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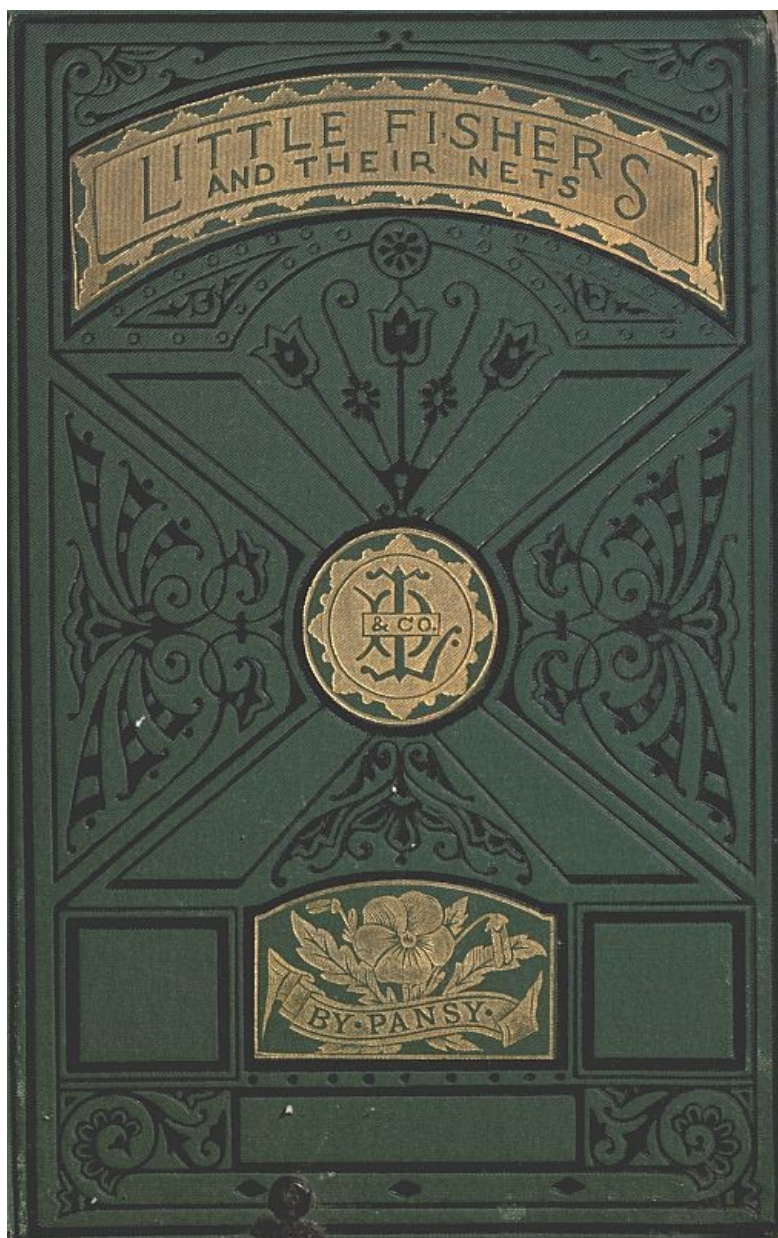
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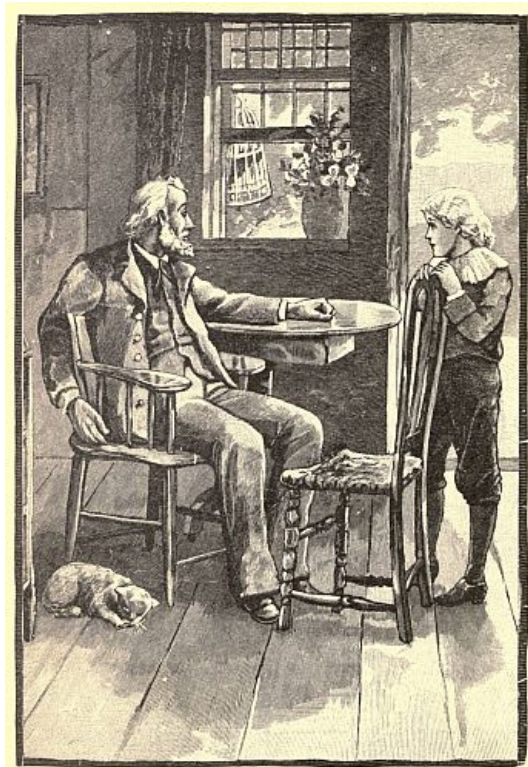
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**NORMAN WAS A HANDSOME BOY WHEN
SHE MARRIED MR. DECKER.**

Little Fishers: and Their Nets

[1]

BY
PANSY

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTIE'S CHRISTMAS," "A HEDGE FENCE," "GERTRUDE'S
DIARY," "THE MAN OF THE HOUSE," "INTERRUPTED,"
"THE HALL IN THE GROVE," "AN ENDLESS
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"RUTH ERSKINE'S CROSSES,"
"SPUN FROM FACT,"
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Little Fishers: and Their Nets.

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CHAPTER I. THE DECKERS' HOME.

JOE DECKER gave his chair a noisy shove backward from the table, over the uneven floor, shambled across the space between it and the kitchen door, a look of intense disgust on his face, then stopped for his good-morning speech:

"You may as well know, first as last, that I've sent for Nan. I've stood this kind of thing just exactly as long as I'm going to. There ain't many men, I can tell you, who would have stood it so long. Such a meal as that! Ain't fit for a decent dog!

"Nan is coming in the afternoon stage. There must be some place fixed up for her to sleep in. Understand, now, that has *got* to be done, and I won't have no words about it."

Then he slammed the door, and went away.

Yes, he was talking to his wife! She could remember the time when he used to linger in the door, talking to her, so many last words to say, and when at last he would turn away with a kind "Well, good-by, Mary! Don't work too hard."

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But that seemed ages ago to the poor woman who was left this morning in the wretched little room with the door slammed between her and her husband. She did not look as though she had life enough left to make words about anything. She sat in a limp heap in one of the broken chairs, her bared arms lying between the folds of a soiled and ragged apron.

Not an old woman, yet her hair was gray, and her cheeks were faded, and her eyes looked as though they had not closed in quiet restful sleep for months. She had not combed her hair that morning; and thin and faded as it was, it hung in straggling locks about her face.

I don't suppose you ever saw a kitchen just like that one! It was heated, not only by the fierce sun which streamed in at the two uncurtained eastern windows, but by the big old stove, which could smoke, not only, and throw out an almost unendurable heat on a warm morning like this, when heat was not wanted, but had a way at all times of refusing to heat the oven, and indeed had fits of sullenness when it would not "draw" at all.

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This was one of the mornings when the fire had chosen to burn; it had swallowed the legs and back of a rickety chair which the mistress in desperation had stuffed in, when she was waiting for the teakettle to boil, and now that there was nothing to boil, or fry, and no need for heat, the stump of wood, wet by yesterday's rain, had dried itself and chosen to burn.

The west windows opened into a side yard, and the sound of children's voices in angry dispute, and the smell of a pigsty, came in together, and seemed equally discouraging to the wilted woman in the chair.

The sun was already pretty high in the sky, yet the breakfast-table still stood in the middle of the room.

I don't know as I can describe that table to you. It was a square one, unpainted, and stained with something red, and something green, and spotted with grease, and spotted with black, rubbed from endless hot kettles set on it, or else from one kettle set on it endless times; it must have been that way, for now that I think of it, there was but one kettle in that house. No tablecloth covered the stains; there was a cracked plate which held a few crusts of very stale bread, and a teacup about a third full of molasses, in which several flies were struggling. More flies covered the bread crusts, and swam in a little mess of what had been butter, but was now oil, and these were the only signs of food.

[10]

It was from this breakfast-table that the man had risen in disgust. You don't wonder? You think it was enough to disgust anybody? That is certainly true, but if the man had only stopped to think that the reason it presented such an appearance was because he had steadily drunk up all that ought to have gone on it during the months past, perhaps he would have turned his disgust where it belonged—on himself.

The woman had not tried to eat anything. She had given the best she had to the husband and son, and had left it for them. She was very willing to do so. It seemed to her as though she never could eat another mouthful of anything.

Can you think of her, sitting in that broken chair midway between the table and the stove, the heat from the stove puffing into her face; the heat from the sun pouring full on her back, her straggling hair silvery in the sunlight, her short, faded calico dress frayed about the ankles, her feet showing plainly from the holes of the slippers into which they were thrust, her hands folded about the soiled apron, and such a look of utter hopeless sorrow on her face as cannot be described? [11]

No, I hope you cannot imagine a woman like her, and will never see one to help you paint the picture. And yet I don't know; since there are such women—scores of them, thousands of them—why should you not know about them, and begin now to plan ways of helping them out of these kitchens, and out of these sorrows?

Mrs. Decker rose up presently, and staggered toward the table; a dim idea of trying to clear it off, and put things in something like order, struggled with the faintness she felt. She picked up two plates, sticky with molasses, and having a piece of pork rind on one, and set them into each other. She poured a slop of weak tea from one cracked cup into another cracked cup, her face growing paler the while. Suddenly she clutched at the table, and but for its help, would have fallen. There was just strength enough left to help her back to the rickety chair. Once there, she dropped into the same utterly hopeless position, and though there was no one to listen, spoke her sorrowful thoughts. [12]

"It's no use; I must just give up. I'm done for, and that's the truth! I've been expecting it all along, and now it's come. I couldn't clear up here and get them any dinner, not if he should kill me, and I don't know but that will be the next thing. I've slaved and slaved; if anybody ever tried to do something with nothing, I'm the one; and now I'm done. I've just got to lie down, and stay there, till I die. I wish I *could* die. If I could do it quick, and be done with it, I wouldn't care how soon; but it would be awful to lie there and see things go on; oh, dear!"

She lifted up her poor bony hands and covered her face with them and shook as though she was crying. But she shed no tears. The truth is, her poor eyes were tired of crying. It was a good while since any tears had come. After a few minutes she went on with her story.

"It isn't enough that we are naked, and half-starved, and things growing worse every day, but now that Nan must come and make one more torment. 'Fix a place for her to sleep!' Where, I wonder, and what with? It is too much! Flesh and blood can't bear any more. If ever a woman did her best I have, and done it with nothing, and got no thanks for it; now I've got to the end of my rope. If I have strength enough to crawl back into bed, it is all there is left of me." [13]

But for all that, she tried to do something else. Three times she made an effort to clear away the few dirty things on that dirty table, and each time felt the deadly faintness creeping over her, which sent her back frightened to the chair. The children came in, crying, and she tried to untie a string for one, and find a pin for the other; but her fingers trembled so that the knot grew harder, and not even a pin was left for her to give them, and she finally lost all patience with their cross little ways and gave each a slap and an order not to come in the house again that forenoon.

The door was ajar into the most discouraged looking bedroom that you can think of. It was not simply that the bed was unmade; the truth is, the clothes were so ragged that you would have thought they could not be touched without falling to pieces; and they were badly stained and soiled, the print of grimy little hands being all over them. Partly pushed under, out of sight, was a trundle-bed, that, if anything, looked more repulsive than the large one. There was an old barrel in the corner, with a rough board over it, and a chair more rickety than either of those in the kitchen, and this was the only furniture there was in that room. [14]

The only bright thing there was in it was the sunshine, for there was an east window in this room, and the curtain was stretched as high as it could be. To the eyes of the poor tired woman who presently dragged herself into this room, the light and the heat from the sun seemed more than she could bear, and she tugged at the brown paper curtain so fiercely that it tore half across, but she got it down, and then she fell forward among the rags of the bed with a groan.

