I, and she could only say: 'Oh, Clarice, this is Mary! Mary, this is Clarice Packard, my new friend. She doesn't care a bit about being two years older than we are! And now we shall all three be friends, like—like the Dauntless Three, don't you know? Oh, isn't this splendid! Oh, I never was so happy in my life!'"

37

"Mammy, Clarice Packard didn't look as if she had ever heard of the Dauntless Three! but she smiled a little, thin smile, and opened her eyes at me, and said, 'So glad!' I shook hands, of course, and her hand just flopped into mine, all limp and froggy. I gave it a good squeeze, and she made a face as if I had broken her bones."

"You have a powerful grip, you know, Mary! Everybody isn't used to wrestling with boys; you probably did hurt her."

38

"I know, Mammy; I suppose I did squeeze too hard. Well! Sue had been showing her everything—all *our* things, that we play with together. She didn't say much,—well, perhaps she could not have said very much, for Sue was talking all the time,—but I felt—Mammy, I felt sure that she didn't really care about any of them. I know she laughed at the telephone, because I saw her."

"'I have a real telephone in my room at home,' she said, 'a long-distance one. My dearest friend lives in Brooklyn, and we have a line all to ourselves. Puppa is one of the directors, you know, and I told him I couldn't have other people listening to what Leonie and I said to each other, so he gave us a private line.' Mammy, do you believe that? I don't!"

"I cannot say, my dear!" said Mrs. Hart, cautiously. "It sounds unlikely, but I cannot say it is not true. Go on."

"I think Sue had been showing Clarice her dresses before I came, for the closet door was open, and her pink gingham was on the bed; and presently Clarice said: 'Have you any jewelry?'"

39

"Sue ran and brought her box, and took out all her pretty little things. You know what pretty things Sue has, Mammy! You remember the blue mosaic cross her godmother sent her from Italy, with the white dove on it, and the rainbow-shell necklace, and that lovely enameled rose-leaf pin with the pearl in the middle?"

"Yes; Sue has some very pretty trinkets, simple and tasteful, as a child's should be. Mrs. Penrose has excellent taste in all such matters. Sue must have enjoyed showing them to a new person."

"Dear Sue! she was so pleased and happy, she never noticed; but I could see that that girl was just laughing at the things. Of course none of them are showy—I should hope not!—but you would have thought they were nothing but make-believe, the way she looked at them. She kept saying, 'Oh, very pretty! quite sweet!' and then she would open her eyes wide and smile; and Sue just quivered with delight every time she did it. Sue thinks it is perfectly beautiful; she says it is Clarice's soul overflowing at her eyes. I want to shake her every time she does it. Well, then she said in a sort of silky voice she has—Sue calls it 'silken,' and I call it 'silky'; and I think, somehow, Mammy, that shows partly the way she strikes us both, don't you?—she said in that soft, silky way, 'Any diamonds, dear?' Of course she knew Sue had no diamonds! The idea! I never heard anything so ridiculous. And when Sue said no, she said: "I wish I had brought my chain; I should like to show it to you. Puppa thought it hardly safe for me to bring it down here into the backwoods, he said. It goes all round my neck, you know, and reaches down to my belt. It cost a thousand dollars.' Mammy, do you believe that?"

40

"I don't think it at all likely, my dear! I am afraid Clarice is given to romancing. But of course she may have a good deal of jewelry. Some very rich people who have not just our ideas about such matters often wear a great many jewels—more than we should like to wear, even if we had the means. But people of good taste would never allow a young girl to wear diamonds."

41

"I should think not, Mammy! Clarice Packard had no diamonds on, but her hands were just covered with rings—rather cheap, showy rings, too. There was one pretty one, though, that took Sue's fancy greatly, and mine too, for that matter. It was a ring of gold wire, with a tiny gold mouse running loose round it—just loose, Mammy, holding on by its four little feet. Oh, such a pretty thing! Sue was perfectly enchanted with it, and could not give over admiring it; and at last Clarice took it off, and put it on Sue's finger, and said she must wear it a little while for her sake. I wish, somehow, Sue had said no; but she was so happy, and 'quicksilvered' all over so, it was pretty to see her. She threw her arms round Clarice's neck, and told her she was a dear, beautiful, royal darling. Then Clarice whispered something in Sue's ear, and looked at me out of

the corner of her eye, and Sue colored and looked distressed; and—and so I came away, Mammy dear, and here I am!"

"Rather hot, and a little cross?" said Mrs. Hart.

42

"Yes, Mammy."

"And with a sore spot in your heart?"

"Yes, Mammy."

Mrs. Hart put down her knitting and held out her arms, and Mary curled up in her lap, and tried to shorten her long legs and make herself as small as might be.

"You know what I am afraid of, Mammy!" she said.

Her mother nodded, and pressed the comforting arms closer round her little girl, but said nothing.

"I am afraid I am going to lose my Sue, my own Sue, who has always belonged to me. It doesn't seem as if I could bear it, Mammy. It has come—so—don't you know?—so all of a sudden! We never thought anything could possibly come between us. I never should think of wanting any one but Sue, and I thought—it was the same—with her. And—and now—she does not see herself how it is, not a bit; she is just as sweet and loving as ever, and she thinks that I can start right in as she has done, and love this girl, and that there will be three of us instead of two. Mammy, it cannot be. You see that, I'm sure; of course you do! And—and I am very sad, Mammy."

43

Mrs. Hart stroked the brown head in silence for a few minutes; then she said:

"Dear child, I don't really think we need be afraid of that—of your losing Sue permanently. You are likely to have an uncomfortable summer; that, I fear, we must expect. But Sue is too good and loving at bottom to be seriously moved by this new-comer; and a tie like that between you and her, Mary, is too strong to be easily loosed. Sue is dazzled by the glitter and the novelty, and all the quicksilver part of her is alive and excited. It is like some of your stories coming true, or it seems so to her, I have no doubt. Remember that you are very different, you two, and that while you are steady-going and content with every-day life, she is always dreaming, and longing for something new and wonderful. She would not be so dear to you if you were more alike, nor you to her. But by and by the other part of her, the sensible part, will wake up again, and she will see what is foolish in this new friendship, and what is real and abiding in the old. Then, too, Mary, you must remember that you are excited as well as Sue, and perhaps not quite just. You have only seen this girl once—"

44

"It would be just the same, Mammy, if I had seen her a hundred times; I know it would!"

"No, love; you cannot know that. Some people show their worst side on first acquaintance, and improve as we know them better. You certainly must show some attention to Clarice Packard. Your father has met Mr. Packard, and says he seems a sensible man, though not a person of much education. Suppose you invite the girl here and let me see her? We might ask her to tea some evening this week."

"No, Mammy; Papa would not endure it; I know he would not. There! look, Mammy! There they go, she and Sue. Look and see for yourself!"

Mrs. Hart looked, and saw the two girls pacing along the opposite sidewalk, arm in arm. Clarice was bending over Sue with an exaggerated air of confidence; her eyes languished, and she shook her head and shrugged her shoulders with an air of ineffable consequence.

45

"You are right, dear," said Mrs. Hart; "not to tea, certainly. What shall we do, then? Let me see! You might have a picnic, you three girls; that is an excellent way of improving acquaintance. You may find it quite a different thing, meeting in an informal way. The first interview would, of course, be the trying one."

Mary brightened. "That would be just the thing!" she said. "And I will try, Mammy, I surely will try to like Clarice, if I possibly can; and of course I can be nice to her, anyhow, and I will. Oh, here comes Sue back again, and I'll ask her!"

Sue came flying back along the street at a very different pace from the mincing steps to which she had been trying to suit her own. Mary rapped on the window. Sue flashed an answering smile, whirled across the street and in at the door, hugged Mary, kissed Mrs. Hart, and dropped on a hassock, all in one unbroken movement.

46

"Oh, Mrs. Hart," she cried, "did you see her? Did you see Clarice? Isn't she too perfectly lovely? Did you ever see such hair and eyes? Did you ever see any one walk so?"

"No, dear; I don't know that I ever did!" said Mrs. Hart. "But I could hardly see your friend's face, you know. You are very much pleased with her, are you, Sue dear?"

"Oh!" cried Sue, throwing her head back with a favorite ecstatic movement of hers. "Mrs. Hart, she is simply the most lovely creature I ever saw in my life. Her ways—why, you never imagined anything so—so gracious, and—and queenly, and—and—oh, I don't know what to call it. And she is going to stay all summer; and we are to be three together, she and Mary and I. You dear!" She stopped to hug Mary and take breath. "You dear old Sobriety, you haven't got a bit used to

Clarice yet; I'm only just beginning to get used to her myself, she's so different from us. She comes from New York, Mrs. Hart; just think of that! She walks down Broadway every day when she is at home. And she has told me all about the elevated railroad; she isn't a bit afraid to go on it, and I don't believe I should be. And—and—oh, Mrs. Hart, isn't it wonderful?"

47

Mrs. Hart smiled down into the beaming face; it was impossible not to respond to such heartfelt joy.

"Dear Sue!" she said affectionately. "You must bring your new friend to see me soon."

"Oh, of course I shall!" cried Sue.

"And Mary and I were just wondering whether it would be pleasant for you three to have a picnic some day soon."

"Oh, Mrs. Hart, how perfectly delightful! When can we go? To-day? I'll run after Clarice and tell her."

"No, no, Quicksilver!" said Mary, catching Sue's skirt as she sprang up, and pulling her down to her seat again. "We can't go to-day, possibly. Perhaps to-morrow—what do you say, Mammy? or would Friday be better?"

Sue's face fell. "Friday!" she said. "Why, Mary, Friday is ever and ever so far off! I don't see how we *can* wait till Friday!"

"To-morrow will do very well," said Mrs. Hart. "I have a small chicken-pie that will be the very thing; and there are doughnuts and cookies. How is your mother feeling, Sue? Will she or Katy be able to get up something for you, do you think?"

48

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mrs. Hart! I'll make an angel-cake; and there is jam, and—well, Katy was going to show me how to make croquettes some time, and perhaps I'll learn how to-morrow, and then they will be all ready, you see; and oh, we'll have all kinds of things. Let's go and see about them now, Mary! Oh, and we'll ask the boys. Don't you think they will come, Mary? Clarice wants to know them. Isn't that sweet of her?"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Hart and Mary, in one breath. "Has she seen them?"

"No; but she asked if there were any nice boys here, and of course I said yes, the nicest boys in the world—Tom and Teddy; and she asked me to introduce them to her; and—and so, you see!"

"I see!" said Mrs. Hart, with a quiet smile. "There are the boys now, back from fishing. Why don't you all go and have a good game of 'I spy' in the orchard?"

49

"Oh, good!" cried both girls.

They ran to the door just in time to meet two jolly, freckled boys who came rolling in, both talking at once. Sue stumbled and fell over one of them, knocking his cap off, and his basket out of his hand.

"Now, then, Quicksilver," said Tom, "where are you a-coming to? Thermometer smashed, and mercury running all over the lot, eh?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Tom—I do indeed! But I saved you the trouble of taking off your hat, anyhow. Come along and play 'I spy' in the orchard."

"Hurrah!" cried the boys. "Where's Mammy? Oh, Mammy, pickereels! five fine fat festive pickereels! Fried for supper, please, Mammy! Coming, Quicksilver! All right, Ballast!" (Ballast was Mary's nickname, as the opposite of Quicksilver.) "Who'll count out?"

"I!" "Me!" "You!"

They tumbled out of the back door together, and the last sound Mrs. Hart heard was:

"Wonozol, zoo-ozol, zigozol, zan,
Bobtail, vinegar, tittle-tol, tan;
Harum-scarum, virgin marum,
Hy, zon, tus!"

50

CHAPTER IV

EARLY IN THE MORNING



At six o'clock on Thursday morning Sue was up and scanning the clouds. There were not many clouds to scan; the sun was rising bright and glorious in a wonderful blue sky.

"It's going to be a perfectly splendid day!" said Sue. "I must call Mary. I don't believe she is awake. Oh, I'll send a pigeon; that's just what I'll do. It will be lovely to be waked up by a pigeon this glorious morning; and I have to feed them, anyhow, because I said I would. I am never going

to forget the pigeons again—never! The next time I do, I shall go without food for two days, and see how I like it."

51

Sue dashed into her dress, buttoned it half-way up, and rushed headlong down the stairs and through the kitchen. Katy, the maid of all work, was crossing the floor with a brimming pan of milk. Crash! Sue ran directly into her. The pan fell with a mighty splash; the milk flew over both Katy and Sue, wetting them from head to feet.

"Indade, then, Miss Sue, 'tis too bad of yez entirely!" cried Katy. "And laughin', too, after sp'ilin' me gown and desthroyin' me clane flure, let alone all the milk in the house gone."

"Oh, but, Katy, if you knew how funny you look, with the white milk all over your red face! I can't help laughing; I truly can't. And my dress is spoiled too, you see, so it's all right. I can't stop now; I'm in the most terrible hurry!"

She flew on, but popped her head back through the door to say:

"But I am sorry, Katy; I truly am! And if you'll just leave the milk there, I'll pick it up—I mean wipe it up—just as soon as I get back from the picnic."

52

Her smile was so irresistible that Katy's angry face softened in spite of herself.

"Sure it's merely a child she is," the good woman said. "Miss Lily's twice the sinse of her, but yet 'tis her takes the heart of one!"

She brought the mop and wiped up the milk, then went soberly to change her dress, wondering how the mistress would make her breakfast without the milk-toast which was usually all she could fancy in the morning.