Poor Mrs. Decker! I wonder if you have not imagined all her sorrowful story without another word from me!

It is such an old story; and it has been told over so many times, that all the children in America know it by heart. [15]

Yes; she was the wife of a drunkard. Not that Joe Decker called himself a drunkard; the most that he ever admitted was that he sometimes took a drop too much! I don't think he had the least idea how many times in a month he reeled home, unable to talk straight, unable to help himself to his wretched bed.

I don't suppose he knew that his brain was never free from the effects of alcohol; but his wife knew it only too well. She knew that he was always cross and sullen now, when he was not fierce, and she knew that this was not his natural disposition. No one need explain to her how alcohol

would effect a man's nature; she had watched her husband change from month to month, and she knew that he was growing worse every day.

There was another sorrow in this sad woman's heart. She had one boy who was nearly ten years old, when she married Mr. Decker; and people had said to her often and often, "What a handsome boy you have, Mrs. Lloyd; he ought to have been a girl." And the first time she had felt any particular interest in Joe Decker was when he made her boy a kite, and showed him how to fly it, and gave him one bright evening, such as fathers give their boys. This boy's father had died when he was a baby, and the Widow Lloyd had struggled on alone; caring for him, keeping him neatly dressed, sending him to school as soon as he was old enough, bringing him up in such a way that it was often and often said in the village, "What a nice boy that Norman Lloyd is! A credit to his mother!" And the mother had sat and sewed, in the evenings when Norman was in bed, and thought over the things that fathers could do for boys which mothers could not; and then thought that there were things which mothers could do for girls that fathers could not, and Mr. Joseph Decker, the carpenter, had a little girl, she had been told, only a few years younger than her Norman. And so, when Mr. Decker had made kites, not only, but little sail boats, and once, a little table for Norman to put his school books on, with a drawer in it for his writing-book and pencil, and when he had in many kind and manly ways won her heart, this respectable widow who had for ten years earned her own and her boy's living, married him, and went to keep his home for him, and planned as to the kind and motherly things which she would do for his little girl when she came home.

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Alas for plans! She knew, this foolish woman, that Mr. Decker sometimes took a drink of beer with his noon meal, and again at night, perhaps; but she said to herself, "No wonder, poor man; always having to eat his dinner out of a pail! No home, and no woman to see that he had things nice and comfortable. She would risk but what he would stay at home, when he had one to stay in, and like a bit of beefsteak better than the beer, any day."

She had not calculated as to the place which the beer held in his heart. Neither had he. He was astonished to find that it was not easy to give it up, even when Mary wanted him to. He was astonished at first to discover how often he was thirsty with a thirst that nothing but beer would satisfy. I have not time for all the story. The beer was not given up, the habit grew stronger and stronger, and steadily, though at first slowly, the Deckers went down. From being one of the best workmen in town, Mr. Decker dropped down to the level of "Old Joe Decker," whom people would not employ if they could get anybody else. The little girl had never come home save for a short visit; at first the new mother was sorry, then she was glad.

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As the days passed, her heart grew heavier and heavier; a horrible fear which was almost a certainty, had now gotten hold of her—that her handsome, manly Norman was going to copy the father she had given him! Poor mother!

I would not, if I could, describe to you all the miseries of that long day! How the mother lay and tossed on that miserable bed, and burned with fever and groaned with pain. How the children quarreled and cried, and ran into mother, and cried again because she could give them no attention, and made up, and ran out again to play, and quarreled again. How the father came home at noon, more under the influence of liquor than he had been in the morning; and swore at the table still standing as he had left it at breakfast time, and swore at his wife for "lying in bed and sulking, instead of doing her work like a decent woman," and swore at his children for crying with hunger; and finally divided what remained of the bread between them, and went off himself to a saloon, where he spent twenty-five cents for his dinner, and fifty cents for liquor. How Norman came home, and looked about the deserted kitchen and empty cupboard, and looked in at his mother, and said he was sorry she had a headache, and sighed, and wished that he had a decent home like other fellows, and wished that a doctor could be found, who didn't want more money than he was worth, to pay him for coming to see a sick woman, and then went to a bakery and bought a loaf of bread, and a piece of cheese, and having munched these, washed them down with several glasses of beer, went back to his work. Meantime, the playing and the quarreling, and the crying, went on outside, and Mrs. Decker continued to sleep her heavy, feverish sleep.

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Several times she wakened in a bewilderment of fever and pain, and groaned, and tried to get up, and fell back and groaned again, and lost her misery in another unnaturally heavy sleep, and the day wore away until it was three o'clock in the afternoon. The stages would be due in a few minutes—the one that brought passengers over from the railroad junction a mile away. The children in the yard did not know that one of them was expected to stop at their house; and the father when he came home at noon had been drinking too much liquor to remember it; and Norman had not heard of it, and for his mother's sake would have been too angry to have met it if he had; so Nan was coming home with nobody to welcome her.

[20]

If you had seen her sitting at that moment, a trim little maiden in the stage, her face all flushed over the prospect of seeing father, and the rest, in a few minutes, you would not have thought it possible that she could belong to the Decker family.

She had not seen her home in seven years. She had been a little thing of six when she went away with the Marshall family.

It had all come about naturally. Mrs. Marshall was their neighbor, and had known her mother from childhood; and when she died had carried the motherless little girl home with her to stay until Mr. Decker decided what to do; and he was slow in deciding, and Mrs. Marshall had a family of boys, but no little girl, and held the motherless one tenderly for her mother's sake; and when the Marshalls suddenly had an offer of business which made it necessary for them to move to the city, they clung to the little girl, and proposed to Mr. Decker that she should go with them and

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stay until he had a place for her again.

Apparently he had not found a place for her in all these seven years, for she had never been sent for to come home.

The new wife had wanted her at first, to be mother to her, as she fancied Mr. Decker was going to be father to her boy. But it did not take her very many months to get her eyes open to the thought that perhaps the girl would be better off away from her father; and of late years she had looked on the possible home-coming with positive terror. Her own little ones had nothing to eat, sometimes, save what Norman provided; and if "he"—and by this Mrs. Decker meant her husband; he had ceased to be "Mr. Decker" to her, or "Joseph," or even Joe—if "he" should take a notion to turn against the girl, life would be more terrible to them in every way; and on the other hand, if he should fancy her, and because of her, turn more against the wife, or Norman, what would become of them then?

So the years had passed, and beyond an occasional threat when Joe Decker was at his worst, to "send for Nan right straight off," nothing had been said of her home-coming. The threat had come oftener of late, for Joe Decker had discovered that there was just now nothing that his wife dreaded more than the presence of this step-daughter; and his present manly mood was to do all he could for the discomfort of his wife! That was one of the elevating thoughts which liquor had given him!

[22]

Three o'clock. The stages came rattling down the stony road. Few people who lived on this street had much to do with the stage; they could not afford to ride, and they did not belong to the class who had much company.

So when the heavy carriages kept straight on, instead of turning the corner below, it brought a swarm of children from the various dooryards to see who was coming, and where.

"It's stopped at Decker's, as true as I live!" said Mrs. Job Smith, peeping out of her clean pantry window to get a view. "I heard that Joe had sent for little Nan, but I hoped it wasn't true. Poor Nan! if the Marshalls have treated her with any kind of decency, it'll be a dreadful change, and I'm sorry enough for her. Yes, that must be Nan getting out. She's got the very same bright eyes, but she has grown a sight, to be sure!" Which need not have seemed strange to Mrs. Smith, if she had stopped to remember that seven years had passed since Nan went away.

[23]

The little woman got down with a brisk step from the stage, and watched her trunk set in the doorway, and got out her red pocket-book, and paid the fare, and then looked about her doubtfully. Could this be home!

CHAPTER II. BEGINNING HER LIFE.

[24]

SHE did not remember anything, but the yard was very dirty, and the fence was tumbling down, and there were lights of glass out of the windows, and a general air of discomfort prevailed. It did not look like a home. Besides, where were father and mother? There must be some mistake.

The two little Deckers who had played and quarreled together all day had left their work to come and stare at the new comer out of astonished eyes. Certainly they did not seem to have been expecting her.

The new comer turned to the elder of the two children, and spoke in a gentle winning voice: "Little girl, do you live here—in this house?"

The child with her forefinger placed meditatively on her lip, and her bright eyes staring intensely, decided to nod that she did.

"And can you tell me what your name is?"

[25]

To this question there was no answer for several seconds, then she thought better of it and gravely said: "I could."

This seemed so funny, that poor Nan, though by this time carrying a very sad heart, could not help smiling.

"Well, will you?" she asked.

But at this the tangled yellow head was shaken violently. No, she wouldn't.

"It can't be," said Nan, talking to herself, since there was no one who would talk with her, looking with troubled eyes at the two uncombed, unwashed children, with their dresses half torn from them, and dirtier than any dresses that this trim little maiden had ever seen before, "this really cannot be the place! and yet father said this street and number; and the driver said this was right." Then she stooped to the little one. "Won't you tell me if your name is Satie Decker?"

But this one was shy, and hid her dirty face in her dirty hands, and stepped back behind her sister who at once came to the rescue.

"Yes, 'tis," she said, "and you let her alone."

A shadow fell over Nan's face, but she said quickly, "Then you must be Susie Decker, and this

[26]

place is really home!"

But you cannot think how strangely it sounded to her to call such a looking spot as this home. There was no use in standing on the doorstep. She could feel that curious eyes were peeping at her from neighbors' windows. She stepped quickly inside the half-open door, into the kitchen where that breakfast-table still stood, with the flies so thick around the molasses cup, from which the children had long since drained the molasses, that it was difficult to tell whether there was a cup behind it, or whether this really was a pyramid of flies.

The children followed her in. Susie had a dark frown on her face, and a determined air, as one who meant to stand up for her rights and protect the little sister who still tried to hide behind her. I think it was well they were there; had they not been, I feel almost sure that the stranger would have sat down in the first chair and cried.

Poor little woman! It was such a sorrowful home-coming to her. So different from what she had been planning all day.

I wish I could give you a real true picture of her as she stood in the middle of that dreadful room, trying to choke back the tears while she convinced herself that she was really Nettie Decker. A trim little figure in a brown and white gingham dress, a brown straw hat trimmed with broad bands and ends of satin ribbon, with brown gloves on her hands, and a ruffle in her neck. This was Nettie Decker; neat and orderly, from ruffle to buttoned boots. I wonder if you can think what a strange contrast she was to everything around her? [27]

What was to be done? she could not stand there, gazing about her; and there seemed no place to sit down, and nowhere to go. Where could father be? Why had he not stayed at home to welcome his little girl? or if too busy for that, surely the mother could have stayed, and he must have left a message for her.

If the little girls would only be good and try to tell her what all this strangeness meant! She made another effort to get into their confidence. She bent toward Susie, smiling as brightly as she could, and said: "Didn't you know, little girlie, that I was your sister Nettie? I have come home to play with you and help you have a nice time."

Even while she said it, she felt ten years older than she ever had before, and she wondered if she should ever play anything again; and if it could be possible for people to have nice times who lived in such a house as this. But Susie was in no sense won, and scowled harder than ever, as she said in a suspicious tone: "I ain't got no sister Nettie, only Sate, and Nan." [28]

Hot as the room was, the neat little girl shivered. There was something dreadful to her in the sound of that name. She had forgotten that she ever used to hear it; she remembered her father as having called her 'Nannie'; that would do very well, though it was not so pleasant to her as the 'Nettie' to which she had been answering for seven years.

But how strange and sad it was that these little sisters should have been taught to call her Nan! could there be a more hateful name than that, she wondered. Did it mean that her step-mother hated her, and had taught the children to do so? She swallowed at the lump in her throat. What if she should cry! what would those children say or do, and what would happen next? she must try to explain.

"I am Nannie," she couldn't make her lips say the word Nan. "I have come home to live, and to help you!" She did not feel like saying "play with you," now. "Will you be a good girl, and let me love you?" [29]

How Susie scowled at her then! "No," she said, firmly, "I won't."

There seemed to be no truthful answer to make to this, for in the bottom of her heart, Nannie did not believe that she could. Still, she must make the best of it, and she began slowly to draw off her gloves. Clearly she must do something towards getting herself settled.

"Won't you tell me where father is? or mother?" her voice faltered a little over that word; "maybe you can show me where to put my trunk; do you know which is to be my room?"

There were pauses made between each of these questions. The poor little stranger seemed to be trying first one form and then another, to see if it was possible to get any help.

Susie decided at last to do something besides scowl.

"Mother's sick. She lies in bed and groans all the time. She ain't got us no dinner to-day; Sate and me called her, and called her, and she wouldn't say anything to us. There ain't no room only this and that," nodding her head toward the bedroom door, "and the room over the shed where Norm sleeps. Norm is hateful. He didn't bring home no bread this noon for Sate and me; and he said maybe he would; we're awful hungry." [30]

"Perhaps he couldn't," said poor startled Nettie. She hardly knew what she said, only it seemed natural to try to excuse Norm. But what dreadful story was this! If there was really a sick mother, why was not the father bending over her, and the house hushed and darkened, and somebody tiptoeing about, planning comforts for the night? She had seen something of sickness, and this was the way it was managed.

Then what was this about there being no room for her? Then what in the world was she to do? Oh, what did it all mean! She felt as though she must run right back to the depot, and get on the cars and go to her own dear home. To be sure she knew that her father was poor; what of that? so were the Marshalls; she had heard Mrs. Marshall say many a time that "poor folks can't have such things," in answer to some of the children's coaxings. But poverty such as this which [31]

seemed to surround this home was utterly strange to Nettie.

Still, though she felt such a child, she was also a woman; in some things at least. She knew there was no going home for her to-night. If she had the money to go with, and if there had been a train to go on, she would still have been stayed, because it would be wrong to go. Her father had sent for her, had said that they wanted her, needed her, and her father certainly had a right to her; and she had come away with a full heart, and a firm resolve to be as good and as helpful and as happy in her old home as she possibly could. And now that nothing anywhere was as she had expected it, was no reason why she should not still do right. Only, what was there for her to do, and how should she begin?

She stood there still in the middle of the room, the children staring. Presently she crossed on tiptoe to the bedroom door which was partly open and peeped in, catching her first glimpse of the woman whom she must call "mother."

Also she caught a glimpse of that dreadful bed; and the horrors of that sight almost took away the thought of the woman lying on it. How could she help being sick if she had to sleep in such a place as that? Poor Nettie Decker! She stood and looked, and looked. Then seeing that the woman did not stir, but seemed to be in a heavy sleep, she shut the door softly and came away. [32]

I don't suppose that Nettie Decker will ever forget the next three hours of her life, even if she lives to be an old woman. Not that anything wonderful happened; only that, for years and years afterwards, it seemed to her that she grew suddenly, that afternoon, from a happy-hearted little girl of thirteen, into a care-taking, sorrowful woman. While she stood in that bedroom door, a perfect whirl of thoughts rushed through her brain, and when she shut the door, she had come to this conclusion:

"I can't help it; I am Nettie Decker; he is my father, and I belong to him, and I ought to be here if he wants me; and she is my mother; and if it is dreadful, I can't help it; there is everything to do; and I must do it."

It was then that she shut the door softly and went back and began her life.

There was that trunk out on the stoop. It ought to go somewhere. At least she could drag it into the kitchen so that the troops of children gathering about the door need not have it to wonder at any longer. Putting all her strength to it she drew it in and shut the door. By this time, Sate, who was getting used to her as she had gotten used to many a new thing in her little life, began to wail that she was hungry, and wanted some bread and some molasses. [33]

"Poor little girlie!" Nettie said, "don't cry; I'll see if I can find you something to eat. Did she really have no dinner, Susie? Oh, darling, don't cry so; you will trouble poor mother."

But Susie had gone back to the scowling mood. "She *shall* cry, if she wants to; you can't stop her; and you needn't try; I'll cry too, just as loud as I can."

And Susie Decker who had strong lungs and always did as she said she would, immediately set up such a howl as put Sate's milder crying quite in the shade.

Nettie looked over at the bedroom door in dismay; but no sound came from there. Yet this roaring was fearful. How could it be stopped? Suddenly she plunged her hand into the depths of a small travelling bag which still hung on her arm, and brought forth a lovely red-cheeked peach. She held it before the eyes of the naughty couple and spoke in a determined tone: "This is for the one who stops crying this instant." [34]

Both children stopped as suddenly as though they had been wound up, and the machinery had run down.

Nettie smiled, and went back into the travelling bag. "There must be two of them, it seems," she said, and brought out another peach. "Now you are to sit down on the steps and eat them, while I see what can be found for our supper."

Down sat the children. There had been quiet determination in this new-comer's tone, and peaches were not to be trifled with. Their mouths had watered for a taste ever since the dear woolly things began to appear in the grocery windows, and not one had they had!

Now began work indeed. Nettie opened her trunk and drew out a work apron which covered her dress from throat to shoes, and made her look if anything, prettier than before. Where was the broom? The children busy with their peaches, neither knew nor cared; however, a vigorous search among the rubbish in the shed brought one to light. And then there was such a cloud of dust as the Decker kitchen had not seen in a long time. Then came a visit to the back yard in search of chips; both children following close at her heels, saying nothing, but watching every movement with wide-open wondering eyes. Back again to the kitchen and the fire was made up. Then an old kettle was dragged out from a hole in the corner, which poor Mrs. Decker called a closet. It was to hold water, while the fire heated it, but first it must be washed; everything must be washed that was touched. Where was the dishcloth? [35]

The children being asked, stared and shook their heads. Nettie searched. She found at last a rag so black and ill-smelling that without giving the matter much thought she opened the stove door and thrust it in. This brought a rebuke from the fierce Susie.

"You better look out how you burn up my mother's things. My mother will take your head right off."

"It wasn't good for anything, dear," Nettie said soothingly, "it was too dirty." And she stooped down and turned over the contents of the trunk. Neat little piles of clothing, carefully marked [36]

with her full name; a pretty green box which Susie dived for, and pushing off the cover disclosed little white ruffles, some of lace, and some of fine lawn, lying cosily together; but Nettie was not searching for such as these. Quite at the bottom of the trunk was a pile of towels, all neatly hemmed and marked. Two of these she selected; looked thoughtfully at one of them for a moment, and then with a grave shake of her head, got out her scissors and snipped it in two. Now she had a dishcloth, and a towel for drying. But what a pity to soil the nice white cloth by washing out that iron kettle! Nettie had grave suspicions that after such a proceeding it would not be fit for the dishes. Still, the kettle must be washed, and to have used the black rag which she had burned, was out of the question.

There was no help for it, the other neat dishcloth must be sacrificed. So taking the precaution to wipe out the iron kettle with a piece of paper, and then to heat it quite hot, and apply soap freely, the cloth escaped without very serious injury; and in less time than it takes me to tell it, the water was getting itself into bubbles over the stove, and a tin pan was being cleaned, ready for the dishes. Then they were gathered, and placed in the hot and soapy water, and washed and rinsed and polished with the white towel until they shone; and the little girls looked on, growing more amazed each moment.

[37]

It did not take long to wash every dish there was in that house. I suppose you would have been very much astonished if you could have seen how few there were! Nettie was very much astonished. She wondered how people could get supper with so few dishes, to say nothing of breakfasts and dinner. But you see she did not know how little there was to put on them.

The next question was, Where to put them? One glance at the upper part of the closet where she had found some of them, convinced Nettie that her clean dishes could not be happy resting on those shelves. There was no help for it; they must be scrubbed, though she had not intended to begin housecleaning the first afternoon. More water and more soap, and the few shelves were soon cleared of rubbish, and washed. Nettie piled all the rubbish on a lower shelf and left it for a future day. She did not dare to burn any more property.

"Don't they look pretty?" she said to the children, when at last the dishes were neatly arranged on the shelf. One held them all, nicely.

[38]

Susie nodded with a grave face that said she had not yet decided whether to be pleased or indignant.

"What did you do it for?" she asked, after a moment's silent survey.

"Why, to make them clean and shining. You and I are going to clear up the house and make it look ever so nice for mother when she wakes up."

"Did you come home to help mother?"

"Yes, indeed. And you two little sisters must show me how to help her; poor sick mother! I am afraid she has too much to do."

"She cries," said Susie gravely, as though she were stating not a surprising but simply a settled fact; "she cried every day: not out loud like Sate and me, but softly. Father says she is always sniveling."

If you had been watching Nettie Decker just then you would have noticed that the blood flamed into her cheeks, and her eyes had a flash of wonder, and terror, and anger in them. What did it all mean? Where had the children learned such words? Was it possible that her father talked in this way to his wife?

[39]

"Hush!" she said unguardedly, "you must not talk so." But this made the fierce little Susie stamp her foot.

"I *shall* talk so!" she said angrily; "I shall talk just what I please, and you sha'n't stop me." And then the queer little mimic beside her stamped her foot, and said, "You sha'n't stop me."

Said Nettie, "There was a little girl on the cars to-day that I knew. She had a little gray kitty with three white feet, and a white spot on one ear, and it had a blue ribbon around its neck. What if you had such a kitty. Would you be real good to it?"

"I will have a *black* kitty," said Susie, "all black; as black as that stove." Nettie glancing at the stove, could not help thinking that it was more gray than black; but she kept her thoughts to herself, and Susie went on. "And it should have a red ribbon around its neck; as red as Janie Martin's dress; her dress is as red as fire, and has ruffles on, and ribbons. But what would it eat?"

She did not mean the dress but the kitten.

Nettie laughed, but hastened to explain that the kitten would need a saucer of milk quite often, and bits of various things. This made wise Susie gravely shake her head.

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"We don't have no milk," she said, "only once in awhile when Norm buys it; Sate, she often cries for milk, but she don't get none. It don't do no good to cry for milk; I ain't cried for any in a long time."

Poor little philosopher! Poor, pitiful childhood without any milk! Hardly anything could have told the story of poverty to Nettie's young ears more surely than this. Why, she was a big girl thirteen years old, and had lived in a city where milk was scarce, and yet her glass had been filled every evening. Nettie did not know what to make of it. How came her father to be so poor? She was sure that the house did not look like this when she went away; and her clothes had been neat and good. She had the little red dress now which she wore away. She thought of it when Susie was talking, and wondered if with a little fixing it could not be made to fit the black-eyed

child who seemed to admire red so much. Finding the kitty a troublesome subject, at least so far as the finding of milk for it was concerned, she turned the conversation to the little girls who had been on the cars; the one with the kitty, and her little sister, whom she called "Pet." "She was about as old as you, Susie, and Pet was about Satie's age. And she was very kind to Pet; she always spoke to her so gently, and took such care of her everybody seemed to love her for her kindness."