Sue had already forgotten the milk. She ran on across the yard, where the dew lay thick and bright, to a small building that stood under a spreading apple-tree. It had been a shed once, and its general effect was still, Sue admitted, "a little sheddy"; but the door was very fine, being painted a light pea-green, the panels picked out with scarlet, and having a really splendid door-plate of bright tin, with "S. PENROSE" in black letters. Some white pigeons sat on the roof sunning themselves, and they fluttered down about the girl's head as she tried the door.

"Dear me!" said Sue. "How stupid of me to lock the door last night! I might have known I should forget the key this morning. Never mind; I can get in at the window."

53

She could, and did; but, catching her dress on a nail, tore a long, jagged rent in the skirt.

"Dear me!" said Sue, again. "And I don't believe there is another clean one, since I spilt the ink last night. Never mind!"

Sue ran up the narrow stairs, and, crossing a landing, entered a tiny room, papered with gay posters. There was plenty of room for the little table and two chairs, and if a third person should come in she could sit on the table. A narrow shelf ran all round the room. This was the Museum, and held specimens of every bird's nest in the neighboring country (all old nests; if Sue had caught any one robbing a nest, or stealing a new one, it would have gone hard with that person), and shells and fossils from the clay bank near the river. The boys played "Prehistoric Man" there a good deal, and sometimes they let Sue and Mary join them, which was great glory. Then there was smoked glass for eclipses (Sue smoked them after the last eclipse, a year ago, so as to be ready for the next one; but the next one was only the moon, which was tiresome, because you didn't need smoked glass), and a dried rattlesnake, and a portrait of Raphael framed in lobster-claws. Sue did not look at these treasures now, because she knew they were all there; but if any "picknickle or bucknickle" had been missing, she would have known it in an instant. Flinging herself into a chair, she hunted for a piece of paper; found one, but rejected it in favor of a smooth, thin sheet of birch bark, on which she wrote as follows:

54

"DEAREST JULIET: It is the east, and thou art the sun, and it's time to get up. I pray thee, wake, sweet maid! This white bird, less snowy than thy neck, bears thee my morning greeting. Do hurry up and dress! Isn't this day perfectly fine? Sha'n't we have a glorious picnic? What are you going to wear? My cake is just lovely! I burned the first one, so this isn't angel, it's buttercup, because I had to take the yolks. Star of my night, send back a message by the bird of love to thy adored

"ROMEO."

Hastily folding the note into a rather tipsy cocked hat, Sue opened a little door upon a ladder-like staircase, and called: "Coo! coo! coo!"

55

Down fluttered the pigeons, a dozen or more, and taking one in her hands, she fastened a note to a bit of ribbon that hung round its neck.

"There!" she said. "Oh, you dear darlings! I must give you your corn before I do another thing."

The corn was in a little covered bin on the landing at the head of the stairs. This landing was called the anteroom, and was fully as large as a small table-cloth. Sue scattered the corn with a free hand, and the pigeons cooed, and scrambled for it as only pigeons can. She kept one good handful to feed the messenger bird, and several others perched on her shoulders and thrust their soft heads into her hand.

"Dear things!" said Sue, again. "Zuleika, do you love me? Do you, Leila and Hassan? Oh, I wonder

if I look like Lili, in the Goethe book! If I were only tall, and had a big white hat and a long white gown with ruffles, I think perhaps—"

56

She stopped short, for a voice was calling from below: "Sue, Sue, where are you?"

Sue's face, which had been as bright as Lili's own, fell.

"Oh, Mary Hart!" she cried. "How could you?"

"How could I what?" and Mary's rosy face looked up from the foot of the staircase.

"Why, I supposed you were still sound asleep, and I was just going to send a pigeon over. See! The note is all fastened on; and it's a Romeo note, too; and now you have spoiled it all!"

"Not a bit!" said Mary, cheerfully. "I'll run right back, Sue. I am only walking in my sleep. Look! see me walk!"

She stretched her arms out stiffly, and stalked away, holding her head high and staring straight in front of her. Sue observed her critically.

"You're doing it more like Lady Macbeth than Juliet!" she called after her. "But still it's fine, Mary, only you ought to glare harder, I think. Mind you stay asleep till the pigeon comes. It's Abou Hassan the wag" (the pigeons were named out of the "Arabian Nights"), "so you might give him a piece of apple, if you like, Juliet."

57

"No apples in Verona at this season!" said Juliet, in a sleep-walking voice (which is a loud, sepulchral monotone, calculated to freeze the blood of the listener). "I don't suppose hard-boiled egg would hurt him!" Then she snored gently, and disappeared round the corner.

"That was clever of Mary," said Sue. "I wish I walked in my sleep really and truly, like that funny book Mr. Hart has about Sylvester Sound. It would be splendid to be able to walk over the housetops and never fall, and never know anything about it till you woke up and found yourself somewhere else. And then, in that opera Mamma told me about, she walked right out of the window, and all kinds of things happened. It must be dreadfully exciting. But if I did walk in my sleep, I would always go to bed with my best dress on, only I'd have my feet bare and my hair down. Dear me! There's that gray cat, and I know she is after my pigeons! Just wait a minute, you cat!"

58

Sue dismissed the pigeons gently, and they fluttered obediently up to their cote, while she ran downstairs. Sure enough, a wicked-looking gray cat was crouching on a branch of the apple-tree, watching with hungry eyes the few birds that had remained on the roof. The cat did not see Sue, or, at all events, took no notice of her. Sue slipped round to the farther side of the tree and began to climb up silently. It was an easy tree to climb, and she knew every knob and knot that was comfortable for the foot to rest on. Soon she was on a level with the roof of the pigeon-house, and, peeping round the bole, saw the lithe gray body flattened along the bough, and the graceful, wicked-looking tail curling and vibrating to and fro. The pretty, stupid pigeons cooed and preened their feathers, all unconscious of the danger; another minute, and the fatal spring would come. Sue saw the cat draw back a little and stiffen herself. She sprang forward with a shout, caught the branch, missed it—and next moment Sue and cat were rolling on the ground together in a confused heap. Poor pussy (who could not understand why she might not have pigeons raw, when other people had them potted) fled, yowling with terror, and never stopped till she was under the kitchen stove, safe from bright-eyed, shouting avalanches. Sue picked herself up more slowly, and rubbed her head and felt for broken bones.

59

"I *won't* have broken anything," she said, "and spoil the picnic. Ow! that hurts; but I can wiggle it all right. I'll put some witch-hazel on it. My head seems to be a little queer!" Indeed, a large lump was already "swellin' visibly" on her forehead. "Never mind!" said Sue. "I'll put arnica on that, and vinegar and brown paper and things; perhaps it'll be all right by breakfast-time; and anyhow, I drove off the cat!" And she shook herself, and went cheerfully into the house.

Punctually at nine o'clock the three girls met on the door-step of the Penrose house, each carrying her basket. They were a curious contrast as they stood side by side. Clarice Packard was gaily dressed in a gown of figured challis, trimmed with rows on rows of ribbon, and a profusion of yellow lace. Her vast hat was tilted on one side, and her light hair was tormented into little flat curls that looked as if they were pinned on, though this was not the case. She had on a brooch, a gold chain, a locket, seven charms, five "stick-pins," four hat-pins, three bracelets, and eight rings; and, as Mary said to herself, she was "a sight to behold." If Clarice, on the other hand, had been asked to describe Mary, she would probably have called her a red-faced dowdy. As a rule, people did not think Mary Hart pretty; but every one said, "What a *nice*-looking girl!" And, indeed, Mary was as pleasant to look at as clear red and white—and freckles!—could make her, with the addition of a very sweet smile, and a pair of clear, honest, sensible blue eyes. Her brown holland frock was made in one piece, like a child's pinafore, and, worn with a belt of russet leather, made a costume of such perfect comfort that she and Sue had vowed to keep to it till they were sixteen, if their mothers would let them. Sue was not in brown holland to-day, because she had torn her last clean pinafore dress, as we have seen; but the blue gingham sailor-suit did well enough, and the blouse was very convenient to put apples in, or anything else from a tame squirrel to a bird's nest. Just now it held a cocoanut and some bananas that would not go into the basket, and that gave the light, fly-away figure a singular look indeed.

60

61

But Sue's bright face was clouded just now. She stood irresolute, swinging her basket, and

looking from one to the other of her companions.

"Mother says we must take Lily!" she announced in a discontented tone. "I don't see how we can be bothered with having her. She'll want to know everything we are talking about, and we sha'n't have half so much fun."

Clarice looked sympathetic. "Children are such a nuisance!" she said, and shrugged her shoulders. "Seems to me they ought to know when they are not wanted."

"Nonsense, Sue!" said Mary, ignoring the last speech. "Of course we will take Lily; she'll be no trouble at all, and she will help a good deal with the wreaths and baskets. I'll see to her," she added, a little pang of bitterness mingling with one of self-reproach. She had not always wanted to take Lily when she and Sue were together. They always had so much to say to each other that was extremely important, and that no one else could possibly understand, that a third in the party, and that third a child of nine, seemed sadly in the way. Now, however, all was changed. Somehow, it was herself who was the third. Perhaps Lily's presence would be a relief to-day.

62

Presently the little girl came running out, all beaming with delight at being allowed to go on the big girls' picnic.

"Mother has given me a whole bottle of raspberry shrub!" she announced joyfully.

"Hurrah!" cried Sue, her face brightening again. "We can have toasts, and that will be splendid. Now let's start, girls! Come, Clarice. Let me carry your basket; it's heavy, and I can carry two just as well as one."

"Start!" echoed Clarice. "We are not going to walk, are we?"

65



ON THE WAY TO THE PICNIC.

"Why, yes," said Sue, looking a little blank. "Don't you—aren't you fond of walking, Clarice? We always walk, Mary and I."

"Oh, certainly; I adore walking. Only, if I had known, Puppa would have sent the team for us. Is it far?" And Clarice glanced down at her shoes, with their paper soles and high heels.

"No," said Sue, cheerily. "Only a little bit of a way, not more than a mile. Oh, Clarice, what a lovely brooch that is! Won't you tell me about it as we go along? I am sure there is a story about it; there's something so exciting about all your things. Do tell me."

Clarice simpered and cast down her eyes, then cast a significant glance at the others. She took Sue's arm, and they walked on together, one listening eagerly, the other evidently pouring out some romantic story. Mary took Lily's hand in hers.


"Come, Lily," she said; "we will go together, and I'll tell you a story as we go. What one would you like? 'Goosey, Gobble, and Ganderee'? Very well!" But to herself Mary was saying: "I don't believe that girl ever walked a mile in her life. We shall have to carry her before we get to the Glen!"

66

67

CHAPTER V

THE PICNIC

larice Packard was indeed in rather a sad plight before they reached the Glen. Part of the road was sandy, and her high heels sank into the sand and made it hard walking for her, while her companions, in their broad-soled "sneakers," trod lightly and sturdily. Then, too, she had from time to time a stitch in her side, which forced her to sit down and rest for some minutes. Mary, looking at her tiny, wasp-like waist, thought it was no wonder. "Her belt is too tight," she whispered to Sue. "Of course she can't walk. Tell her to let it out two or three holes, and she will be all right."

68

"Oh, hush, Mary," whispered Sue. "It isn't that at all; it's only that she is so delicate. I ought never to have brought her all this way. She has been telling me about the fainting-fits she has sometimes. Oh, what should we do if she had one now!"

"Pour some water over her," said downright Mary. "But don't worry, Sue; we are nearly there, and it really *cannot* hurt her to walk one short mile, you know."

"Do you think not, Mary? But I am afraid you don't understand her. You see, she is so delicate, and you are as strong as a cart-horse. Clarice said so. And I suppose I am pretty strong, too."

"I'm much obliged to her," said Mary. "Come, Sue, let's push along; she will be all right when we once get there and she has rested a little."

The Glen was indeed a pleasant place. A clear stream ran along between high, rocky banks, with a green space on one side, partly shaded by two or three broad oak-trees. Under one of these trees was a bank of moss, as soft and green as if it had been piled by the fairies for their queen. Indeed, this was one of Sue's and Mary's theories, the other being that this special oak was none other than Robin Hood's own greenwood tree, transplanted by magic from the depths of Sherwood Forest. The former theory appealed more to Sue now, as she led the weary Clarice to the bank, and made her sit down in the most comfortable place.

69

"There, dear," she cried; "isn't this lovely? You shall rest here, Clarice, and we will play fairies, and you shall be Titania. You don't mind, do you, Mary, if Clarice is Titania this time? She is so slender, you see, and light; and besides, she is too tired to be anything else."

Mary nodded, with a smile; she could not trust herself to speak. She had been Titania ever since they first read "Lamb's Tales"; but it was no matter, and she had promised her mother to do her very best to bring Clarice out, and learn the better side of her.

"Isn't it lovely, Clarice?" she asked, repeating Sue's question as she took her place on the mossy bank.

70

"Alegant!" was the languid reply; "perfectly elegant. Isn't it damp, though? Doesn't it come off green on your clothes?"

Mary reassured her on this point. She examined her challis anxiously, and sank back again, apparently relieved. She looked round her. Sue and Lily had vanished for the moment. The trees met over their heads. There was no sound save the tinkling of the brook and the faint rustle of the leaves overhead.

"It's real lonesome, isn't it?" said Clarice.

"Yes," said Mary; "that's part of the beauty of it. There is never any one here, and we can do just as we like, with no fear of any one coming. I think in the woods it's pleasant to be alone, don't you?"

"Alegant!" said Clarice; "perfectly elegant! Are there any more people coming, did you say?"

"Only my brothers; they are coming later."

Clarice brightened, and sat up, arranging her trinkets. "Are they in college?" she asked, with more interest than she had shown in anything that day.