[41]

"I take care of Sate," said Susie. "I never let anybody hurt her. I would scratch their eyes out if they did; and they know it."

"You slap me sometimes," little Sate said, her voice slightly reproachful.

"Yes," said Susie loftily, "but that is when you are bad and need it; I don't let anybody else slap you."

"The oldest little girl had curly hair," said Nettie, "but it wasn't so long as yours, and did not curl so nicely as I think yours would. And Pet's hair was a pretty brown, like Sate's, and looked very pretty. It was combed so neatly. One wore a blue dress, and one a white dress; but I think they would have looked prettier if they had been dressed both alike."

"I don't like white dresses," said Susie; "I like fiery red ones."

So Nettie resolved that the red dress should be made to fit her.

[42]

Meantime, the scrubbing had gone on rapidly; the table was as clean as soap and water could make it. Now if those children would only let her wash their faces and put their hair in order, how different they would look. Should she venture to suggest it?

It all depended on how the idea happened to strike Susie.

CHAPTER III. THE TRUTH IS TOLD.

[43]

IN the bottom of that wonderful little trunk lay side by side two little blue and white plaid dresses, made gabrielle fashion, with ruffles around the bottom and around the neck. Never were dresses made with more patient care. All the stitches were small and very neat.

And they represented hours and hours of steady work. Every stitch in them had been taken by Nettie Decker. Long before she had thought of such a thing as coming home, they had been commenced. Birthday presents they were to be to the little sisters whom she had never seen. She had earned the money to buy them. She had borrowed two little neighbors of the same age, to fit them to, and with much advice and now and then a little skilful handling from Mrs. Marshall, they were finally finished to Nettie's great satisfaction.

It was the day the last stitch was set in them that she learned she was to come herself and bring them.

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She thought of them this afternoon. If the little girls would only let her comb their hair and wash their faces and hands, she would put on the new dresses. She had not intended to present them in that way, but dresses as soiled and faded and worn as those the little sisters had on, Nettie Decker had never worn.

She opened the trunk, with both children beside her, watching, and drew out the dresses.

"Aren't these almost as pretty as red ones?" she asked, as she unfolded them, and displayed the dainty ruffles.

"No," said Susie, "not near so pretty as red ones. But then they are pretty. They aren't dresses at all; they are aprons. Are they for you to wear?"

"No," said Nettie, "they are for two little girls to wear, who have their hair combed beautifully, and their hands and faces very clean."

"Do you mean us?"

"I do if the description fits. I can think just how nice you would look if your faces were clean and your hair was combed."

"We will put on the aprons," said Susie firmly, "but we won't have our hair combed, nor our faces washed, and you need not try it."

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But Miss Susie found that this new sister had as strong a will as she. The trunk lid went down with a click, and Nettie rose up.

"Very well," she said, "then we will not waste time over them. I brought them for you, and meant to put them on you this afternoon to surprise mamma, but if you don't want them, they can lie in the trunk."

"I told you we did want them," said Susie, looking horribly cross. "I said we would put them on."

"Yes, but you said some more which spoiled it. I say that they cannot go on until your faces and hands are so clean that they shine, and your hair is combed beautifully."

"You can't make us have our hair combed."

"I shall not try," said Nettie, as though it was a matter of very small importance to her. "I was willing to dress you all up prettily, but if you don't choose to look like the little girls I saw on the cars, why you can go dirty, of course. But you can't have the clean new dresses."

"Till when?"

"Not ever. Unless you are clean and neat."

[46]

"It hurts to have hair combed."

"I know it. Yours would hurt a good deal, because you don't have it combed every day; if you kept it smooth and nice it would hardly hurt at all. But I didn't suppose you were a cowardly little girl who was afraid of a few pulls. If the dresses are not worth those, we had better let them lie in the trunk."

Nettie was already beginning to understand her queer fierce little sister. She had no idea of being thought a coward.

"Well," she said, after a thoughtful pause, "comb my hair if you like; I don't care. Sate, you are going to have your hair combed, and you needn't cry; because it won't do any good."

It was certainly a trial to all parties; and poor little Sate in spite of this warning, did shed several tears; but Susie, though she frowned, and choked, and once jerked the comb away and threw it across the floor, did not let a single tear appear on her cheeks. And at last the terrible tangles slipped out, and left silky folds of beautiful hair that was willing to do whatever Nettie's skilful fingers told it. When the faces and hands were clean, and the lovely blue dresses had been arranged, Nettie stood back to look at them in genuine delight. What pretty little girls they were! She sighed in two minutes after she thought this. What did it mean that they looked so neglected and dirty?

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"These must go in the wash," she said, as she gathered up the rags which had been kicked off.

"Will we put these on in the morning?" asked Susie, in quite a mild tone. She was looking down at herself and was very much pleased with her changed appearance.

"Oh, no," Nettie said, "they are too light to play in. They are dress-up clothes. You must have dark dresses on in the morning."

"We ain't got no dresses only them," and Susie pointed contemptuously at the rags in Nettie's hand. This made poor Nettie sigh again. What did it all mean?

However, there was no time for sighing. There was still a great deal to be done.

"Now we must get tea," she said, bustling about. "Where does mother keep the bread, and other things?"

"She don't keep them nowhere. We don't have no things. I go to the bakery sometimes for bread, and for potatoes, and sometimes for milk. I would go now; I just want to show that hateful little girl in there my new dress, and my curls, but it isn't a bit of use to go. He won't let us have another single thing without the money. He said so yesterday, and he looked so cross he scared Sate; but I made faces at him."

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This called forth several questions as to where the bakery was, and Nettie, finding that it was but a few steps away, and that the little girls really bought most of the things which came from there, counted out the required number of pennies from her poor little purse for a loaf of bread and a pint of milk. In the cupboard was what had once been butter, set on the upper shelf in a teacup. It was almost oil, now.

"If I had a lump of ice for this," Nettie murmured, "it might do. Butter costs so much."

"They keep ice at the bakery," said that wise young woman, Susie, "but we never buy it."

This brought two more pennies from the pocketbook; for to Nettie it seemed quite impossible that butter in such a condition could be eaten. So the ice was ordered, and two very neat, and very vain little bits of girls started on their mission.

Tablecloths? Where would the new housekeeper find them? Where indeed! Hunt through the room as she would, no trace of one was to be found. She did not know that the Deckers had not used such an article in months. She thought of the cupboard drawer at home, and of the neat pile which was always waiting there, and at about this hour it had been her duty to set the table and make everything ready for tea. It would not do to think about it. There were sharper contrasts than these. Her proposed present to her mother had been a tablecloth, not very large nor very fine, but beautifully smooth and clean, and hemmed by her own patient fingers. She must get it out to-night, as no other appeared; and of course she could not set the table without one. So it was spread on the clean table, and the few dishes arranged as well as she could. There was a drawing of tea set up in another teacup, and there was a sticky little tin teapot. Nettie, as she washed it, told it that to-morrow she would scour it until it shone; then she made tea. Meantime the little errand girls had returned with their purchases, the butter was resting on a generous lump of ice, the bread which was found to be stale, was toasted, a plate of cookies from the wonderful trunk was added, and at last there was ready such a supper as had not been eaten in that house for weeks. To be sure it looked to Nettie as though there was very little to eat; but then she had not been used to living at the Deckers. She began to be very nervous about the people who were going to sit down at this neat table. Why did not some of them come?

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The wise housekeeper knew that neither tea nor toast improved greatly by standing, but she

drew the teapot to the very edge of the stove, covered the toast, and set it in the oven. Then she went softly to the bedroom door and opened it. This time a pair of heavy eyes turned, as the door creaked, and were fixed on her with a kind of bewildered stare. She went softly in.

"How do you feel now?" she asked gently. "I have made a cup of tea and a bit of toast for you. Shall I bring them now? The children said you did not eat any dinner."

"Who are you?" asked the astonished woman, still regarding her with that bewildered stare.

Nettie swallowed at the lump in her throat. It would be dreadful if she should burst out crying and run away, as she felt exactly like doing.

"I am Nettie Decker," she said, and her lips quivered a little. "Father sent for me, you know. Didn't you think I would be here to-day, ma'am?" [51]

"You can't be Nan!"

I cannot begin to describe to you the astonishment there was in Mrs. Decker's voice.

"Yes'm, I am. At least that is what father used to call me once in a while, just for fun. My name is Nanette; but Auntie Marshall where I live, or where I used to live"—she corrected herself, "always called me Nettie. May I bring you the tea, ma'am? I think it will make you feel better."

But the two children had stayed in the background as long as they intended. They pushed forward, Susie eager-voiced:

"Look at us! See my curls, and see my new apron, only she says it is a dress, but it ain't; it is made just like Jennie Brown's apron, ain't it? But we ain't got no dresses on. She's got a white cloth on the table, and cookies, and a lump of ice, and everything; and we had two peaches. Old Jock gave us the bread. She sent the money, and I told him to take his old money and give me some bread right straight."

How fast Susie could talk! [52]

There was scarcely room for the slow sweet Satie to get in her gentle, "and me too." Meaning look at my dress and hair. The bewildered mother raised herself on her elbow and stared—from Nan to the little girls, and then back to Nan. She was sufficiently astonished to satisfy even Susie.

"Well, I never!" she said at last. "I didn't know, I mean I didn't think"—then she stopped and pressed her hand to her head, and pushed back the straggling hair behind her ears. "I took dizzy this morning," she said at last, addressing Nettie as though she were a grown-up neighbor who had stepped in to see her, "and I staggered to the bed, and didn't know nothing for a long while. I had a dreadful pain in my head, and then I must have dropped to sleep. Here I've been all day, if the day is gone. It must be after three o'clock if you've got here. I meant to try to do something towards making things a little more decent; though the land knows what it would have been; I don't. There's nothing to do with. I didn't know till this morning that he had the least notion of sending for you—though he's threatened it times enough. I've been ailing all the spring, and this morning I just give out. I don't know what is the matter with me. The bed goes round now, and things get into a kind of a blur." [53]

"Let me bring you a cup of tea and something to eat," said Nettie; "I think you are faint." Then she vanished, the children following. She was back in a few minutes, under her arm a white towel from her trunk; this she spread on the barrel head which you will remember did duty as a table. She spread it with one hand, little Sate carefully smoothing out the other end. In her left hand she carried a cup of tea smoking hot, and poor Mrs. Decker noticed that the cup shone. Susie followed behind, an air of grave importance on her face, and in her hands a plate, covered by a smaller one, which being taken off disclosed a delicately browned slice of bread with a bit of butter spread carefully over it.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Decker again, but she drank the tea with feverish haste, stopping long enough to feel of the cup with a curious look on her face. It was so smooth. There was a sound of heavy feet outside, and the children appeared at the door and announced that father and Norm had come. Nettie took the emptied cup, promising to fill it again, urged the eating of the toast while it was hot, and went with trembling heart to meet the father whom she had not seen in so many years that she remembered very little about him. [54]

A great rough-faced, unshaven man, with uncombed hair, ragged and dirty shirt sleeves, ragged and dirty pants, a red face and eyes that seemed but half open, and watery. Nothing less like what Nettie had imagined a father, could well be described. However, if she had but known it, this was a great improvement on the man who often came home to supper. He was nearly sober, and greeted her with a rough sort of kindness, giving her a kiss, which made her shrink and tremble. It was perfumed with odors which she did not like.

"Well, Nan, my girl, you have grown into a fine young lady, have you? Tall for your years, too. And smart, I'll be bound; you wouldn't be your mother's girl if you wasn't. Is it you that has fixed up things so? It is a good thing you have come to take care of us. We haven't had anything decent here in so long, we've most forgot how to treat it. Come on, Norm. This table looks something like living again." [55]

And "Norm" shambled in. Rough, and uncombed, and unwashed, except a dab at his hands which left long streaks of brown at the wrists. A hard-looking boy, harder than Nettie had ever spoken to before. She could not help thinking of Jim Daker who lived in a saloon not far from her old home, and whom she had always passed with a hurried step, and with eyes on the ground, and of whom she thought as of one who lived in a different world from hers, and wondered how it

felt to be down there in the slum. Now here was a boy whom it was her duty to think of as a brother; and he reminded her of Jim Daker!

Still there was something about Norm that she could not help half liking. He had great brown, wistful-looking eyes, and an honest face. She had not much chance, it is true, to observe the eyes; for he did not look at her, nor speak, until his father said:

"Why don't you shake hands with Nan? You ought to be glad to see her. You ain't used to such a looking supper as this."

The boy laughed, in an embarrassed way, and said he was sure he did not know whether he was glad to see her or not: depended on what she had come for. He gave her just a gleam then from the brown eyes, and she smiled and held out her hand. He took it awkwardly enough, and dropped it as suddenly as though it had been hot; then sat down in haste at the table, where his step-father was already making havoc with the toast. It was not a very substantial meal for people who had dined on bread and cheese, and were hungering at that moment for beer; but the man had spoken the truth, it was better than they generally found. There was one part of the story, however, that he failed to tell: which was, that he did not furnish money to get anything better. As for Susie and Sate, they had become suddenly silent. They sat close together and devoured their toast, like hungry children indeed, but also like scared children. They gave occasional frightened glances at their father which puzzled and pained Nettie. No suspicion of the truth had yet come to her. Oh, yes, she had smelled the liquor when her father kissed her; but she thought it was something which had to do with the machinery around which he worked.

[56]

"Where is the old woman?" he asked suddenly, setting down his empty cup which Nettie had filled for the third time. She looked up at him with a startled air. To whom was he speaking and what old woman could he mean? Her look seemed to make him cross. "What are you staring at?" he said sharply. "Can't you answer a question? Where's your mother?"

[57]

Nettie hurried to answer; she was sick, had been real sick all day, but was better now, and was trying to get up.

"She is everlastingly sick," the father said with a sneer; "you will get used to that story if you live here long. I hope you ain't one of the sickly kind, because we have heard enough of that."

This sentence and the tone in which it was spoken, brought the blood in great waves to Nettie's face. It was the first time she had ever heard a man speak of his wife in such a way. Norm looked up from his cookie, and flashed angry eyes on his step-father for a moment, and said "he didn't know as that was any wonder. She had enough to make any woman sick."

"You shut up," said the father in increasing irritability; and the children slipped out of their seats and moved toward the door, keeping careful eyes on the father until they were fairly outside. Nettie felt her limbs trembling so that her knees knocked together under the table. But at last every crumb of toast was eaten, and every drop of tea swallowed, and Mr. Decker pushed himself back from the table, and spoke in a somewhat gentler tone: "Well, my girl, make yourself as comfortable as you can. I'm glad to see you. We need your help, you'll find, in more ways than one. You've been working for other folks long enough. It is a poor place you've come to, and that's a fact. I ain't what I used to be; I've been unfortunate. No fellow ever had worse luck. Everything has gone wrong with me ever since your mother died. A sick wife, and young ones to look after, and nobody to do a thing. It is a hard life, but you might as well rough it with the rest of us. You'll get along somehow, I s'pose. The rest of us always have. I've got to go out for awhile. You tell the old woman to fix up some place for you to sleep, and we'll do the best we can."

[58]

And he lounged away; Norm having left the table and the room some minutes before. And this was the father to whom Nettie Decker had come home!

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She swallowed at the lump which seemed growing larger every minute in her throat. She had choked back a great many tears that afternoon. There was no time to cry. Some place must be fixed for her to sleep.

In the home that she had left, there was a little room with matting on the floor, and a little white bed in the corner, and a pretty toilet set that the carpenter's son had made her at odd times, and a wash bowl and pitcher that had been her present on her eleventh birthday, and a green rocking-chair that aunt Kate had sent her: not her own aunt Kate, but Mrs. Marshall's sister who had adopted her as a niece, and these things and many another little knickknack were all her own. The room was empty to-night; but then Nettie must not cry!

She began to gather the dishes and get them ready for washing. Just as she plunged her hands into the dishwater, the bedroom door opened, and her mother came out, stepping feebly, like one just recovering from severe illness.

"I'm dreadful weak," she said in answer to Nettie's inquiries, "but I guess I'm better than I have been in a good while. I've had a rest to-day; the first one I have had in three years. I don't know what made me give out so, all of a sudden. I tried to keep on my feet, but I couldn't do it no more than I could fly. You oughtn't to have to wash them dishes, child, with your pretty hands and your pretty dress. Oh, dear! I don't know what is to become of any of us."

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"This is my work apron," said Nettie, trying to speak cheerily, "and I am used to this work: I always helped with the tea dishes at home." Then she plunged into the midst of the subject which was troubling her. "Father said I was to ask you where I was to sleep."

"He better ask himself!" said the wilted woman, rousing to sudden energy and indignation. "How does he think I know? There isn't the first rag to make a bed of, nor a spot to put it, if there

was. I say it was a sin and a shame for him to send for you, and that's the truth! If he had one decent child who had a place to stay, where she would be took care of, he ought to have let you alone. You have come to an awful home, child. You have got to know the truth, and you might as well know it first as last. It is enough sight worse than you have seen to-night, though I dare say you think this is bad enough. You don't look nor act like what I was afraid of, and you must have had good friends who took care of you; and he ought to have let you alone. This is no place for a decent girl. It is bad enough for an old woman who has given up, and never expects to have anything decent any more. He won't provide any place for you, nor any clothes, and what we are to do with one more mouth to feed is more than I can see. I wouldn't grudge it to you, child, if we had it; but we are starved, half the time, and that's the living truth."

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"I won't eat much," said poor Nettie, trembling and quivering, "and I will try very hard to help; but if you please, what makes things so? Can't father get work?"

"Work! of course he can; as much as he can do. He is as good a machinist to-day as there is in the shops; when they have a particular job they want him to do it. He works hard enough by spells; why, child, it's the drink. You didn't know it, did you? Well, you may as well know it first as last. He was nearer sober to-night than he has been in a week; but he wasn't so very sober or he wouldn't have been cross. He used to be good and kind as the best of them, and we had things decent. I never thought it would come to this, but it has, and it grows worse every day. Yes, you may well turn pale, and cry out. Turning pale won't do any good. And you may cry tears of blood, and them that sells the rum to poor foolish men will go right on selling it as long as they have money to pay, and kick them out when they haven't. That is the way it is done, and it keeps going on here year after year, homes ruined, and children made beggars, and them that have the making of the laws, go right on and let it be done. I've watched it. And I've tried, too. You needn't think I gave up and sat down to it without trying as hard as ever woman could to struggle against the curse; but I've give up now. Nothing is of any use. And the worst of it is my Norm is going the same road."

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CHAPTER IV. NEW FRIENDS.

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AND then the poor woman who thought she had no more tears to shed, buried her face in her hands and shed some of the bitterest ones she ever did in her life.

Poor Nettie! she tried to turn comforter; tried to think of one cheering word to say; but what was there to cheer the wife of a drunkard? Or the daughter of a drunkard? Could it be possible that she, Nettie Decker, was that! Oh, dear! how often she had stood in the door, and with a kind of terrified fascination watched Jane Daker stealing home in the darkness, afraid to go in at the front door, lest her drunken father should see her and vent his wrath on her. Could she ever creep around in the dark and hide away from her own *father*? Wouldn't it be possible for her to go back home? She had not money enough to get there, but couldn't she work somehow, and earn money? She could write a letter to the folks at home and tell them the dreadful story, and they would surely find a way of sending for her. But then, money was not plenty in that home, and she began to understand that they had done a great deal for her, and that it had cost a good deal to pay her fare to this place. She had wondered, at the time, that her father did not send the money for her to come home, but she said to herself: "I suppose he did not know how much it would cost, and he will give it to me to send in my first letter. Perhaps he will give me a little bit more than it costs, too, for a little present for Jamie."

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Oh, poor little girl! building hopes on a father like hers. She had not been at home half a day, but she knew now that no money would ever go back to the Marshalls in return for all they had done for her. Worse than that, she might not be able to get back to them herself. Would her father be likely to let her go? He had sent for her, and had told her during this first hour of their meeting, that she had worked for other people long enough. This made her heart swell with indignation.

Done enough for others, indeed! What had they not done for her? She never realized it half so plainly as she did to-night. "I will go back!" she muttered, setting the little bowl she was drying on the table with a determined thump. "I can't stay in such a place as this. I will write to Auntie Marshall this very night if I can get a chance, and she will contrive some way."

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Certainly, Nettie in that mood could have no comfort for a weeping mother, and attempted none, after the first murmured word of pity. But meantime she knew very well that she could not go back home that night, and the present terror was, where was she to sleep?

Her mother went back into the bedroom after a few minutes of bitter weeping, and Nettie finished the work, then stood drearily in the doorway, wondering what she could do next, when a good, homely, motherly face looked out of the side window of the small house next their own, and a cheery voice spoke:

"Are you Joe Decker's little Nannie?"

"Yes'm," said Nettie, sadly, wondering drearily, even then, if it could be possible that this was so.

"Well," said the voice, "I calculated that you must be; though I never should have known you in

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the world, if I hadn't heard you was coming, you was such a mite of a thing when you went away. What a tall nice girl you've got to be. Your ma is sick, the children said. I've been away ironing all day, or I would have been in to see if I could help the poor thing any. I don't know her very much, but she is sickly, and has hard times now and then, and I'm sorry for her. Now what I was wondering is, where are they going to put you to sleep? The upper part of that house ain't finished off, is it? It is one big attic, ain't it, where Norm sleeps? I thought so. I suppose there could be quite a nice room made up there with a little work and a few dollars laid out, but your pa ain't done it, I'll be bound. And I knew there wasn't but one bedroom down-stairs, and I couldn't think how they would manage it."

"It isn't managed at all, ma'am," said Nettie, seeing that she seemed to wait for an answer, and there was nothing to say but the simple truth. "There is no place for me to sleep."

"You don't say! Now that's a shame. Well, now, what I was thinking was, that maybe you would like to sleep in the woodhouse chamber; it is a nice little room as ever was, and it opens right out of my Sarah Ann's room; so you wouldn't be lonesome. I haven't any manner of use for it, now my boy's gone away, and I just as soon you would sleep there as not until your folks get things fixed. You're a dreadful clean-looking little girl, and I like that. I'm a master hand to have clean things around me; Job says he believes I catch the flies and dust their wings before I let them go into my front room. Job is my husband, and that is his little joke at me, you know." And she laughed such a jolly little roly-poly sort of laugh that poor Nettie could not keep a smile from her troubled face. A refuge in the woodhouse chamber of this neat, good-natured-looking woman seemed like a bit of heaven to the homesick child.