71

"Oh, no!" said Mary, laughing. "They are—"

But at this moment Sue came running up with an armful of ferns and oak-leaves, Lily following with another load. "I had to go a long way before I found any that were low enough to reach!" cried Sue, panting after her run. "I mustn't shin to-day, 'cause these are new stockings, and last time I tore them all to pieces."

"Tore these all to pieces?" asked Mary, laughing.

"Be still, Mary; I won't be quirked at. Now let's all make garlands. No, not you, Clarice; you must just rest. Do you feel better? Do you think you'll be all right in a little while? Now you shall be Titania and give us orders and things; and then, when we have finished the wreaths, we'll sing you to sleep. I am Oberon, you know, generally; but I'll be one of the common fairies now; and Lily—yes, Lily, you can be Puck. Now, can you say some of it, Clarice?"

"Some of what?" asked Clarice, with an uncomprehending look.

72

"Why, 'Midsummer-Night's Dream.' We always play that here, except when we play Robin Hood. Perhaps you would rather play Robin, Clarice; perhaps you don't care for 'Midsummer-Night's Dream.' Oh, I hope you do, though. We are *so* fond of it, Mary and I!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Clarice, rather peevisly. "Oh, Shakspeare's play? I never read it. I didn't take literature at school. Puppa thought I was too delicate to study much."

Sue looked blank for a moment. Not to know "Midsummer-Night's Dream"—that did seem very strange!

But Clarice opened her eyes at her and smiled and sighed. "My eyes have never been strong!" she murmured plaintively.

Sue's arms were round her in an instant. "You poor darling!" she cried. "Isn't that hard, Mary? isn't it cruel? To think of not having strong eyes! Clarice, I will come and read to you every day; I should just love to do it. We'll begin to-morrow morning. Oh, how splendid that will be! What shall we read first? You have read 'Westward Ho!' of course, and all Mrs. Ewing, and 'Prince Prigio,' and 'The Gentle Heritage,' and the Alices, and all the Waverleys?"

73

No; Clarice had read none of these. She had read "Wilful Pansy, the Bride of an Hour," she said, last; and she had just begun "My Petite Pet" before she came here. It was perfectly sweet, and so was another by the same author, only she couldn't remember the name.

"Aren't we going to play something?" asked Lily, plaintively. Lily could never understand why big girls spent so much good time in talking.

"Oh, yes!" cried Sue. "We must play, to get up an appetite for dinner; I've got one already, but I'll get another. What would you like to play, Clarice?"

"I don't care," said Clarice. "Anything you like."

"Oh, but do care, please!" cried Sue, imploringly; "because this is your picnic, really. We got it up for you; and we want you to have everything just as you like it; don't we, Mary?"

74

Mary assented civilly, and pressed Clarice to choose a game.

"Oh, but I really don't care in the least!" said Clarice. "I don't know much about games; my set of girls don't play them; but I'll play anything you like, dear!" She opened her eyes and smiled again, and again Sue embraced her ardently.

"You dear, sweet, unselfish thing!" she cried. "I think you are an angel; isn't she, Mary? Perhaps we needn't play anything, after all. What *would* you like to do, Clarice?"

But Clarice would not hear of this—would not choose anything, but would graciously play any game they decided on. A game of "Plunder" was started, but somehow it did not go well. Plunder is a lively game, and must be played with ardor. After two or three runs, Clarice put her hand to her side and gasped for breath.

"Only a stitch!" she murmured; and she sank down on the mossy bank, while the others gathered round her with anxious faces.

"It will go off in a minute. I'm afraid I am not strong enough to play this any more, girls. Rough games never suit me."

75

Mary flushed and looked at Sue; but Sue's gaze was fixed on Clarice, all contrition. "My dear! I am so sorry! You see, we've never been delicate, and we don't know how; we don't even know what it's like. Lie down, dear, and rest again! Oh, Mary, I feel as if we were murderers. See how white she is! Do you think she is going to die?"

This was more than Mary could stand. "I think you would be better, Clarice," she said bluntly, "if you loosened your dress a little. Sha'n't I let out your belt for you?"

But Clarice cried out, and declared her dress was too loose already. "I never wear anything tight," she said—"never! See, I can put my whole hand up under my belt." And so she could, when she drew her breath in. "No," she said; "it is my heart, I fear. I suppose I shall never be strong like some people. But don't mind me! Go on playing, and I will watch you."

But three were not enough for Plunder; and besides, the heart for playing seemed to be gone out of them all, except Lily, who pouted and hung her head, and thought this a very poor kind of picnic indeed. Clarice lay on the bank and fanned herself, looking utterly bored, as indeed she was. Sue regarded her with wide, remorseful eyes, and wondered what she ought to do. In desperation, Mary proposed lunch.

76

"I am getting hungry!" she said. "Aren't you, girls? It will take a little time to get the things out and trim the table; let's begin now."

All agreed with alacrity, and there was some animation as the baskets were unpacked and their contents spread on the "table," which was green and smooth, and had no legs. The platters were made of oak-leaves neatly plaited together. The chicken-pie was set out, the cakes and turnovers beside it, with doughnuts and sandwiches at convenient intervals. Sue tumbled the bananas and the cocoanut out of her blouse, and piled them in an artistic pyramid, tucking in fern-fronds and oak-leaves.

"There!" she said, surveying the effect with her head on one side. "That is pretty, isn't it, Mary—I mean Clarice?" 77

Mary pressed her lips together and squeezed Lily's hand hard. Clarice said it was "perfectly elegant," and then asked again if the gentlemen were coming.

"Gentlemen!" said Sue. "Oh, how funny you are, Clarice! Mary, isn't she funny? The idea of calling the boys gentlemen!"

"I hope they are!" was on the tip of Mary's tongue; but she refrained, and only said it was time they were here. As if in answer to her words, a joyous whoop was heard, and a scuttling among the branches. Next moment Tom and Teddy burst into the open, out of breath, as usual, tumbling over each other and over their words in their eagerness.

"Hallo! Hallo, Quicksilver! Are we late?"

"I say! we stopped to get some apples. Did you remember apples? I knew you wouldn't, so we—"

"And we found a woodchuck—"

"Oh, I say, Mary, you should have seen him! He sat up in the door of his hole, and—" 78

"Salt! you forgot the salt, Ballast, and Mammy sent it. Saccarappa! it's all spilled into my pocket. Do you mind a few crumbs?"

"Boys! boys!" said Mary, who had been trying in vain to make herself heard, "do be quiet! I want to introduce you to Miss Packard. Clarice, these are my brothers, Tom and Teddy."

The boys had no hats to take off,—they wore hats on Sunday, though!—but they bowed with the short, decisive duck of fourteen (indeed, Tom was fifteen, but he did not look it), and tried to compose their features. "Do!" they murmured; then, at a severe look from Mary, they came forward, and each extended a grimy paw and shook Clarice's gloved hand solemnly, leaving marks on it. The ceremony over, they breathed again, and dropped on the grass.

"Isn't this jolly?" they cried. "Ready for grub? We are half starved."

Clarice's look was almost tragic as she turned upon Sue. "Are these the boys you meant?" she asked in a whisper that was fully audible. "These—little—ragamuffins?" 81



"EACH CAME FORWARD AND SHOOK CLARICE'S GLOVED HAND SOLEMNLY."

Fortunately, Mary was talking to Teddy, and did not hear. Sue did, and for the first time her admiration for Clarice received a shock. She raised her head and looked full at Clarice, her hazel eyes full of fire. "I don't understand you," she said. "These are my friends; I invited them because you asked me to."

Clarice's eyes fell; she colored, and muttered something, Sue did not hear what; then she put her hand to her side and drew a short, gasping breath.

In an instant Sue's anger was gone. "Boys!" she cried hastily. "Tom, bring some water, quick! She's going to faint."

Clarice was now leaning back with closed eyes. "Never mind me," she murmured softly; "go on and enjoy yourselves. I shall be—better—soon, I dare say."

Splash! came a shower of water in her face. Tom, in eager haste, had stumbled over Sue's foot, and his whole dipperful of water was spilled over the fainting maiden. She sprang to her feet with amazing agility.

"You stupid, stupid boy!" she cried, stamping her foot, her eyes blazing with fury. "You did it on purpose; you know you did! Get away this minute!" 82

Then, while all looked on in silent amaze, she burst into tears, and declared she would go home that instant. She would not stay there to be made a fool of by odious, rude, vulgar boys.

There was dead silence for a moment. Then Tom said, slowly and solemnly (no one could be so solemn as Tom when he tried): "I beg your pardon, Miss Packard; I am very sorry. I will go away if you wish it, but I hope you will stay."

Sue wanted to hug Tom, but refrained. (She had decided a little while ago that she was getting too big to hug the boys any more.) "Tom, you are a darling," she whispered in his ear—"a perfect dear duck! And you can use the telephone all you like to-morrow. Clarice," she added aloud, "he has apologized; Tom has apologized, and that is all he can do, isn't it? You are all right now, aren't you?" 83

Clarice hesitated. Her dignity was on the one hand, her dinner on the other; she was hungry, and she yielded.

"If he didn't really mean to," she began ungraciously; but Mary cut her short with what the boys called her full-stop manner.

"I think there has been quite enough of this foolishness," she said curtly. "Sue, will you pass the sandwiches? Have some chicken-pie, Clarice!"

A sage has said that food stops sorrow, and so it proved in this case. The chicken-pie was good, and all the children felt wonderfully better after the second help all round. Tongues were loosed, and chattered merrily. The boys related with many chuckles their chase of the woodchuck, and how he finally escaped them, and they heard him laughing as he scuttled off.

"Well, he *was* laughing—woodchuck laughter; you ought just to have heard him, Mary."

Sue made them all laugh by telling of her encounter with Katy and the milk-pan. Even Clarice warmed up after her second glass of shrub, and told them of the picnics they had at Saratoga, where she had been last year. 84

"That was why I was so surprised at this kind of picnic, dear," she said to Sue, with a patronizing air. "It's so different, you see. The last one I went to, there were—oh, there must have been sixty people at the very least. It was perfectly elegant! There were two four-in-hands, and lots of drags and tandems. I went in a dog-cart with Fred. You know—the one I told you about." She nodded mysteriously and simpered, and Sue flushed with delighted consequence.

"What did you take?" asked Lily, her mouth full of chicken.

"Oh, a caterer furnished the refreshments," said Clarice, airily. "There was everything you can think of: salads, and ice-cream, and boned turkey, and all those things. Perfectly fine, it was! Everybody ate till they couldn't hardly move; it was elegant!"

"Didn't you do anything but just gob—I mean eat?" asked Mary.

"Oh, there was a band of music, of course; and we walked about some, and looked at the dresses. They were perfectly elegant! I wore a changeable taffeta, blue and red, and a red hat with blue birds in it. Everybody said it was just as cute! The reporter for the 'Morning Howl' was there, and he said it was the handsomest costume at the picnic. He was a perfect gentleman, and everything I had on was in the paper next day." 85

"This is soul-stirring," said Tom (who did sometimes show that he was fifteen, though not often), "but didn't I hear something about toasts?"

Clarice looked vexed, but Mary took up the word eagerly. "Yes, to be sure, Tom; it is quite time for toasts. Fill the glasses again, Teddy! Clarice, you are the guest of honor; will you give the first toast?"

Clarice shook her head, and muttered something about not caring for games.

"Then I will!" cried Sue; and she stood up, her eyes sparkling.

"I drink to Clarice!" she said. "I hope she will grow strong, and never have any heart again,—I mean any pain in it,—and that she will stay here a long, long time, till she grows up!" 86

Teddy choked over his glass, but the others said "Clarice!" rather soberly, and clinked their glasses together. Clarice, called upon for a speech in response to the toast, simpered, and said that Sue was too perfectly sweet for anything, but could think of nothing more. Then Tom was

called upon. He rose slowly, and lifted his glass.

"I drink to the health of Quicksilver Sue!
May she shun the false, and seek the true!"

Mary gave him a warning glance, but Sue was enchanted. "Oh, Tom, how dear of you to make it in poetry!" she cried, flushing with pleasure. "Wait; wait just a minute, and I'll make my speech."

She stood silent, holding up her glass, in which the sunbeams sparkled, turning the liquid to molten rubies; then she said rather shyly:

"I drink to Tom, the manly Hart,
And wish him all the poet's art!"

This was received with great applause.

87

Mary's turn came next; but before she could speak, Clarice had sprung to her feet with a wild shriek. "A snake!" she cried; "a snake! I saw it! It ran close by my foot. Oh, I shall faint!"

Teddy clapped his hand to his pocket, and looked shamefaced.

"I thought I had buttoned him in safe," he said. "I'm awfully sorry. The other one is in there all right; it was only the little one that got out."

But this was too much for Clarice. She declared that she must go home that instant; and after an outcry from Sue no one opposed her. The baskets were collected, the crumbs scattered for the birds, and the party started for home. Mary and her brothers led the way with Lily, Sue and Clarice following slowly behind with arms intertwined. Sue's face was a study of puzzled regret, self-reproach, and affection.

"Mary," said Tom.

"Hush, Tom!" said Mary, with a glance over her shoulder. "Don't say anything till we get home."

88

"I'm not going to say anything. But what famous book—the name of it, I mean—expresses what has been the matter with this picnic?"


"Oh, I don't know, Tom. 'Much Ado about Nothing'?"

"No," said Tom. "It's 'Ben Hur'!"