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"I am very much obliged to you, ma'am," she said respectfully; "I will tell my mother how kind you are, and I think she will be glad to accept the kindness for a few days. I—" and then Nettie suddenly stopped. It might not be well to say to this new friend that she would not need to trouble the woodhouse chamber long, for she meant to start for home as soon as a letter could travel there, and another travel back. Something might come in the way of this resolve, though it made her feel hot all over to think of such a possibility.

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"Bless my heart!" said Mrs. Job Smith as Nettie vanished to consult her mother. "If that ain't as polite and pretty-spoken a child as ever I see in my life. She makes me think of our Jerry. To think of that child being Joe Decker's girl and coming back to such a home as he keeps! It is too bad! I am sure I hope they will let her sleep in the woodhouse chamber. It is the only spot where she will get any peace."

Mrs. Decker was only too glad to avail herself of her neighbor's kind offer. "It is good of her," she said gratefully to Nettie. "I wish to the land you could have such a comfortable room all the time; they are real clean-looking folks. You wouldn't suppose from the looks of this house that I cared for clean things, but I do, and I used to have them about me, too. I was as neat once as the best of them; but it takes clothes and soap and strength to be clean, and I have had none of 'em in so long that I have most forgot how to do anything decent."

"Soap?" said Nettie, wonderingly. She was beating up the poor rags which composed the bed in her mother's room, trying to get a little freshness into them.

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"Yes, soap; I don't suppose you can imagine how it would seem not to have all the soap you wanted; I couldn't, either, once, but I tell you I save the pennies nowadays for bread, so that I need not see my children starve before my eyes. I would rather do without soap than bread; especially when our clothes are so worn out that there is nothing much to change with. Oh, I tell you when you get into a house where the men folks spend all they can get on beer or whiskey, there are not many pennies left. Mrs. Smith has been real kind; she sent the children in a bowl of soup one day when their father had gone off and not left a thing in the house, nor a cent to get anything with.

"And she has done two or three things like that lately; I'm grateful to her, but I'm ashamed to say so. I never expected to sink so low that I should be glad of the scraps which a poor neighbor like her could send in. Oh, no; they are not very poor. Why, they are rich as kings, come to compare them with us; but they are not grand folks at all; he is a teamster, and works hard every day; so does she; but he doesn't drink a drop, and they have a good many comfortable things. Their boy is away at school, and their girl, Sarah Ann, is learning a dressmaker's trade. You will have a comfortable bed in there, and I'm glad of it."

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And now it was eight o'clock. Susie and Sate were asleep in their trundle bed, the tired Nettie having coaxed them to let her give them a splendid bath first, making the idea pleasant to them by producing from her trunk a cunning little cake of perfumed soap. They looked "as pretty as pictures," the sad-eyed mother said, as she bent over them when they were asleep, with their moist hair in loose waves, and their clean faces flushed with health. "They are real pretty little girls," she added earnestly, as she turned away. "He might be proud of them. And he used to be, too. When Sate was a baby, he said she had eyes like you, and he used to kiss her and tell her she was pretty, until I was afraid he would spoil her; but there isn't the least danger of that now. He never notices either of them except to slap them or growl at them."

"How came father to begin to drink?" Nettie asked the question timidly, hesitating over the last word; it seemed such a dreadful word to add to a father's name.

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"Don't ask me, child; I don't know. They say he always drank a little; a glass of beer now and then. I knew he did when I married him, but I thought it was no more than all hard-working men did. I never thought much about it. I know it never entered my head that he could be a drunkard. I'd have been too afraid for Norm if I had dreamed of such a thing as that."

"He kept increasing the drinks, little by little—it grows on them, it seems, the habit does; they say that is the way with all the drinks; I didn't know it. I never was taught about these things. If I had been, I think sometimes my life would have been very different. I know I wouldn't have walked right into the fire with my one boy, anyhow. I'm talking to you, child, as though you were a woman grown, and you seem most like a woman to me, you are so handy, and quiet, and nice-looking. I was sorry you were coming, because I thought you would just be an added plague; and now I am sorry for your own sake."

Nettie hesitated greatly over the next question. It was a very hard one to ask this sick and discouraged mother, but she must know the whole of the misery by which she was surrounded. "Does Norman drink too?" [72]

"Norm," said Mrs. Decker, dropping into the one chair, and putting her hand to her heart as though there was something stabbing her there, "Norm has been led away by your father. He was a bright little fellow, and your father took to him amazingly. I used to tell him his own little girls would have reason to be jealous of his step-son. He took Norm with him everywhere, from the first. And taught him to do odd things, for a little fellow, and was proud of his singing, and his speaking, and all that. And when Susie there, was a baby, and I was kept close at home with her, and Norm would tear around in the evening and wake her up, I slipped into the way of letting him go out with your father to spend the evenings; I didn't know they spent them in bar-rooms, or groceries where they sold beer. I never *dreamed* of such a thing. Your father talked about meeting the men, and I thought they met at some of the houses where there wasn't a baby to cry, and talked their work over, or the news, you know. And there he was teaching Norm to drink. He was a pretty little fellow, and he would sing comic songs, and then they would treat him to the sugar in their glasses! When I found it out, he had got to liking the stuff, and I don't suppose a day goes by without his taking more or less of it now. He never gets as bad as your father; but he will. He is never cross and ugly to me, nor to the children, but he will be. It grows on him. It grows on them all. And to think that I led him into the trap! If I had stayed in the country where I was brought up, or if I had left him with his grandfather, as he wanted me to, he might have been saved. The grandfather is gone now, and so is the farm. Your father got hold of my share of that, and lost it somehow. He didn't mean to, and that soured him, and he drank the harder and we are going down to the very bottom of everything as fast as we can." [73]

It seemed to poor Nettie that they must have reached the bottom now. She could not imagine any lower depths than these.

She made up the poor bed as well as she could, and then went back to the kitchen to see what could be done about breakfast. Her new mother was evidently too weak and sick to be troubled with the thought of it, and while she stayed, Nettie resolved that she would help the poor woman all she could. She went out into the yard to examine, and discovered to her satisfaction that there must be a cooper's shop just around the corner, for the chips lay thick. She gathered some for the morning fire, determined in her mind that she would buy a few potatoes at the grocery in the morning! In the cupboard she had found a cup of sour milk; this she had carefully treasured with an eye to breakfast, and she now looked into her purse to see if she could spare pennies for a quart of flour. If she could, then some excellent cakes would be the result. And now everything that she knew how to do towards the next day's needs was attended to, and she went out in the moonlight, and sat down on the lowest step of the back stoop, and did what she had been longing to do all the afternoon—cried as though her poor young heart was breaking. [74]

Astride a saw-horse in the yard which belonged to Job Smith, and which was separated from the stoop where she sat only by a low fence, was a curly-headed boy, who had come there apparently to whittle and whistle and watch her. He was not there when she sat down and buried her head in her apron. She did not notice his whistling, though he made it loud and shrill on purpose to attract her attention, He knew quite a little about her by this time. He had come upon the boys of the Grammar School in the midst of their afternoon recess and heard Harry Stuart interrupt little Ted Barrows who was the youngest one in the class and wrote the best compositions. They were gathered under a tree listening to Ted, while he read them "The Story of An Hour," which was especially interesting because it had some of their own experiences skilfully woven in. [75]

"Hold on," Harry was saying, just as the whistling boy appeared within hearing. "You didn't make that thing up; you got it from the Deckers; that is what is just going to happen there. Old Joe's Nan is coming home this very day, and she is about as old as the girl you've got in your story, and is freckled, I dare say; most girls are."

"I didn't even know old Joe Decker had a girl to come home!" said little Ted, looking injured. "I made every word of it out of my own mind." [76]

But the boys did not hear him; their interest had been called in another direction. "Is that so? Is Nan Decker coming home? My! What a house to come to. Mother said only yesterday that she hoped the folks who had her would keep her forever. What is she coming for? Who told you?"

"Why, she is coming because Joe thinks that will be another way to plague the old lady. At least that is what my mother thinks. Mrs. Decker told her once that when Joe had been drinking more than usual he always threatened to send for Nan; but she didn't think he would. And now it seems he has. I heard it from the old fellow himself. He was telling Norm about it, while I stood waiting for father's saw. He said she was coming in the stage this afternoon; that she had worked for other folks long enough and it was time he had some good of her himself. I pity her, I tell you."

Then the whistler had come out from behind the trees, and said good-afternoon, and asked a

few questions. The boys had answered him civilly enough, but in a way which showed that they did not count him as one of them. The fact was, he was a good deal of a stranger. He had been in town only a few weeks, and he did not go to school, and he boarded with or lived with, the Smiths, who lived next door to the Deckers, and were nice enough people, but did not have much to do with the fathers and mothers of these boys, and—well, the fact was, the boys did not know whether to take this new comer in, and make him welcome, or not. They sort of liked him; he was good-natured, and accommodating so far as they knew, but they knew very little about him. He asked a good many questions about the expected Nan Decker. He had never heard of her before. Since he was to live next door to her, it might be pleasant to know what sort of a person she was. But the boys could tell him very little. Seven years, at their time of life, blots out a good many memories. They only knew that she was Nan Decker who went away when her mother died, and who had lived with the Marshalls ever since; and all agreed in being sorry for her that she was obliged at last to come home.

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The whistling boy walked away, after having cross-questioned first one, and then another, and learned that they knew nothing. He was on his way to the woods for one of his long summer rambles. He felt a trifle lonely, and wished that the boys had asked him to sit down under the trees and have a good time with them.

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JERRY ON ONE OF HIS SUMMER RAMBLES.

He would have liked to hear Ted's composition, he said to himself; the boy had a sweet face, and a head that looked as though he might be going to make a smart man, one of these days. What was the matter with those fellows, he wondered, that they were not more cordial?

He thought about it quite awhile, then plunged into the mosses and ferns and gathered some lovely specimens, which he arranged in the box he carried slung over his shoulder, and forgot all about the boys, and poor little Nan Decker. On the way home, in the glow of the setting sun, he thought of her again, and wondered if she had come, and if she would be a sorrowful and homesick little girl. It seemed queer to think of being homesick when one came home! But then, it was only a home in name; he had not lived next door to it for five weeks without discovering that, and the little girl's mother was dead! Poor Nan Decker! A shadow came over his bright face for a moment as he thought of this. His mother was dead. He resolved to speak a kind word to the little girl the very first time that he had a chance. And here in the moonlight was his chance.

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He stopped whistling at last and spoke: "If it is anything about which I can help, I shall be very glad to do it." A kind, cheerful voice. Nettie looked up quickly and choked back her tears. She was not one to cry, if there were to be any lookers-on.

"I guess you are homesick," said the boy from, his horse's back; "and that isn't any wonder. I'm homesick myself, nearly every night, especially if it is moonlight. I don't know what there is about the moon that chokes a fellow up so, but I've noticed it often; but then I feel all right in the morning."

"Are you away from your home?"

"I should say I was! Or rather home has gone away from me. I haven't any home in particular, only my father, and he is away out in California. I couldn't go there with him, and since my school closed I am waiting here for him to come back. It is home, you know, wherever he is. He doesn't expect to be back yet for months. So you and I ought to be pretty good friends, we are such near neighbors. I live right next door to you. We ought to be introduced. You are Nannie Decker, I suppose, and I am Jerry Mack at your service. I don't wonder you are homesick; folks always are, the first night."

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"My name is Nanette," said Nettie, gently, "but people who like me most always say Nettie: and it isn't being homesick that makes me feel so badly—though I am homesick; but it is being scared, and astonished, and, oh! everything. Nothing is as I thought it would be; and there are things about it that I did not understand at all, or maybe I wouldn't have come; and now I am here, I don't know what to do." She was very near crying again, in spite of a watcher.

"I know," he said, nodding his head, and speaking in a grave, sympathetic voice. "Job Smith—that is the man I am staying with—has told me how it used to be with your father. He says he was a very nice father indeed. I am as sorry for you as I can be. But after all, I wouldn't give up if I were you; and I should be real glad that I had come home to help him. He needs a great deal of help. Folks reform, you know. Why, people who are a great deal worse than your father has ever been yet, have turned right around and become splendid men. If I were you I would go right to work to have him reform. Then there's Norm—he needs help, too; and he ought to have it before he gets any older, because it would be so much easier for him to get started right now."

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"I don't know the least thing to do," said Nettie; but she dried her eyes on her neat little handkerchief as she spoke, and sat up straight, and looked with earnest eyes at the boy on the other side the fence. This sort of talk interested and helped her.

"No; of course you don't. You haven't studied these things up, I suppose. But there is a great deal to do. My father is a temperance man, and I have heard him talk. I know a hundred things I would like to do, and a few that I can do. I'll tell you what it is, Nettie, say we start a society, you and I, and fight this whole thing?"

"We can begin with little bits of plans which we can carry out now, and let them grow as fast as we can follow them and see what we can do. Is it a bargain?"

"There is nothing I would like so well, if you will only show me how," said Nettie, and her eyes were shining. [82]

It was wonderful what a weight these few words seemed to lift from her troubled heart. The boy's face had grown more thoughtful. He seemed in doubt just how to express what he wanted to say next.

"I don't know how you feel about it," he said as last, "but I know somebody who would be sure to help in anything of this kind that we tried to do—show us how, you know, and make ways for us to get money, and all that."

"Who is it?"

Nettie spoke quickly now, for her heart was beating loud and fast. Was there somebody in this town who could be asked to come to the rescue, and who was willing to give such hearty help as that? If such were the case, she could see that a great deal might be accomplished. She waited for her new friend's answer, but he looked down on the stick he was whittling and gravely sharpened the end to a very fine point, before he spoke again.

"I don't know what you think about such things, but I mean—God. I *know* he is on our side in this business, don't you?"

"Yes," said Nettie, thoughtfully, and her manner changed. [83]

Her voice which had been only eager before, became soft and gentle, and she looked over at the boy in the moonlight and smiled. "I know Him," she said, "and I am His servant. It is strange I forgot for a little while that He knew all about this home, and father, and everything! Maybe He wants me to help father. I mean to begin right away. I will do every single thing I can think of, to keep father, and Norm, and everybody else from drinking liquor any more forever."

There was a sudden spring from the saw-horse, a long step taken over the low fence, and the boy stood beside her.

"There are two of us," he said gravely. "There is my hand on it. I am a Christian, too. And father gave me a verse once, which always helps me when I think of the rumsellers: 'If God be for us, who *can* be against us!' I know he is for us, and so, though the rumsellers are against us, and think they are going to beat, one of these days he will show them! What you and I want to do is to keep working at it all we can, so as to show that we believe in him."

"Now we are partners—Nettie Decker and Jerry Mack, who knows what we can do? Anyhow, we are friends, and will stand by each other through thick and thin, won't we?" [84]

"Yes," said Nettie, "we will." And she rose up from the doorstep, and they shook hands.

CHAPTER V. A GREAT UNDERTAKING.

 [85]

JERRY turned away whistling. Did you ever notice how apt boys are to whistle when something has stirred their feelings very much, and they don't intend that anybody but themselves shall know it?

Nettie went back into the little brown house to see if her mother was comfortable for the night. Her heart was lighter than she had thought it ever would be again.

Everything was quiet within the house. The children with their arms tossed about one another, and their cheeks flushed with sleep, looked sweeter than they often did awake. The heartsick mother had forgotten her sorrow again for a little while, in sleep. Where father and Norm were, Nettie did not know. It seemed strange to go away and leave the light burning, and the door unfastened. At home, they always gathered at about this hour, in the neat sitting-room, and sang a hymn and repeated each a Bible verse, and then Mr. Marshall prayed, and after that she kissed Auntie Marshall and the others, and tripped away to her pretty room. The contrast was very sharp. If it had not been for that new friend whose voice she heard at this moment softly singing a cheery tune, I think the tears would have come again. [86]

As it was, she slipped into Mrs. Job Smith's neat kitchen. What a contrast that was to the kitchen next door! The first thing she saw was the tall old clock in the corner. "Tick-tock, tick-tock." She had never seen so large a clock before; she had never heard one speak in such a slow and patronizing tone, as though it were managing all the world. She looked up into its face and smiled. It seemed like a great strong friend.

There was nothing very remarkable about that kitchen. At least I suppose you would not have thought so, unless you had just spent an afternoon in the Decker kitchen. Then you might have felt the difference. The floor was painted a bright yellow, and had gay rugs spread here and there. The stove shone brilliantly, and the two chairs under the window were painted green, with dazzling white seats. A high, old-fashioned, wooden-backed rocker occupied a cosey corner near the clock. A table set against the wall had a bright spread on it, and newspapers, and a book or two, and a pair of spectacles lay on it. The lamp was in the centre, and was clear and beautifully trimmed.

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Simple enough things, all of them, but they spoke to Nettie's heart of home.

There was a brisk step on the stair; the door opened, and Mrs. Smith's strong, homely face appeared in sight. "Here you are," she said cheerily, "tired enough to go to sleep, I dare say. Well, the room is all ready for you. I guess you won't be lonesome, for it is right out of Sarah Ann's room, and my boy Jerry is across the hall. You've got acquainted with Jerry, I guess? I saw you and him talking, out in the moonlight. I'm glad of it. Jerry is good at chirking a body up; and there never was a better boy made than he is.

"Now you get right to sleep as goon as you can, and dream of all the nice things you can think of. It is good luck to have nice dreams in a new room, you know."

"Poor little soul!" she said to herself as the door closed after Nettie. "I hope she will be so sound asleep that she won't hear her father and Norm come stumbling home. Isn't it a mean thing, now, that the father of such a little girl as that should go and disgrace her?"

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Mrs. Smith was talking to nobody, and so of course nobody answered her; and in a little while that house was still for the night. Nettie, in the clean, sweet-smelling woodhouse chamber, was soon on her knees; not sobbing out a homesick cry, as she thought she would, as soon as ever she had a chance, but actually thanking God for these new friends; and asking Him to be One in this new society, and show them just what and how to do. Then she went into sound sleep; and heard no stumbling, nor grumbling, though both father and brother did much of it when at last they shambled home.

The new plans came up for consideration early the next morning. Before Nettie had opened her eyes to the neatly whitewashed walls in the woodhouse chamber, she heard the sound of merry whistling, keeping time to the swift blows of an axe. Jerry was preparing kindlings. In a very short time after that, he looked up to say good-morning, as Nettie was making her way across the yard to the other house.

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"Don't you want some of these nice chips? They will make your kettle boil in a jiffy."

This was his good-morning; he held out both hands to her, full of broad smooth chips. "Aunt Jerusha likes them better than any other kind; I keep her supplied. Wait, I'll carry them in."

"Oh, you needn't," Nettie said in haste, and blushing. What would he think of the Decker kitchen after being used to Mrs. Smith's! But he took long springs across the walk, vaulted the fence and stood at the kitchen door waiting for her. It looked even more desolate, in contrast with the sunny morning, than it had the night before. Nettie resolved to blacken the stove that very day. "Do you know how to make a fire?" Jerry asked. "I do. I made aunt Jerusha's for her, two mornings, but it is hard work to get ahead of her."

Yes, Nettie knew how. She had made the fire for the supper, in Mrs. Marshall's boarding house, many a time. She proceeded to show her skill at once; Jerry, looking on admiringly, admitted that she knew more about it than he did.

"You see, father and I board," he said apologetically, "and there isn't much chance to learn things. I'll tell you what I can do—get you a fresh pail of water."

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Before she could speak, he darted away. There was a sound of feet coming down the unfinished stairs, and Norm lounged into the room, rubbing sleepy eyes, and looking as though he had not combed his hair in a week. He stared at Nettie as though he had never seen her before, and answered her good-morning, with:

"I'll be bound if I didn't forget you! Where have you been all night?"

"Asleep," said Nettie, brightly. "Now I want to have breakfast ready by the time mother comes out, to surprise her. Will you tell me whether you have tea or coffee?"

Norm laughed slightly. "We have what we can get, as a rule. I heard mother say there wasn't any tea in the house. And I don't believe we have had any coffee for a month. I'd like some, though; I know that. I've got a quarter; I'll go and get some, if you will make us a first-rate cup of coffee."

"Well," said Nettie, "I'll do my best."

She spoke a little doubtfully, having a shrewd suspicion that the quarter ought to be saved for more important things than coffee; but she did not like to object to Norm's first expressed idea of partnership; so he went away, and when the fresh water came, the teakettle was filled, the table set, the potatoes washed and put in the oven; by the time Mrs. Decker appeared, Nettie, with a very flushed face, was bending over her hot griddle, testing the cake she had baked.

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"Well, I do say!" said Mrs. Decker, and the tone expressed not only surprise, but gratitude. There was a pleasant odor of coffee in the room, and the potatoes were already beginning to hint that they would soon be done. The cake that Nettie had baked was as puffy and sweet as her heart could desire.

"I believe you're a witch," said Mrs. Decker. "I couldn't think of a thing for breakfast. Where did you get them cakes?"

"Made them," said Nettie; "I found a cup of sour milk; Auntie Marshall used to let me make them often for breakfast. Norm went after the coffee; and I guess it is good. I saved my egg shell from the cakes to settle it."

"You're a regular little housekeeper," said Mrs. Decker. "And so Norm went after coffee! Did you ask him to? Went of his own accord! That's something wonderful for Norm. He used to think of things for me but he don't any more."

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Altogether, it was really almost a comfortable breakfast, though it seemed to Nettie that she would never get it ready. She was not used to managing with so few dishes. Her father drank three cups of coffee, said it was something like living, and gave Nettie twenty-five cents, with the direction that he hoped there would be something decent to eat when they came home at noon.

Nettie's cheeks were red with more than the baking of cakes, then. She was ashamed of her father. How could he speak in a way to insult his wife! They went off hurriedly at last, Norm and the father; and the children who had been silent, began to chatter the moment the door closed after them. Mrs. Decker, too, began to talk.

"He thinks twenty-five cents will buy a dinner for us all, and keep us in clothes, and get new furniture, and dishes! He will have it that it is because things are wasted that we have such poor meals. As if I had anything to waste! I don't know what to do, nor which way to turn. We need everything."

"Don't you think we had better clean house to-day?" Nettie asked a little timidly, as they rose from the table and she began to gather the dishes.

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"Clean house!" repeated the dazed mother. "Why, yes, child, I suppose so. It needs it badly enough. Oh, we can wash up the floor, and the shelf. It doesn't take long; there are not many things in the way. No furniture to move. But it doesn't stay clean long, I can tell you. Just one room in which to do everything! I might have kept it looking better, though, if I had not been sick. I have just had to let everything go, child. Lying awake nights, and worrying, have used me up."

She took the broom as she spoke and began to sweep vigorously, scurrying the children out of her way.