89

CHAPTER VI

AT THE HOTEL

 h Clarice, isn't it too bad that it's raining?" said Sue. "It hadn't begun when I started. It did look a little threatening, though. And I meant to take you such a lovely walk, Clarice. I don't suppose you want to go in the rain? I love to walk in the rain, it's such fun; but you are so delicate—"

"That's it," said Clarice, ignoring the wistful tone in Sue's voice. "I shouldn't dare to, Sue. There is consumption in my family, you know,"—she coughed slightly,— "and it always gives me bronchitis to go out in the rain. Besides, I have such a headache! Have some candy? I'll show you my new dresses, if you like. They just came this morning from New York—those muslins I told you about."

90

"Oh, that will be fun!" said Sue. But as she took off her tam-o'-shanter she gave a little sigh, and glanced out of the window. The rain was coming down merrily. It was the first they had had for several weeks, and sight, sound, and smell were alike delightful. It would be such fun to tramp about and splash in the puddles and get all sopping! Last summer, when the drought broke, she and Mary put on their bathing-dresses, and capered about on the lawn and played "deluge," and had a glorious time. But of course she was only twelve then, and now she was thirteen; and it made all the difference in the world, Clarice said. The water was coming in a perfect torrent from that spout! If you should hold your umbrella under it, it would go f-z-z-z-z-z! and fly "every which way"; that was centrifugal force, or something—

"Here they are," said Clarice.

Sue came back with a start, and became all eyes for the muslin dresses which were spread on the bed. They were too showy for a young girl, and the trimmings were cheap and tawdry; but the colors were fresh and gay, and Sue admired them heartily.

91

"Oh, Clarice, how lovely you will look in this one!" she cried. "Don't you want to try it on now, and let me see you in it?"

Clarice asked nothing better, and in a few minutes she was arrayed in the yellow muslin with

blue cornflowers. But now came a difficulty: the gown would not meet in the back.

"Oh, what a shame!" said Sue. "Will you have to send it back, Clarice, or can you have it altered here? There is a very good dressmaker; she makes all our clothes,—Mary's and mine,—except what are made at home."

Clarice giggled.

"I'm afraid she wouldn't be quite my style," she said. "I wondered where your clothes *were* made, you poor child! But this is all right. I'll just take in my stays a little, that's all."

"Oh, don't, Clarice! Please don't! I am sure it will hurt you. Why, that would be tight lacing, and tight lacing does dreadful things to you. I learned about it at school. Dear Clarice, don't do it, please!"

92

"Little goose! who said anything about tight lacing? I'm only going to—there! Now look—I can put my whole hand in. You mustn't be so awfully countrified, Sue. You can't expect every one to go about in a bag, as you and Mary Hart do. I am two years older than you, my dear, and I haven't lived in a village all my life. It is likely that I know quite as much about such matters as you do."

"I—I beg your pardon, Clarice!" said Sue, the quick tears starting to her eyes. "Of course you know a great, great deal more than I do; I—I only thought—"

"There, do you see?" Clarice went on. "Now, that is real comfortable—perfectly comfortable; and it does fit elegant, don't it?"

"It certainly makes you look very slender," faltered Sue.

"Don't it?" repeated Clarice. "That's what my dressmaker always says."

She was turning slowly round and round before the glass, enjoying the effect. "There is nothing like a slender figure, she says; and I think so, too. Why, Sue, if you'll promise never to tell a soul, I'll tell you something. I used to be fat when I was your age—almost as fat as Mary Hart. Just think of it!"

93

"Oh, did you? But Mary isn't really fat, Clarice. She's only—well, rather square, you know, and chunky. That is the way she is made; she has always been like that."

"I call her fat!" said Clarice, decisively. "Of course, it's partly the way she dresses, with no waist at all, and the same size all the way down. You would be just as bad, Sue, if you weren't so slim. I don't see what possesses you to dress the way you do, making regular guys of yourselves. But I was going to tell you. My dressmaker—she's an elegant fitter, and a perfect lady—told me to eat pickled limes all I could, and put lots of vinegar on everything, and I would get thin. My! I should think I did. I used to eat six pickled limes every day in recess. I got so that I couldn't hardly eat anything but what it had vinegar in it. And I fell right away, in a few months, to what I am now."

94

"Oh! Oh, Clarice!" cried Sue, transfixed with horror. "How could you? Why, it must have made you ill; I know it must. Is that why you are so pale?"

"Partly that," said Clarice, complacently. "Partly, I used to eat slate-pencils. I haven't had hardly any appetite for common food this year. The worst is these headaches I have right along. But I don't care! I should hate to have staring red cheeks like Mary Hart. Your color is different; it's soft, and it comes and goes. But Mary Hart is dreadful beefy-looking."

"Clarice," said Sue, bravely, though she quivered with pain at the risk of offending her new friend, "please don't speak so of Mary. She is my oldest friend, you know, and I love her dearly. Of course I know you don't mean to say anything unkind, but—but I'd rather you didn't, please."

"Why, I'm not saying anything against her character!" said Clarice; and any one save Sue might have detected a spiteful ring in her voice. "I won't say a word about her if you'd rather not, Sue, but if I do speak, I must say what I think. She's just as jealous of me as she can be, and she tries to make trouble between us—any one can see that; and I don't care for her one bit, so there!"

95

"Oh, Clarice, don't say that! I thought we were all going to be friends together, and love one another, and— But you don't really know Mary yet. She is a dear; really and truly she is."

Clarice tossed her head significantly. "Oh, *I* don't want to make mischief!" she said. "Of course it doesn't matter to *me*, my dear. Of course I am only a stranger, Sue, and I can't expect you to care for me half as much as you do for Mary Hart. Of course I am nobody beside her."

"Clarice, Clarice, how can you? Don't talk so. It *kills* me to have you talk so! when you know how I love you, how I would do anything in the wide world for you, my dear, lovely Clarice!"

Clarice pouted for some time, but finally submitted to be embraced and wept over, and presently became gracious once more, and said that all should be forgiven (she did not explain what there was to forgive), and only stipulated that they should not talk any more about Mary Hart. Then she changed the subject to the more congenial one of clothes, and became eloquent over some of the triumphs of her dressmaker. Finally, in a fit of generosity, she offered to let Sue try on the other muslin dress. Sue was enchanted. "And then we can play something!" she cried. "Oh, there are all kinds of things we can play in these, Clarice."

96

"I guess not!" said Clarice. "Play in my new dresses, and get them all tumbled? Sue Penrose, you

are too childish. I never saw anything like the way you keep wanting to play all the time. I should think you were ten, instead of thirteen."

Much abashed, Sue begged again for forgiveness. She did not see so very much fun in just putting on somebody else's dress and then taking it off again, but she submitted meekly when Clarice slipped it over her head. But the same difficulty arose again: the dress would not come anywhere near meeting round Sue's free, natural figure.

97

"Here," said Clarice; "wait a minute, Sue. I've got another pair of stays. We'll fix it in a moment."

Sue protested, but was overruled. Clarice was determined, she said, to see how her little friend would look if she were properly dressed for once. In a few moments she was fastened into the blue muslin, and Clarice was telling her that she looked too perfectly sweet for anything.

"Now *that* is the way for you to dress, Sue Penrose. If I were you I should insist upon my mother's getting me a pair of stays to-morrow. Why, you look like a different girl. Why, you have an elegant figure—perfectly elegant!"

But poor Sue was in sore discomfort, and no amount of "elegance" could make her at ease. She could hardly breathe; she felt girded by a ring of iron. Oh, it was impossible; it was unbearable!

"I never, never could, Clarice!" she protested. "Unhook it for me; please do! Yes, it is very pretty, but I cannot wear it another moment."

98

She persisted, in spite of Clarice's laughing and calling her a little countrified goose, and was thankful to find herself free once more, and back in her own good belted frock.

"Oh, Clarice," she said, "if you only *knew* how comfortable this was, you would have your dresses made so; I know you would."

"The idea!" said Clarice. "I guess not, Sue. Have some more candy? My, how my head aches!"

"It is this close room," said Sue, eagerly. "Clarice, dear, you are looking dreadfully pale. See, it has stopped raining now. Do let us come out; I know the fresh air will do you good."

But Clarice shook her head, and said that walking always made her head worse, and she should get her death of cold, besides.

"Then lie down, and let me read to you. Why, I forgot; I have 'Rob Roy' in my pocket; I wondered what made it so heavy. I remember, now, I did think it might possibly rain, so I brought 'Rob' in case. There, dear, lie down and let me tuck you up. Oh, Clarice, you do look so lovely lying down! I always think of you when I want to think of the Sleeping Beauty. There, now; shut your eyes and rest, while I read."

99

Clarice detested "Rob Roy," but her head really did ache,—she had been eating candy all the afternoon and most of the morning,—and there was nothing else to do. She lay back and closed her eyes. They were dreadfully stupid people in this book, and she could hardly understand a word of the "Scotch stuff" they talked. She wished she had brought "Wilful Pansy, the Bride of an Hour," or some other "elegant" paper novel. And thinking these thoughts, Clarice presently fell asleep, which was perhaps the best thing she could do.

Sue read on and on, full of glory and rejoicing. Di Vernon was one of her favorite heroines, and she fairly lived in the story while she was reading it. She was in the middle of one of Di's impassioned speeches when a sound fell on her ear, slight but unmistakable. She looked up, her eyes like stars, the proud, ringing words still on her lips. Clarice was asleep, her head thrown back, her mouth open, peacefully snoring. Another snore, and another! Sue closed the book softly. It was a pity that Clarice had lost that particular chapter, it was so splendid; but she was tired, poor darling, and her head ached. It was the best thing, of course, that she should have fallen asleep. Sue would watch her sleep, and keep all evil things away. It was not clear what evil things could come into the quiet room of the respectable family hotel, but whatever they might be, Sue was ready for them.

100

Sue's ideas of hotel life had become considerably modified since she had had some actual experience of it. Instead of being one round of excitement, as she had fancied, she was obliged to confess that it was often very dull. The Binns House was a quiet house, frequented mostly by "runners," who came and went, and with a small number of permanent boarders—old couples who were tired of housekeeping, or ancient single gentlemen. The frescoes and mirrors were there, but the latter reflected only staid middle-aged faces, or else those of bearded men who carried large handbags, and wore heavy gold watch-chains, and smelt of strong tobacco and cheap perfumery. Even the table, with its array of little covered dishes that had once promised all the delights of fairy banquets, proved disappointing. To lift a shining cover which ought to conceal something wonderful with a French name, and to find squash—this was trying; and it had happened several times. Also, there was a great deal of mincemeat, and it did not compare with Katy's. And the bearded men gobbled, and pulled things about, and talked noisily. Altogether, it was as different as could well be imagined from Sue's golden dream. And it was simply impossible to use the soap they had, it smelt so horribly.

101

Hark! was that a foot on the stairs? Suppose something were really going to happen now, while Clarice was asleep! Suppose she should hear voices, and the door should open softly, softly, and a villainous face look in—a bearded face, not fat and good-natured looking like those people's at

dinner, but a haggard face with hollow, burning eyes and a savage scowl. Some robber had heard of Clarice's jewelry and her father's wealth, and had come all the way from New York (there were no robbers in Hilton) to rob, perhaps to murder her. Ah! but Sue would fling herself before the unconscious sleeper, and cry: "Back, villain, or I slay thee with my hands!" He might go then; but if he didn't, she would throw the lamp at him. She and Mary had decided long ago that that was the best thing to do to a robber when you had no weapons, because the oil and glass together would be sure to frighten him. And—and—oh! what was that? 102

This time it was no fancy. A man's voice was heard in the hall below; a man's foot came heavily up the stairs, and passed into the next room. A hand was laid on the latch.

"Clarissy, are you here?" asked the voice.

Sue sprang to her feet. It was Mr. Packard. What should she do? Mr. Packard was no robber, but Sue did not like him, and it seemed quite out of the question that he should find her here, with Clarice asleep. Seizing her tam and her jacket, and slipping "Rob Roy" into her pocket, she opened the window softly, and stepped out on the balcony which formed the roof of the hotel porch. She might have gone out of the other door, but the window was nearer; besides, it was much more exciting, and he might have seen her in the passage. Sue closed the window behind her, with a last loving glance at Clarice, who snored quietly on; and just as Mr. Packard entered the room she climbed over the balustrade and disappeared from sight. 103

"What upon earth is that?" asked Mrs. Binns, looking out of the window of the office, which was on the ground floor. "Somebody shinnin' down the door-post!—a boy, is it? Do look, Mr. Binns. I ain't got my glasses."

Mr. Binns looked.

"Well, I should say!" he remarked, with a slow chuckle. "It's Mis' Penrose's little gal. Well, she is a young 'un, to be sure! Be'n up to see the Packard gal, I s'pose. Now, you'd think she'd find the door easier; most folks would. But it wouldn't be Sue Penrose to come out the door while the' was a window handy by, *and* a post." 104

"Sue Penrose is gettin' too big to go shinnin' round the street that way," said Mrs. Binns. "I don't care for that Packard gal myself; she's terrible forthputtin', and triflin' and greedy, besides; but you wouldn't see her shinnin' down door-posts, anyway."

"Humph!" said Mr. Binns. "She don't know enough!" 105

CHAPTER VII

THE MYSTERY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

Mary! Mary Hart! I want to speak to you. Are you alone?"

"Yes," said Mary, looking up from her mending. "I am just finishing Teddy's stockings; he does tear them so. Come in, Sue."

"Hush! No; I want you to come out, Mary. It's something very important. Don't say a word to any one, but come down to the arbor this minute. I must see you alone. Oh, I am so excited!"

The arbor was at the farther end of the Harts' garden—a pleasant, mossy place with seats, and a great vine climbing over it. Mary put away her basket methodically, and joined Sue, whom she found twittering with excitement. 106

"Oh, Mary, what do you think? But first you must promise not to tell a living soul. Honest and true, black and blue! Promise, Mary, or my lips are sealed forever!"

"I promise," said Mary, without thinking.

Sue's tremendous secrets were not generally very alarming.

Sue drew a long breath, looked around her, said "Hush!" two or three times, and began:

"Isn't it perfectly splendid, Mary? The circus is coming to Chester on the 24th, and Clarice and I are going. It is going to be the greatest show in the world; the paper says so; and I've seen the pictures, and they are simply glorious. Isn't it fine? Clarice has asked me to spend the day with her at the hotel, and Mother says I may; and Clarice is going to treat me. Mary, she is the most generous girl that ever lived in this world. You don't half appreciate her, but she is."

"Who is going to take you to the circus?" asked practical Mary. "Mr. Packard?" 107

"Hush! No. That is the exciting part of it. We are going alone, just by ourselves."

"Sue! You cannot! Go up to Chester alone—just you two girls?"

"Why not? Clarice is much older than I, you know, Mary. Clarice is fifteen, and she says it is perfectly absurd for us to be such babies as we are. She says that in New York girls of our age

wear dresses almost full length, and put up their hair, and—and all kinds of things. She says it's just because we live down East here that we are so countrified. And she knows all about going to places, and she has lots of money, and—and so—oh, Mary, isn't it exciting?"

"What does your mother say?" asked Mary, slowly. "Is she willing, Sue?"

"I am not going to tell her!" said Sue.

Her tone was defiant, but she colored high, and did not look at Mary as she spoke.

"You are not—going—to tell your mother?" repeated Mary, in dismay. "Oh, Sue!"

"Now, hush, hush, Mary Hart, and listen to me! Clarice says what's the use? She says it would only worry Mother, and I ought not to worry her when she is so delicate. She says she thinks it is a great mistake for girls to keep running to their mothers about everything when they are as big as we are. She *never* does, she says—well, it's her aunt, but that makes no difference, she says; and she is fifteen, you know. Besides, my mother is very different from yours; you know she is, Mary. I suppose I *should* want to tell things to your mother if she was mine. But you know perfectly well how Mamma is; she never seems to care, and it only bothers her and makes her head ache."

108

"Sue, how can you talk so? Your mother is ill so much of the time, of course she can't—can't be like my Mammy, I suppose."

Mary faltered a little as she said this. She had often wished that Mrs. Penrose would take more interest in Sue's daily life, but she felt that this was very improper talk.

"I don't think you ought to talk so, Sue!" she said stoutly. "I am sure you ought not. I think Clarice Packard has a very bad influence over you, and I wish she had never come here."

109

"Clarice says you are jealous, Mary, and that you try to make trouble between her and me. I don't believe that; but you have *no* imagination, and you cannot appreciate Clarice. If you knew what she has done for me—how she has opened my eyes."

Sue's vivid face deepened into tragedy. "Mary, I believe I will tell you, after all. I didn't mean to,—Clarice warned me not to,—but I will. Mary, there is a mystery in my life. Hush! don't speak—don't say a word! I am a foundling!"

If Mary had been less amazed and distressed, she must have laughed aloud. Sue, in her brown holland frock, her pretty hair curling round her face, her eyes shining with excitement, was the very image of her mother. As it was, Mary could only gasp, and gaze round-eyed.

"I am! I am sure of it!" Sue hurried on. "It explains everything, Mary: Mamma's not caring more, and my feeling the way I do, and everything. Clarice says she is sure it must be so. She knows a girl, the most beautiful girl she ever saw, and she never knew it till she grew up, because they were so fond of her; but she was left on their door-step in a wicker basket lined with pink satin, and a note pinned to her clothes saying that her parents were English noblemen, but they never would acknowledge her because she wasn't a boy. And so! And you know I have always felt that there was *something wrong*, Mary Hart, and that I was not like other children; you know I have!"

110

"I know you have often talked very foolishly," said Mary, "but I never heard you say anything wicked before. Sue, this is downright wicked, and ridiculous and absurd besides. I never heard such nonsense in my life, and I don't want to hear any more of it."

Both girls had risen to their feet, and stood facing each other. Mary was flushed with distress and vexation; but Sue had turned very pale.

"Very well!" she said, after a pause. "I see Clarice is right. You have a mean, jealous spirit, Mary. I thought I could tell the—the great thing of my life, to my most intimate friend,—for you *have* been my most intimate friend,—and you would understand; but you don't. You never have understood me; Clarice has said so from the beginning, and now I know she is right. At least, I have *one* friend who can feel for me. Good-by, Mary—forever!"

111

"Oh, Sue!" cried Mary, wanting to laugh and cry together. But Sue was gone, dashing through the garden at tempest speed, and flinging the gate to behind her with a crash.

Mary went into the house, and cried till she could not see. But there were no tears for Sue. She ran up to her room, and locked the door. Then, after looking carefully around, she drew out from under the bed an old brown leather writing-desk, produced a key that hung by a ribbon round her neck, unlocked the desk, and took out a faded red morocco blank-book. It had once been an account-book, and had belonged to her grandfather; the great thing about it was that it had a lock and key! Opening it, Sue found a blank page, and flinging herself over the table, began to write furiously:

112

"Mary and I have parted—parted forever. She was my dearest upon earth, but I know her no more. Her name is Hart, but she has none, or at least it is of marble. I am very unhappy, a poor foundling, with but one friend in the world. I sit alone in my gloomy garet." (The sun was pouring in at the window, but Sue did not see it.) "My tears blot the page as I write." (She tried to squeeze out a tear, failed, and hurried on.) "My affections are blighted, but I am proud, and they shall see that I don't care one bit how mean they are. I am of noble blood, I feel it coursing in my veins, and I shouldn't wonder a bit if I were a princess. And if I die young, Mary Hart can come

and shed tears on my monument and be sorry she acted so."

Meantime, in the room below, little Lily was saying: "Mamma, I wish I had some one to play with. Couldn't you get me another sister, about my age? Sue says she is too old to play with me!" And Mrs. Penrose was sighing, and wondering again why her elder child was not the comfort to her that Mary Hart was to her mother.



"MARY AND I HAVE PARTED—PARTED FOREVER."

The days that followed were sad ones for Mary. The intimacy between her and Sue had been so close that they had never felt the need of other friends; and, indeed, in their small neighborhood it happened that there were no pleasant girls of their own age. It had not seemed possible that anything could ever come between her and Sue. They loved to say that they were two halves, and only together made a whole. Now it was bitter to see Sue pass by on the other side of the home street with averted eyes and head held high. Mary tried to greet her as usual; for had they not said a hundred times how silly it was for girls to quarrel, and what spectacles they made of themselves behaving like babies?

But it was of no use. The breach was complete; and Sue refused to speak to Mary, or even to recognize her, and had only the most frigid little nod for her brothers. Many a time did Mary curl up for comfort in her mother's lap, and rest her head on her shoulder, and tell her how it hurt, and ask what she should do, and how she should live without her friend. She never failed to find comfort; and always, after a good little talk, there was something that Mrs. Hart particularly wanted done, and that Mary could help her so much with; and Mary found that there is no balm like work for a sore heart.

One day Mrs. Hart said: "Mary, how would you like to ask little Lily to come and spend the afternoon with you? Mrs. Penrose is really very far from well, and Sue seems to be entirely absorbed. It would be a kind thing to do, daughter."

So Lily came; and in making her happy Mary forgot the sore spot in her own heart. From that day the two were a good deal together. Beside Sue's glancing brightness Lily had seemed rather a dull child; or perhaps it was merely that Mary had no thought to give her, and felt with Sue that children were in the way when one wanted to talk seriously. But in Mary's companionship the child expanded like a flower. She was so happy, so easily pleased. It was delightful to see her face light up at sight of Mary. And Mary determined that, come what might, she and Lily would always be friends. "And, Lily," she would whisper, "if—no! *when* we get our Sue back again, won't she be surprised to see how much you have learned, and how many of our plays you know? And there will be three of us then, Lily."

And Lily would smile and dimple, and look almost a little like Sue—almost!

The boys, too, were a great comfort in those days. Never had Tom been so considerate, so thoughtful. Hardly a day passed but he would want Mary to play or walk or fish with him. She had never, it seemed, seen so much of Tom before, though he had always been the dearest boy in the world—except Teddy.

"Oh!" she cried one day, when Tom, after an hour's patient search, found the silver thimble that she had carelessly dropped in the orchard—"oh, it *is* good to have a brother Tom. I don't see what girls do who have none."

"It's pretty nice to have a sister Mary," said Tom, shyly; he was always shy when there was any question of feeling. "Do you know, Ballast—do you know, I've never had so much sister Mary as I've been having lately. Of course it's a great shame about Sue, and I miss her no end, and all that—but it's nice to have such a lot of you, dear." 118

Sister and brother exchanged a silent hug that meant a good deal, and Mary inwardly resolved that, come what might, Tom should always hereafter have all the sister Mary he wanted.

"And it's simply no end for Lily," Tom added. "Lily has never had a fair chance, you know, Mary."

"Lily is a very nice little girl," said Teddy, with kind condescension. "There's a great deal more in Lily than people think. Mary, if you are going over there, you might take her these horse-chestnuts. She likes the milky ones, before they turn brown."

"Take them yourself, Master Teddy!" said Mary, laughing. "You know it's what you want to do. Bring her over, and we'll go and play in the orchard, all four of us. We'll play 'Wolf,' if you like." 119

"Oh, no!" cried Teddy. "Let's play 'Indian'; let's play 'The Last of the Mo's.' We haven't played that for ever and ever so long."

"Lily doesn't know 'The Last of the Mohicans,'" said Mary. "She has never read it. I'll read it to her, I think. We might begin the next rainy day, boys, and all read together."

"Hooray!" said both boys.

"I can be making my new net," said Tom.

"And I can work on my boat," said Teddy.

"And I have about six dozen things to make for Christmas!" said Mary, laughing. "Who is to do the reading, I should like to know?"

"Oh, Mammy will read it to us."

"All right! Hurrah for Mammy! Of course she will."

"But that is no reason why we should not play 'The Last of the Mo's' now," resumed Tom. "We can tell Lily enough, as we go along, to show her what it's like, and of course she wouldn't take an important part, anyway—just a squaw or an odd brave. Cut along, Teddy, and bring the kid over." 120

Lily came hurrying back with Teddy; and the four stood for a moment together by the front door, laughing and chatting, and giving out the parts for the game. They had never played it before without Sue. Mary would rather not have played it now, but that seemed no reason why the boys should not have their favorite game, and no doubt Tom could play Uncas very well—though, of course, not *as well*, even if he was a boy.

Tom was just striking an attitude and brandishing an imaginary tomahawk, when, on the opposite side of the street, Sue came along, arm in arm, as usual, with Clarice Packard. The Hart children looked in dismay. Was this their Sue? Something was wrong with her hair. It was rolled up high over her forehead, and bobbed up into a short cue behind. Something was wrong with her feet; at least, so it seemed from the way she walked, mincing on her toes. And she had a spotted veil on, and she carried a parasol. Was this their Quicksilver Sue? Could it be?

As they passed, Clarice looked across the way and bowed a triumphant little bow; then tittered rudely, and whispered something in her companion's ear. Sue held her head high, and was walking past looking straight before her, as she always did now, when suddenly it seemed as if some feeling took hold upon her, stronger than her own will. She turned her head involuntarily, and looked at the group standing on the familiar door-step. A wave of color swept over her face; the tears rushed into her eyes. For a moment she seemed to waver, almost to sway toward them; then resolutely she turned her head away again, and walked on. 121

"Mary," said Tom, "do you know what?"

"No, Tom. I don't know this particular 'what.' I know—what you saw just now." And poor Mary looked as if the heart for play was clean gone out of her.

"Well, I'll tell you. Our Sue has had just about enough of her new treasure. I'll bet my new fishing-line that she would give all her best boots to come and play 'Last of the Mo's' with us in the orchard." 122

CHAPTER VIII

THE CIRCUS

Tom was right. That moment was the turning-point for Sue Penrose. When she saw that group on the familiar door-step across the way, something seemed to clutch at her heart, something seemed to fall from her eyes. What did this all mean? There were her friends, her dear old friends, with their honest faces and their clear, kind, true eyes. She had seen the longing look in Mary's eyes, and Tom's grave glance which seemed to say that he was sorry for her. It was the afternoon playtime, and they were all going to play together some of the happy boy-and-girl plays in which she, Sue, had always been the leader; and she was not with them. She had lost them all, and for what? All at once, Clarice's giggle, her whispered talk of dresses and parties and "gentlemen friends" sounded flat and silly and meaningless. What did Sue care for such stuff? How could she ever have thought she cared? What would she not give for a good romp in the orchard, and a talk with Mary afterward! A small voice said in her heart: "Go back! A kiss to Mary, a word to the boys, and all will be forgotten. Go back now, before it is too late!" 123

But two other voices spoke louder in Sue's ear, drowning the voice of her heart. One was pride. "Go back?" it said. "Confess that you have been wicked and silly? Let the boys and Lily see you humbling yourself—you, who have always been the proud one? Never!" The other was loyalty, or rather a kind of chivalry that was a part of Sue. "You cannot desert Clarice," said this voice. "She is a stranger here, and she depends upon you. She is delicate and sensitive, and you are the only person who understands her; she says so. She isn't exactly nice in some ways, but the others are hard on her, and you must stand by her. You cannot go back!" 124

So when Clarice tittered, and whispered something about Mary's dress, Sue pressed her arm, and straightened herself and walked on, looking steadfastly before her.

"My! Sue, what is the matter?" her companion asked. "You look as cross as a meat-ax. No wonder! I call the way that boy stared at you downright impudent. They seem to have taken up with Lily, now that they can't get you. He, he!"

And a new sting was planted in Sue's heart, already sore enough. Yes; they had taken up with Lily; Lily was filling her place.

Sue took the pain home with her, and carried it about all day, and many a day. The little sister had never been much to her, as we have seen. Her own life had been so overflowing with matters that seemed to her of vital importance that she had never had much time to bestow on the child who was too old to be set down with blocks and doll and told to amuse herself, and yet was too young—or so Sue thought—to share the plays of the older children. She had "wished to goodness" that Lily had some friend of her own age; and "Don't bother!" was the answer that rose most frequently to her lips when Lily begged to be allowed to play with her and Mary. 125

"Don't bother, Lily. Run along and amuse yourself; that's a good girl! We are busy just now." She had never meant to be unkind; she just hadn't thought, that was all.

Well, Lily did not have to be told now not to bother. There was no danger of her asking to join Sue and Clarice, for the latter had from the first shown a dislike to the child which was heartily returned. People who "think children are a nuisance" are not apt to be troubled by their company.

After the morning hour during which she sat with their mother, reading to her and helping her in various ways (how was it, by the way, that Lily had got into the way of doing this? she, Sue, had never had time, or had never thought of it!), Lily was always over at the Harts' in these days. Often when Sue and Clarice were sitting upstairs, talking,—oh, such weary, empty, stupid talk, it seemed now!—the sound of Lily's happy laughter would come from over the way and ring in her sister's ears. 126

They were playing Indians again, were they? "The Last of the Mohicans"! Tom was Hawkeye, of course; but who was Uncas in her stead? She had always been Uncas. She knew a good many of his speeches by heart. Ah! she thrilled, recalling the tremendous moment when the Delawares discover the tortoise tattooed on the breast of the young hero. She recalled how "for a single instant Uncas enjoyed his triumph, smiling calmly on the scene. Then motioning the crowd away with a high and haughty sweep of the arm, he advanced in front of the nation with the air of a king, and spoke in a voice louder than the murmur of admiration that ran through the multitude.

"Men of the Lenni-Lenape,' he said, 'my race upholds the earth. Your feeble tribe stands on my shell. What fire that a Delaware can light would burn the child of my fathers?' he added, pointing proudly to the simple blazonry on his skin. 'The blood that came from such a stock would smother your flames!'" 127

Ah! and then the last speech, that she always spoke leaning against a tree, with her arms folded on her breast, and her gaze fixed haughtily on the awe-struck spectators: "Pale-face! I die before my heart is soft!" and so on. They all said she did that splendidly—better than any one else.

What was Clarice saying?

"And I said to him, I said: 'I don't know what you mean,' I said. 'Oh, yes, you do,' he said. 'No, I don't,' I said. 'I think you're real silly,' I said. And he said: 'Oh, don't say that,' he said. 'Well, I shall,' I said. 'You're just as silly as you can be!'" And so on and so on, till Sue could have fallen asleep for sheer weariness, save for those merry voices in her ear and the pain at her heart.

But when Clarice was gone, Sue unlocked her journal and wrote:

"I am very unhappy, and no one cares. I am alone in the world, and I feel that I have not long to live. My cheek is hollow, and my eyes gleam with an unnatural light; but I shall rest in the grave and no one will mourn for me. I hear the voices of my former friends, but they think no more of the lonely outcast. I do hope that if I should live to be fifteen I shall have more sense than some people have; but she is all I have left in the world, and I will be faithful to death. They have taken my sister from me—" But when she had written these last words Sue blushed hotly, and drew her pen through them; for she was an honest child, and she knew they were not true.

Then she went downstairs. Her room was too lonely, and everything in it spoke too plainly of Mary. She could not stay there.

Mrs. Penrose looked up as she entered the sitting-room. "Oh! it is you, Sue," she said, with her little weary air; "I thought it was Lily."

"Would you like me to read to you, Mamma?" asked Sue, with a sudden impulse.

129

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Penrose, doubtfully; "isn't Clarice here? Yes, I should like it very much, Sue. My eyes are rather bad to-day."

Sue read for an hour, and forgot the pain at her heart. When the reading was over, her mother said: "Thank you, my dear; that was a real treat. How well you read, Sue!"

"Let me read to you every day, Mother," said Sue. She kissed her mother warmly; and, standing near her, noticed for the first time how very pale and thin she was, how transparent her cheek and hands. Her heart smote her with a new pain. How much more she saw, now that she was unhappy herself! She had never thought much about her mother's ill health. She was an "invalid," and that seemed to account for everything. At least, she could be a better daughter while she lived, and could help her mother in the afternoon, as Lily did in the morning.

The day of the circus came. A week ago, how Sue had looked forward to it! It was to be the crowning joy of the season, the great, the triumphal day. But now all was changed. She had no thought of "backing out"; an engagement once made was a sacred thing with Sue; but she no longer saw it wreathed in imaginary glories. The circus was fun, of course; but she was not going in the right way, she knew—in fact, she was going in a very naughty way; and Clarice was no longer the enchanting companion she had once seemed, who could cast a glamour over everything she spoke of. Sue even suggested their consulting Mr. Packard; but Clarice raised a shrill clamor.

130

"Sue, don't speak of such a thing! Pappa would lock me up if he had any idea; he's awfully strict, you know. And we have both vowed never to tell; you know we have, Sue. You vowed on this sacred relic; you know you did!"

The sacred relic was a battered little medal that Clarice said had come from Jerusalem and been blessed by the Pope. As this was almost the only flight of fancy she had ever shown, Sue clung to the idea, and had made the vow with all possible solemnity, feeling like Hannibal and Robert of Normandy in one. This was not, however, until after she had told Mary of the plan; but, somehow, she had not mentioned that to Clarice. Mary would not tell, of course; perhaps, at the bottom of her heart, Sue almost wished she would.

131

The day was bright and sunny, and Sue tried hard to feel as if she were going to have a great and glorious time; yet when the hour came at which she had promised to go to the hotel, she felt rather as if she were going to execution. She hung round the door of her mother's room. Could this be Sue, the foundling, the deserted child of cloudy British princes?

"If you need me, Mamma, I won't go!" she said several times; but Mrs. Penrose did not notice the wistful intonation in her voice, and she had not yet become accustomed to needing Sue.

"No, dear!" she said. "Run along, and have a happy day. Lily and Katy will do all I need." Then, with an impulse she hardly understood herself, for she was an undemonstrative woman, she added: "Give me a kiss before you go, Susie!"

132

Sue hung round her neck in a passionate embrace. "Mamma!" she exclaimed, "Mamma! if I were very, very wicked, could you forgive me?—if I were very dreadfully wicked?"

"I hope so, dear!" said Mrs. Penrose, settling her hair. She had pretty hair, and did not like to have it disarranged. "But you are not wicked, Sue. What is the matter, my dear?"

But Sue, after one more almost strangling embrace, ran out of the room. She felt suffocated. She must have one moment of relief before she went. Dashing back to her room, she flung herself upon her journal.

"I go!" she wrote. "I go because I have sworn it, and I may not break my word. It is a dreadful thing that I do, but it is my fate that becoms. I don't believe I am a foundling, after all, and I don't care if I am. Mamma is just perfectly sweet; and if I *should* live, I should never, never, *never* let her know that I had found it out. Adieu!

133

After making a good flourish under her name, Sue felt a little better; still, her heart was heavy enough as she put on her pretty hat with the brown ostrich-feathers, which went so well with her pongee dress. At least, she looked nice, she thought; that was some comfort.

The circus was a good one, and for a time Sue forgot everything else in the joy of looking on. The tumbling! She had never dreamed of such tumbling. And the jumping over three, four, six elephants standing together! Each time it seemed impossible, out of the question, that the thing could be done. Each time her heart stood still for an instant, and then bounded furiously as the lithe, elastic form passed like an arrow over the broad brown backs, and lighted on its feet surely, gracefully, with a smile and a courtly gesture of triumph. That one in the pale blue silk tights—could he really be human, and go about on other days clad like other men? 134

Then, the wonderful jokes of the clown! Never was anything so funny, Sue thought. But the great, the unspeakable part, was when the Signora Fiorenza, the Queen of Flame, rode lightly into the arena on her milk-white Arabian charger. Such beauty Sue had never dreamed of; and, indeed, the Signora (whose name was Betsy Hankerson) was a handsome young woman enough, and her riding-habit of crimson velvet, if a little worn and rubbed, was still effective and becoming. To Sue's eyes it seemed an imperial robe, fit for coronations and great state banquets, or for scenes of glory like this.

Round and round the Signora rode, bending graciously from the saddle, receiving with smiling composure the compliments of the clown.

"Well, madam! how did you manage to escape the police?" 135

"The police, sir?"

"Yes, madam! All the police in Chester—and a fine-looking set of men they are—are on your track."

"Why, what have I done, sir, that the police should be after me?"

"What have you done, madam? Why, you have stolen all the roses in town and put them in your cheeks, and you've stolen all the diamonds and put them in your eyes; and worse than that!"

"Worse than that, sir?"

"Yes, madam. You've stolen all the young fellows' hearts and put them in your pocket." Whack! "Get up there, Sultan!"

And he smacked the white horse with his hand, and the Signora cantered gaily on. This was delightful; and it was all true, Sue thought, every word of it. Oh, if she could only look like that, what would she not give?

But now, a new wonder! The Signora had leaped lightly to her feet, and was standing on the back of the fiery steed, always galloping, galloping. She was unfastening the gold buttons of her riding-habit; it fell off, and she stood transformed, a wonderful fairy in gold-spangled gauze, with gold slippers, and a sparkling crown—had she had it on all the time under her tall hat?—set in her beautiful black hair. The clown shouted with glee, and Sue could have shouted with him: 136

"Glory hallelujah! See the fireworks! Oh, my! somebody get my smoked glasses; she puts my eyes clean out. Smoked glass, ladies and gentlemen, five cents a piece! You'll all go stone-blind if you try to look at her without it."

The music quickened its time, the snow-white steed quickened his pace. The Signora called to him and shook the reins, and the good beast sprang forward in response. Faster and faster, louder and louder, till the air was palpitating with sound, and that glittering figure flashed by like a fiery star. And now two men in livery came running out, holding a great ring of living flame. They sprang up on two stools. They held the ring steady while the flames leaped and danced, and Sue fancied she could actually hear them hiss. The clown shouted and waved his hat; the ring-master cracked his whip; the music crashed into a maddening peal; and with a flash and a cry, horse and girl dashed through the circle of fire. 139



AT THE CIRCUS.

It was over. The flames were gone. The Signora was once more seated, cantering easily round the ring, bending again to the clown's remarks. But Sue still sat breathless, her hands clasped together, her eyes shining. For a time she could not speak. At last she turned to Clarice with burning cheeks and fluttering breath.

"Clarice, from this moment that is what I live for! I can do that, Clarice, I know; I feel that I can. Do you suppose she would take me as a pupil? Do you think she would? If I can do that just once, then I can die happy!"

"How you talk, Sue Penrose!" said Clarice. "The idea! Who ever heard of a young lady going into a circus? Say, don't look over opposite. Those horrid Hart boys are over there, and they've been staring at you as if you belonged to them. Such impudence!"

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CHAPTER IX

THE LONELY ROAD

The day of the circus was not a happy one for Mary Hart. She watched Sue go down the street, and her heart went out toward her friend. What a darling she was! How pretty she looked, and how well the plumed hat set off her delicate, high-bred face, and the little air she had of owning the world and liking her possession! Now that there were no mincing steps beside her, she walked with her own free, graceful gait, head held high, eyes bent forward, ready for anything.

"She ought really to be a princess," thought humble-minded Mary; and in her glow of admiration she did not see the troubled look in Sue's bright eyes.

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The day went heavily. The boys, too, went off to the circus in the afternoon. Mary might have gone with them, but she had been given her choice between this treat and the concert that was coming off a week or two later, and had chosen the latter. If she and Sue could have gone together with the boys, that would have been another matter. She longed to tell the boys her secret, and beg them to keep an eye on Sue, in case she should get into any trouble. Several times the words were on the tip of her tongue, but the thought of her promise drove them back. She had promised in the solemn school-boy formula, "Honest and true, black and blue"; and that was as sacred as if she had sworn on any number of relics. There was a dreadful passage in "Lalla Rookh": "Thine oath! thine oath!"

She and Sue had decided long ago that they would not take oaths, but that a promise should be just as binding. The promise lay heavy on Mary's heart all day. She found it hard to settle down to anything. Sue's face kept coming between her and her work, and looked at her from the pages of

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her book. Her imagination, not very lively as a rule, was now so excited that it might have been Sue's own. She saw her friend in every conceivable and inconceivable danger. Now it was a railway accident, with fire and every other accompaniment of terror. She could hear the crash, the shrieks, and the dreadful hiss of escaping steam; could see the hideous wreck in which Sue was pinned down by burning timbers, unable to escape. Now a wild beast, a tiger or panther, had escaped from his cage and sprung in among the terrified audience of pleasure-seekers. She saw the glaring yellow eyes, the steel claws. This time she screamed aloud, and frightened Lily Penrose, who, luckily, came over at that very moment to ask advice about the cutting of her doll's opera-cloak. Mary forced herself to attend to the cloak, and that did her good; and there was no reason why Lily should not be made happy and amused a little. Then there were some errands to do for her mother, and then came her music lesson; and so, somehow or other, the long day wore away, and the time came for the arrival of the circus train from Chester. The time came, and the train with it. Mary heard it go puffing and shrieking on its way. She stationed herself at the window to watch for Sue. Soon she would come by, twinkling all over, quicksilvering with joy as she did when she had had a great pleasure—making the whole street brighter, Mary always thought. But Sue did not come. Five o'clock struck; then half-past five; then six. Still no Sue. In an anguish of dread and uncertainty, Mary pressed her face against the pane and gazed up the fast-darkening street. People came and went, going home from their work; but no slight, glancing figure came swinging past. What had happened? What could have happened? So great was Mary's distress of mind that she did not hear her mother come into the room, and started violently when a hand was laid on her shoulder.

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"My dear," said Mrs. Hart, "I think the boys must have missed the train. Why—why, Mary, dear child, what is the matter?" for Mary turned on her a face so white and wild that her mother was frightened.

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"Mary!" she cried. "The boys! Has—has anything happened? The train—"

"No, no!" cried Mary, hastily. "It isn't the boys, mother. The boys will be all right. It's Sue—my Sue!"

Then it all came out. Promise or no promise, Mary must take the consequences. On her mother's neck she sobbed out the story: her foolish "solemn promise," the day-long anxiety, the agony of the last hour.

"Oh, what can have happened to her?" she cried. "Oh, Mammy, I'm so glad I told you! I'm so glad—so glad!"

"Of course you are, my dear little girl," said Mrs. Hart. "And now, stop crying, Mary. Thank goodness, there's your father driving into the yard this moment. Run and tell him; he will know just what to do."



"MARY STATIONED HERSELF AT THE WINDOW."

The glory was over. The scarlet cloths and the gold spangles had disappeared behind the dingy curtains; the music had gone away in green bags; and the crowd poured out of the circus, jostling and pushing. Sue was walking on air. She could hear nothing but that maddening clash of sound,

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see nothing but that airy figure dashing through the ring of flame. To do that, and then to die suddenly, with the world at her feet—that would be the highest bliss, beyond all other heights; or—well, perhaps not really quite to die, but swoon so deep that every one should think her dead. And then, when they had wept for hours beside her rose-strewn bier, the beautiful youth in pale blue silk tights, he with the spangled velvet trunks, might bend over her—having read "Little Snow-white"—and take the poisoned comb out of her hair, or—or something—and say—

"Ow!" cried Clarice, shrilly. "That horrid man pushed me so, he almost tore my dress. I think this is perfectly awful! Say, Sue, let's go and see the Two-headed Girl. We've lots of time before the train."

Sue for once demurred; she did not feel like seeing monstrosities; her mind was filled with visions of beauty and grace. But when Clarice pressed the point, she yielded cheerfully; for was it not Clarice's party? But already the glow began to fade from her sky, and the heavy feeling at her heart to return, as they pushed their way into the small, dingy tent, where the air hung like a heavy, poisonous fog. 148

It happened that they were just behind a large party of noisy people, men and women laughing and shouting together, and the showman did not see them at first. They had made their way to the front, and were gazing at the two slim lads who, tightly laced into one crimson satin bodice, and crowned with coppery wigs, made the Two-headed Girl, when the showman—an ugly fellow with little eyes set too near together—tapped Sue on the shoulder.

"Fifty cents, please," he said civilly enough.

Sue looked at him open-eyed.

"Fifty cents," he repeated. "You two come in without payin'. Quarter apiece, please."

Sue put her hand to her pocket, which held both purses (Clarice had no pockets in her dresses; she said they spoiled the set of the skirt), but withdrew it in dismay. The pocket was empty! She turned to Clarice, who was staring greedily at the monstrosity. "Clarice!" she gasped. "Clarice! did you—have you got the purses?" 149

"No," said Clarice. "I gave mine to you, to put in your pocket; don't you remember?"

"Yes, of course I do; but—but it is gone! They are both gone!"

"Come, none o' that!" said the man. "You've seen the show, and you've got to pay for it. That's all right, ain't it? Now you hand over them fifty cents, little lady; see? Come! I can't stand foolin' here. I got my business to attend to."

"But—but I haven't it!" said Sue, growing crimson to the roots of her hair. "Somebody—my pocket must have been picked!" she cried, as the truth flashed upon her. She recalled the dense crowd, the pushing, the rough lad who had forced his way between her and Clarice just at the doorway.

"Oh, Clarice," she said, "my pocket has certainly been picked! What shall we do?"

"What shall we do?" echoed Clarice. "Oh, Sue, how could you? I don't see why I let you take my purse. There was a ten-dollar gold piece in it. I might have known you would lose it!" And she began to whimper and lament. 150

This was poor comfort. Sue turned from her friend, and faced the angry man bravely.

"I am very sorry," she said. "My pocket has been picked, so I cannot pay you. We did not know that we had to pay extra for the side-shows. I hope you will excuse—"

"Not much I won't excuse!" said the man, in a bullying tone, though he did not raise his voice. "You'll pay me something, young ladies, before you leave this tent. I ain't runnin' no free show; this is business, this is, and I'm a poor man."

Sue looked round her in despair. Only vacant or boorish faces met her eyes; it was not a high-class crowd that had come to see the Two-headed Girl. Suddenly a word of Mr. Hart's flashed into her mind like a sunbeam:

"If you are ever in danger away from home, children, call a—" 151

"Is there a policeman here?" she asked eagerly. "There must be one outside, I am sure. Will you call him, please?"

"No; there ain't no policeman!" said the man, quickly. He glanced warily about him, and added in a conciliatory tone: "There ain't no need of any policeman, young ladies. I guess we can settle this little matter right now, between ourselves, friendly and pleasant. You step right in this way, out of the jam. There's a lady here'll be real pleased to see you."

He half led, half pushed, the frightened girls into an inner compartment of the tent, where a stout, greasy-looking woman was counting greasy coppers into a bag. The woman looked up as they entered, still counting: "Seventy—seventy-five—eighty—and twenty's a dollar. What's the matter, Ed?"

"These little ladies got their pockets picked, so they say!" said the man, with a wink. "They're real ladies; any one can see that with half an eye. They don't want to rob a poor man like me. Maybe they've got some jew'lry or something they'd like to give you for the money they owe. You see to 152

'em, Min; I got to go back."

With another wink at the woman, and a leer at the children which was meant to be attractive, he slipped out, and left them alone with the stout woman.

"Well!" she began, in a wheedling voice, "so you had your pockets picked, my dears, had you? Well, now, that was a shame, I should say! Let me see!"

She advanced toward Clarice, who retreated before her, cowering in a corner and crying: "I haven't got any pocket; it's her! She took my purse, and now she's lost it. Oh, dear! I wish we hadn't come!"

"Let me see, dear," said the woman.

She felt Clarice all over with swift, practised fingers.

"Sure enough, you ain't got no pocket," she said. "I thought you might be makin' a mistake, you see. There! why, what's this? Stand still, ducky! I wouldn't hurt ye for the world; no, indeed—such a sweet, pretty young lady as you be. Ain't this a pretty chain, now? and a locket on the eend of it—well, I never! It ain't safe for young ladies to be goin' round alone with such a lot of jew'lry. Why, you might be murdered for it, and laid welterin' in your blood. I guess I'll take this, dear, to pay for the show; it'll be safer for you goin' home, too. What's this, again? gold stick-pins? Well, now, I call them dangerous! I don't see what your ma was thinkin' of, lettin' you come out rigged up like this. I'm doin' you a kindness takin' 'em off'n ye; they might cost ye your life, sure as you stand here. There's a terrible rough set o' folks round these grounds, specially come night."

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All the while she was talking she was quietly stripping Clarice of her trinkets. Clarice was too frightened to speak or move; she could only moan and whimper. But after the first moment of stupefaction, Sue came forward with flashing eyes and crimson cheeks. "How dare you?" she cried. "How dare you steal her things? Her father or Mr. Hart—Mr. George Hart of Hilton—will send you the money to-morrow, everything we owe. You shall not steal our things, you wicked woman!"

The woman turned on her with an evil look. "Highty-tighty!" she said. "Ain't we fine, miss? I wouldn't talk so free about stealin', after you stealin' our show, sneakin' in and thinkin' you'd get it free. No you don't!" And she caught Sue as she tried to slip past her out of the tent. "Let's see what you've got, next."

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"Police!" cried Sue. "Help! police!"

Instantly the woman's hand was over her mouth, and she was held in a grasp of iron.

"You holler ag'in, and I'll strip the clothes off yer back!" she hissed. "Hold yer tongue, or I'll call Ed. He won't stand no foolin'!"

Sue struggled fiercely, but it was of no use. The woman shifted her easily to one arm, and with the other hand searched her pocket.

"Not even a handkerchief!" she said. "No jew'lry, neither. Well, your mother's got sense, anyway. Hallo! here's a ring, though. Guess I'll take that. Le' go, sis, or I'll hurt ye."

"It—it's not my ring!" gasped Sue, shaking her head free. "It's hers—my friend's. Don't take it!"

"Guess it's mine, now!" said the woman, with a chuckle. She forced back the girl's slender fingers, and drew off the gold mouse-ring.

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"There! now you can go, dears; and next time, you take my advice, and get some of your folks to take you to the circus. Ah! and be thankful I've left you them pretty hats. I know a little girl as would be pleased to death with that hat with the feathers; but you might take cold if I let ye go bare-headed, and I'm a mother myself."

Trembling, half fainting, the girls found themselves outside the tent. The grounds were well-nigh deserted, all the spectators being gone. Here and there a group of stragglers leaned on the railings of the neighboring fence, smoking and talking. Rough-looking men were at work about the tents, and some of them looked curiously at the girls as they hurried along. Neither spoke. Clarice was still whimpering and crying under her breath. Sue's eyes were blazing; her cheeks felt on fire. She ran hastily across the grounds, dragging Clarice after her by the hand. She felt every moment as if they might be seized and carried back to that horrible den. Suppose the man should be coming after them now! He might put them in prison, and her mother would never know where she was. She choked back the sob that rose in her throat. On, on, as fast as feet could fly! At last the palings were reached and passed. Now they could stop to draw breath, for they were on the highroad, and out of sight of the hated inclosure. Panting, Sue leaned against the fence, and waited till she should have breath enough to speak some word of encouragement to her companion. No one was in sight; there was no sound save the crickets keeping time in the grass. All was as peaceful and serene as if there were no dreadful things or wicked people in the world. They were not far from the station now, and once in the train for home, with the friendly conductor, who knew her and would take charge of them both—

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Then, suddenly, a new thought flashed into Sue's mind, and struck ice into the fever of her blood. How long had they been in that dreadful place? How was it that no one was to be seen going

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toward the station, of all the throng that had come up with them in the train?

"Clarice!" she gasped. "I am—afraid—we may miss the train. We must run. It isn't far now. Run as fast as you possibly can!"

Clarice answered with a sob; but she began to run as well as her foolish dress and shoes would let her. But another answer came at that moment: a whistle, long and clear, loud at first, then growing fainter and fainter till it died away. In desperation the girls flew on along the road—to reach the station and find it empty! The long curve of the rails stretched away toward home. The train was gone!

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CHAPTER X

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Six o'clock was supper-time in the little town of Chester, so the usual loungers had left the station as soon as the train departed; and by the time the girls arrived it was deserted, even by the ticket-seller. No one was in sight; at least, they saw no one. They were too much absorbed in their trouble to notice two faces that peeped at them for a moment round the corner of the station, and then vanished. They were alone, six miles from home, with no money. What were they to do?

Clarice broke out in tearful reproaches:

"Sue Penrose, you have brought us to this! It is all your fault! I never should have thought of coming up here if it hadn't been for you."

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Sue looked at her, but made no reply. Clarice's eyes dropped under the steady look; she faltered, but hurried on:

"And losing all my money, too! If you hadn't lost my money, I should not have been robbed of my beautiful jewelry—all I had in the world! and it was worth lots and lots."

Sue, in bitterness of spirit, thought, "How about the diamond chain?" but she said nothing. She felt, suddenly, many years older than Clarice. Was this a girl of fifteen, whimpering like a baby? Was this the friend for whom she had given up Mary?

"And how are we ever to get home?" asked Clarice, in conclusion.

"We must walk!" said Sue, briefly.

"Walk!" shrieked Clarice. "Sue Penrose, are you crazy? It's twenty miles, if it's a step!"

"Nonsense!" said Sue. "It's a short six miles."

"That's just as bad!" moaned Clarice. "You know I should die before we had gone a mile; you *know* I should, Sue! Isn't there some one we can borrow money from? Can't we go to the hotel and telephone to somebody at home?"

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They might indeed have done this, but in her excited state Sue could not think it possible. Her high-strung, sensitive nature was strained beyond the possibility of sober judgment; she could only act, and the action that began instantly was the only one that she could think of. Besides, to see more strangers, perhaps meet with more insults—never! They must walk home; there was no other way; and they must start this instant.

"I am sure you can do it, Clarice," she said, speaking as cheerfully as she could. "You can take my arm, and lean on me when you are tired; and every little while we can sit down and rest. Come! we must start at once; it will be dark before we get home, as it is."

Clarice still protested, but yielded to the stronger will, and the two girls started on their lonely walk.

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As they turned their backs on the station, a head was cautiously advanced from behind the building; a pair of sharp eyes followed the retreating figures for a few moments, then the head was as cautiously withdrawn.

The road from Chester to Hilton was a pleasant one. On one side was the railway, with the river beyond; on the other, green meadows rolling up and away to the distant hills. There were few houses, and these scattered at long distances. To Sue the road was familiar and friendly enough; but to Clarice it seemed an endless way stretching through an endless desert. She was thoroughly frightened, and her blood was of the kind that turns to water; very different from the fire that filled Sue's veins and made her ready to meet an army, or charge a windmill or a railway-train, or anything else that should cross her path.

Over and over again Clarice lamented that she had ever come to Hilton.

"Why did I come to this hateful, poky place?" she wailed. "Aunt Jane didn't want me to come. She

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said there wouldn't be anybody here fit for me to associate with. Oh! why did I come?"

"I suppose because you wanted to!" said Sue; and it might have been Mary that spoke.

"Come, Clarice," she went on more gently, "we might as well make the best of it. Let's tell stories. I'll begin, if you like. Do you know about the Maid of Saragossa? That is splendid! Or Cochrane's 'Bonny Grizzy'? Oh! she had to do much worse things than this, and she never was afraid a bit—not a single bit."

Sue told the brave story, and the thrill in her voice might have warmed an oyster; but Clarice was not an oyster, and it left her cold.

"Grizzy is a horrid, ugly name," she said. "And I think it was real unladylike, dressing up that way, so there!"

"Clarice!"—Sue's voice quivered with indignation,—"when it was to save her father's life! How can you? But perhaps you will care more about the Maid of Saragossa."

But after a while Clarice declared that the stories only made her more nervous. She was unconscious of the fact that they had carried her over two miles of the dreaded six.

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"Besides," she said peevishly, "I can't hear when you are talking, Sue. Listen! I thought I heard footsteps behind us. I do! Sue Penrose, there is some one following us!"

Sue listened. Yes, there were footsteps, some way behind. "But, my dear," she said, "this is the highroad! Why should they be following us? People have a right to walk on the road—as good a right as we have."

They stopped a moment, instinctively, and listened; and the footsteps behind them stopped too. They went on, and the steps were heard again, light yet distinct, keeping the distance between them, neither more nor less.

Clarice grasped Sue's arm. "They are tramps or robbers, Sue! We are going to be murdered. Oh, I shall scream!"

"You will *not* scream!" said Sue, grasping her arm in return, and resisting the impulse to shake it. "You are talking nonsense, Clarice! I believe—I believe it is nothing in the world but an echo, after all. If it were not for this fog, we could see whether there was any one there."

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She looked back along the road, but the river-fog was rising white and dense, and closed in behind them like a curtain.

"They can't see us, anyhow, whoever they are!" said Sue. "Why, it's exciting, Clarice! It's like the people in the forest in 'Midsummer-Night's Dream.' If we were only sure that these were nice people, we might call, and they could answer, and hunt round for us, and it would be fine."

"Oh, it's awful! It's just awful!" moaned Clarice; and she shook with real terror. "And the worst of it is, I can't walk any more. I can't, Sue! It's no use! I am going to faint—I know I am."

"Nonsense!" said Sue, stoutly, though her heart sank. "Keep up a little, Clarice, do! There is a watering-trough a little farther on, and we can bathe our feet. That will be a great help; and we must be nearly half-way home now."

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But tight lacing and tight shoes are not nonsense. They are very real things, and poor Clarice was really suffering more than Sue had any idea of. The stitch in her side was not imaginary this time. She stopped involuntarily to draw breath; and the footsteps behind them stopped too, and went on when they did. There was no longer any doubt; the girls were being followed.

Clarice began to cry again; and Sue set her teeth, and felt that a crisis was coming.

"Clarice," she said, "let me see if I can carry you! I think I can! I know the way Sir Bedivere did with King Arthur: he made broad his shoulders to receive his weight, you know, and round his neck he drew the languid hands—kind of pickaback, you see. You are not heavy; I think I can do it!"

And she actually took Clarice on her back, and staggered on perhaps a hundred yards—till they both came to the ground, bruised and breathless.

"I'm going to die!" said Clarice, doggedly. "I won't walk another step. I may just as well be murdered as plain die. I—can't see!" and the poor girl sank down, really half fainting.

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Sue set her teeth hard. She dragged Clarice back from the road, and propped her against a tree, then took her stand in front of her. She felt no fear; the quicksilver ran riot in her veins. If she only had her dagger, the good sharp dagger paper-knife that she had worn in her boot for two whole months, while she was playing cow-boy! It hurt a good deal, and made holes in her stockings, so she had given it up. What would she not give for it now! Or if she had something poisoned that she could hand to the people when they came up,—like Lucrezia Borgia,—and see them drop dead at her feet! But she had nothing! Stop! yes! her hat-pin, the hat-pin Uncle James had sent her from Russia! Carefully, with a steady hand, she drew out the long, sharp steel pin, and felt its point; then set her back against the tree, and waited.

The footsteps behind the fog-curtain hesitated, stopped altogether. There was a silence, but Sue's heart beat so loud, the sound seemed to fill the air. All at once, from the opposite direction came

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another sound, the sound of horses' hoofs, the rattle of wheels; and, as if at a signal, the footsteps came on again, quickened their pace, were close at hand. Two figures loomed through the white fog; paused, as if reconnoitering in the dim half-light. Then, at sight of Sue standing alone before her prostrate companion, they broke into a run, and came up at racing speed, panting.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom.

"Because we're right here!" said Teddy.

"Right here, Quicksilver!" said Tom.

The hat-pin dropped from Sue's hand. A great sob rose and broke,—only one!—and then—oh! it didn't matter now if she was getting to be a big girl. Her arms were round Tom's neck, and her head was on his good broad brotherly shoulder, and she was crying and laughing and saying, "Oh, Tom! Oh, Tom!" over and over and over again, till that young gentleman began to be seriously alarmed.

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"I say!" he said; "I wouldn't, Quicksilver! Come! I wouldn't if I were you! Teddy, you've got the handkerchief, haven't you? I had the peanuts, you know."

But Teddy, who was going to be a surgeon, was stooping over Clarice with keen professional interest.

"We might haul her down to the river and put her head in!" he said. "This hat won't hold water any more; will yours? I say! don't they still bleed people sometimes, when they haven't got salts and things? My knife is just as sharp!"

Poor Clarice started up with a faint scream. Altogether, these four were so absorbed that they never heard the approaching wheels, and Mr. Hart almost ran over them before he could pull up his horse.

"Hallo!" he said. "What upon earth—now, Mary, Mary, do be careful, and wait till I—Dear me, sirs! What a set of children! Stand still, Jupiter!"

For Mary had scrambled down among wheels and legs, and had thrown herself upon Sue and Tom; and Teddy, abandoning Clarice, exhausted himself in a vain endeavor to get his short arms round the three.

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"Oh, Mary, Mary! is it really you? Can you ever forgive me?"

"Sue! Sue, my Sue, don't talk so, dear! It is all my fault, for not telling Mammy this morning. Oh, Tom, you blessed boy, I might have known you would take care of her!"

"Young people," said Mr. Hart, bending over from the wagon, "perhaps if you would kindly get in, it might facilitate matters, and you can continue this highly interesting conversation as we go along. Other girl faint? Hand her here, Tom! Put your arm round my neck, my child—so! there we are!"

They jogged along in silence for a few minutes. Sue and Mary had nothing to say at first—in words, at least. They sat with their arms round each other's neck and their heads together. Now and then one would make a little murmur, and the other respond; but for the most part they were still, too full of joy to speak.

"What happened, Tom?" asked Mr. Hart, when he thought time enough had elapsed to quiet the excitement a little.

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"Why, sir," said Tom, "we saw the girls, of course; but then we lost sight of them after the circus,—I don't know how" (Sue shuddered and Clarice moaned),—"so we went straight to the station. So when they didn't get there in time for the train, we thought we'd better wait and see how things were. So we followed them along—"

"Oh, Tom, we were so frightened!" cried Sue. "Of course you didn't know how frightened we were, Tom—but I had my hat-pin all ready to stick into you!"

"No! had you?" said Tom, chuckling.

"You young ninny!" said his father. "Why didn't you join the girls, instead of hanging behind and scaring them half to death?"

Tom hung his head. "I—it was awfully stupid!" he said. "Because I was a fool, sir, I suppose, and thought—"

"Because I was a fool, Mr. Hart!" said Sue. "Because I had been wicked and hateful and ungrateful, and a Perfect Pig, and he knew it!"

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Mrs. Hart sat at her window, sewing her seam and listening to the music she loved best, the music of children's voices. There were five of them, her own three and the two Penroses; and they were all sitting on the broad door-step, husking sweet corn and talking. Sue had just come over; she had been helping Katy, who had a lame arm. She looked pale and grave, for the adventure of two days before seemed still very near; yet her eyes were full of light as she looked from one to the other of the children, gazing as if she could not get her fill. Now and then she and Mary held out a hand and exchanged a silent squeeze that meant rivers of speech; but somehow Tom seemed to be doing most of the talking.

"Look at that!" he said, holding up an ear like glossy ivory, every row perfect as a baby's teeth. "Isn't that bully? Save the silk, Sue and Lily! We want to make wigs for the harvest feast to-night."

"Oh, tell me!" cried Sue, her eyes kindling. "A harvest feast? What fun!"

"Why, hasn't Mary told you? You and Lily are coming to tea, you know, and we thought we would make it a harvest tea. So we are all to wear corn-silk wigs, and we're going to put the candles in Jack-o'-lanterns—little ones, you know; squashes, of course, or apples." 172

"Apples will be best!" said Mary. "I have some pound sweets all picked out. We meant this for a surprise, you know, Tom, but never mind! It's really better fun for us all to know."

"Lots!" said Tom. "I forgot, though, about the surprise part. And then—it'll be full moon—we'll go out Jack-o'-lanterning, and that'll be no end; and then Mammy says we can roast chestnuts, and Father has the bonfire all ready, and we'll have a celebration. A Quicksilver Celebration, eh, Sue?"

"Oh, Tom!" said Sue. "Not Quicksilver any more; just stupid, stupid, grubby lead—and rusty, too!"

"Lead doesn't rust," said Teddy, gravely.

"This lead does! And—I've got something to read to you all. It is part of my penance, Mary. Yes, I will! It isn't all true, but part of it is." 173

She drew a letter from her pocket (it was written on pink paper, scented with cheap scent), and began to read:

"Miss Clarice Stephanotis Packard presents her compliments to Miss Susan Penrose, and tells her that I am going home to-morrow with my Papa, and I never shall come to this mean place any more. It is all my fault for assoshating with my soshal inpheriars, and if you hadn't have poked your nose into my affairs, Miss Penrose, and put your old candy in my pew, I shoud not have been robbed and most murderd. The girl here says I could have the law of you to get back the money my mouse ring cost,—"

"What girl?" asked Mary.

Sue blushed hotly.

"The—the chambermaid," she said. "She—Clarice has made a kind of companion of her. She isn't a very nice girl, I'm afraid."

Then resuming the reading—

"but Papa says he will get me a new one, and I shall see that nobody gets that away from me. You never will see me again, Sue, but you will have those common Harts; I supose they will be glad enouf to take up with you again." 174

"So I remain, Miss Penrose,

"Yours truly,
"MISS CLARICE STEPHANOTIS PACKARD."

Sue's eyes remained fixed on the paper; her cheeks glowed with shame and mortification; she could not meet her friends' eyes. There was a moment of dead silence; then came a sound that made her look up hastily, blushing still deeper.

"Why! why, you are all laughing!" she cried.

"My dear, of course we are laughing!" cried Mary, catching her in her arms. "What should we do but laugh? And we *are* glad to take up with you again, aren't we, boys?"

"Rather!" said Tom. "Why, Sue, it's been only half living without our Quicksilver."

"Have you really missed me?" cried poor Sue. "Oh, Tom! Of course I know Mary has, because I know how wretched I have been, really, all the time, even at first, when I didn't know it. But you, too, and Teddy? Oh, I am so glad! so glad! And now there are five of us, aren't there, Lily?" 175

Lily answered with a warm caress. She knew privately that she was the happiest of the five, but she did not know how to say it.

"Five of us!" echoed Teddy. "I say! we ought to have a name. The Frisky Five! No! that isn't good. Somebody else try!"

"The Festive Five!" suggested Tom.

But Mary shook her head. "I have it!" she said. "Join hands, all! the Faithful Five! Hurrah for us!"

The five children stood up and held hands, looking at one another with a certain solemnity.

"The Faithful Five!" they repeated. "Hurrah for us!"

And Teddy added: "But we'll make a toast of it to-night with shrub—lots of shrub!"

"And now we must make the wigs!" said Mary. "We'll do that in the barn chamber, so that we sha'n't mess with the silk."

"And then can't we climb a tree?" said Sue, plaintively. "I haven't climbed a tree for a month, Mary! I will be Isabella of Buchan, if you like, and you can all capture me and put me in the cage in the greening-tree."

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"All right!" "Hurrah!" "Come on!"

The joyous voices died away; and Mrs. Hart took off her glasses and wiped her eyes, but not before a tear had fallen on her work. "Bless them!" she said. "And hurrah for them! This may have been a good thing, after all."

An hour later Sue was bending once more over her journal; but this time Mary's arms were round her, and Mary's eyes were looking over her shoulder as she wrote.

"My troubles are over, and they were all my own fault; but now I am happy, and nothing but death can part me and Mary. I have the dearest and best friends in the world—"

"Oh, don't, Sue!" said Mary.

"I shall!" said Sue, and wrote on:

"And I have told Mamma all about everything, and she has forgiven me, and now we are all different, and she is perfectly lovely, and we understand all about things together, like Mary and her mother. And I hope I am going to be a better girl now all my life; but still the name I shall always love best is that I am Mary's own

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'QUICKSILVER SUE.'

Transcriber's Note:

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Inconsistent spelling and hyphenation in the original document have been preserved.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK QUICKSILVER SUE ***

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