It was a long day, and a busy one. And at night, the room certainly looked better. The floor had been scrubbed with hot lye to get off the grease, and the stove had been blackened until the children shouted that it would do for a looking-glass. Several other improvements had been made. But after all, to Nettie's eyes it was dreadfully bare and comfortless. Not a cushioned chair, nor a rocker, nor anything that to her seemed like home. All day she had been casting glances at a closed door which opened from the kitchen, and thinking her thoughts about the room in there. A large square room, perfectly empty. Why wasn't it used? If for nothing else, why didn't Norm sleep in it, instead of in that dreadful unfinished attic where the rats must certainly have full sweep? Or why did not her mother move in there with the trundle bed, instead of being cooped up in that small bedroom? Or why had they not prepared it for her to sleep in, if they really did not want it for anything else? She gathered courage at last, to ask questions.

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"Oh, that room," her mother said with bitterness, "when I first came here to live, we pleased ourselves nights, after the children were in bed, telling what we would have in it. We meant to furnish it for a parlor. We were going to have it carpeted; he wanted a red carpet, and I wanted a brown one with a little bit of pink in, but land! I would have taken one that was all yellow, just to please him. And we were going to have a lounge, and two rocking chairs, and I don't know what not. And there it is, shut up. I might have had it for a bedroom at first, but I wouldn't. I wanted to save it. And then, when I gave that all up, there was nothing to fix it with. Norm couldn't sleep there without curtains to the windows; no more could we; it is right on the street, almost."

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"And things keep getting worse and worse, so I just shut the door and locked it and let it go. If I had had a spare chair to put in, I might have gone in there and cried, now and then, but I hadn't even that. I tried to rent it; but the woman who was hunting rooms heard that your father drank, and was afraid to come. Oh, we have a splendid name in the place, you'll find. We are just going to ruin as fast as a family can; that's the whole story."

In the middle of the afternoon, when Nettie had done everything she could think of, unless some money could be raised, and some clothes made, so that the children could have the ones washed which they were wearing, she stood in the back door, wondering how that could be brought about, when Jerry appeared in his favorite seat on the sawhorse.

"Everything done up for the day?" he asked.

Nettie laughed.

"Everything has stopped for the want of things to do with," she said. "I don't see but that will be the trouble with what we want to do. Why, you can't do a single thing without money; and where is it to come from?"

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"That is one of the things we must think up," Jerry said gravely. "I have thought about it some. This temperance business needs money. One of the troubles with boys like Norm is that they have no nice places to go to. Boys like to meet together and talk things over, you know, and have a good time, and how are some of them going to do it? The church isn't the place, nor the schoolhouse, and those fellows haven't pleasant homes; the only spot for them is the saloons. I

don't much wonder that they get in the habit of going there. I have heard my father say that saloons were the only places that were fixed up, and lighted, where folks without any pleasant homes were made welcome. Why, just look at it in this town. There's your Norm. There are two fellows who go with him a great deal. If you meet one, you may be sure that the other two are not far away. Their names are Alf Barnes and Rick Walker. Neither of them have as decent a home as Norm's, oh! not by a good deal. And he doesn't feel like inviting them into your kitchen to spend the evening. Should you think he would?"

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Warm as the day was, Nettie shivered. "I should think they would rather stay out in the street than to come there," she said.

"Well, now you see how it is. They don't stay in the streets, such fellows don't. Not all the time. They get tired, and sometimes it rains, and in winter it is cold, and they look about them for somewhere to go. There's a saloon, bright and clean; comfortable chairs, and good-natured people. It is the only place that says Come in! to such fellows. Why shouldn't they go in?"

"I've heard my father talk about this by the hour. In big cities they have rooms warmed and lighted, and nicely furnished, on purpose for such young men; only father is always saying that they don't begin to have enough of them; but in such a town as this, I would like to know what the boys who haven't nice homes to stay in, are expected to do with themselves evenings? One of these days, when I am a man, that is the way I am going to use all my extra money. I'll hunt out towns where the fellows have just been left to stay in the streets, or else go to the rum-holes, and I'll fit up the nicest kind of a room for them. Bright as gas can make it, and elegant, you know, like a parlor; and I'll have cakes, and coffee, and lemonades, and all those things, cheaper than beer, and serve them in fine style. Wouldn't that be a fine thing to do?"

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"Then the first thing," said Nettie, "is a room."

Jerry turned round on his horse and looked full at her and laughed. "You talk as though it was to be done now," he said. "I was telling what I would do in that dim future, when I become a man."

"We might begin pieces of it now. Norm will be too old when you are a man; and so will those others. There is our front room. If we only had some furniture to put in it. My Auntie Marshall made some real pretty seats once, out of old boxes; she padded them with cotton, and covered them with pretty calico, and you can't think how nice they were. I could make some, if I had the boxes and the calico."

"I could get the boxes," said Jerry. "I know a man in the blacksmith shop who has a brother in the grocery down at the corner, and he could get boxes for us of him, I'm pretty sure. He is a nice man, that blacksmith. I like him better than any man in town, I believe. I could fix covers on the boxes myself, and do several other things. I have a box of tools, and I often make little things. I say, Nettie, let's fix up the front room. I've often wondered what there was in there. Would your mother let us have it?"

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"She would let us have most everything, I guess," Nettie said thoughtfully, "if she thought it would do any good."

"All right. We'll make it do some good. Let's set to work right away. The first thing as you say, is a room. No, we have the room; the first thing is furniture. I'll go and see Mr. Collins this very evening. He is the blacksmith."

In less than half an hour from that time Jerry stood beside Mr. Collins.

That gentleman had on his big leather apron, and was busy about his work as usual.

"Boxes?" he said to Jerry. "Why, yes, there are piles of them in his cellar, and out by his back door. I should think he would be glad to get rid of some. But what do you want of them? Furniture? How are you going to make furniture out of boxes? What put such a notion as that into your head, and what do you want of furniture, anyhow?"

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So Jerry sat down on a box and told the whole story. Mr. Collins listened, and nodded, and shook his head, and smiled grimly, occasionally, and sighed, and in every possible way showed his interest and appreciation.

"And so you two are going to take hold and reform the town?" he said at last. "Humph! Well, it needs it bad enough! if old boxes will help, it stands to reason that you ought to have as many as you want. I'll engage to see that you get them."

When Mr. Collins told his brother-in-law, the grocer, the two laughed a good deal, but the blacksmith finished his story with, "Well, now I tell you what it is—something is better than nothing, any day; there's been nothing done here for so long that I think it is kind of wonderful that those two young things should start up and try to do something."

"So do I, so do I," assented the grocer, heartily, "and if old boxes will help 'em, why, land, they're welcome to as many as they can use. Tell the chap to step around here and select his lumber, and I'll have it delivered."

This message Jerry was not slow to obey; so it happened that the very next afternoon Mrs. Job Smith stood in her back door and watched with curious eyes the unloading of the grocer's wagon. Six, seven, eight empty boxes! "For the land's sake, what be you going to do with them?" she asked Jerry.

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Mrs. Job Smith had a great warm heart, but no education to speak of; and no mother had, in her childhood, begged her a dozen times a day not to use such expressions as "for the land's

sake!" she knew no better than to suppose they added emphasis to her words; Jerry laughed.

"It is for the room's sake, auntie," he said. "We are going to have a cabinet shop in the barn loft. Mr. Smith said I might. I shall make some nice things, auntie, see if I don't. Come up in the loft, will you, and see my tool chest?"

This last sentence was addressed to Nettie who had appeared in her back door to admire the boxes. So the two climbed the ladder stairs, Nettie a little timidly as one unused to ladders, and Jerry with quick springs, holding out his hand to her at the top, to help her in making the final leap. Then he took from his pocket a curious little key which he explained to Nettie would open that tool chest provided you knew how to use it; but he supposed that a man who had stolen it might try for a week, and yet not get into the chest. [102]

A skilful touch, and the handsome chest was open before her, displaying its wonders to her pleased eyes. It was a well-stocked chest. Chisels, and saws, and hammers, and augers, and sharp, wicked-looking little things for which Nettie had no name, gleamed before her.

"How nice!" she said at last. "How splendid! It looks as though somebody who knew how, could make splendid things with them."

"And I know how," said Jerry. "At least, I know some things. I spent a summer down in a little country town where father had some business; and the man we boarded with kept a small shop, where all sorts of things were made. Not a great factory, you know, where they make a thousand chairs of one kind, and a thousand of another, and never make anything but chairs. This was just a little country shop, where they made a table one day, and a chair the next, and a bedstead the next; and you could watch the men at work, and ask questions and learn ever so much. I got so I could use tools, as well as the next one, Mr. Braisted said, whatever he meant by that. Father liked to have me learn. He said tools were the cleanest sharp things that he knew anything about. I can make ever so many things. I like to do it. I wonder I have not been about it since I came here. Now what shall we go at first? What does your mother say about the room?" [103]

"She is willing," said Nettie, "only she doesn't see how much of anything can be done. She is most discouraged, you see, and nothing looks possible to her, I suppose."

"That's all right. She can't be expected to know we can do things until we show her. If she will let us try, that is all we need ask."

"She says the room ought to have some kind of a carpet; they always have carpets in home-like rooms, she says; and I guess that is so. Except in kitchens, of course."

Nettie hastened to say this, apologetically, thinking of Mrs. Job Smith's bright yellow floor.

Jerry whistled.

"That is so, I suppose," he said thoughtfully; "and they don't make carpets out of boxes, nor with saws and hammers, do they? I don't know how we would manage that. There must be a way to do it, though. Let's put that one side among the things that have got to be thought about." [104]

"And prayed about," said Nettie.

"Yes," he said, flashing a very bright look at her, "I thought that, but somehow I did not like to say it out, in so many words."

"I wonder why?" said Nettie thoughtfully; "I mean, I wonder why it is so much harder to say things of that kind than it is to speak about anything else?"

"Father used to say it was because people didn't get in the habit of talking about religion in a common sense way. They don't, you know; hardly anybody. At least hardly anybody that I know; around here, anyway. Now my father speaks of those things just as easy as he does of anything."

"So does Auntie Marshall; but I used to notice that not many people did. Your father must be a good man."

"There never was a better one!"

Notwithstanding Jerry said all this with tremendous energy, his voice trembled a little, and there came one of those dashes of feeling over him which made him think that he must drop everything and go to that dear father right away. [105]

"When he comes after you and takes you away, what will I do?"

Nettie's mournful tone restored the boy's courage.

He laughed a little. "No use in borrowing trouble about that. He is afraid he cannot come back before winter, if he does then. I'm going to get him to let me stay here until he does come, though. And now we must attend to business. What will you have first in my line? Chairs, tables, sofas—why, anything you say, ma'am."

And both faces were sunny again.

CHAPTER VI. HOW IT SUCCEEDED.

MRS. JOB SMITH leaned against the table in her bright kitchen, caught up the edge of her apron in one hand, then leaned both hands on her sides, and thought. Jerry had been consulting her. Was there any way of planning so that the front room in the Decker house could have a carpet? He repeated all Mrs. Decker said about a room not being home-like without one, and Mrs. Smith, at first inclined to combat the idea, finally admitted that in winter a room where you sat down to visit, did look kind of desolate without a carpet, unless it was a kitchen, and had a good-sized cook stove to brighten it up. There was no denying that that square front room would be the better for a carpet. At the same time there was no denying that the Deckers needed a hundred other things worse than they did a carpet. But the hearts of the boy and girl were bent on having one; and what the boy was bent on, Mrs. Job Smith liked to have accomplished, and believed sooner or later that it would be. The question was, How could she help to bring it about? [107]

"There's that roll of rag carpeting, bran-new," she said aloud; Mrs. Smith had spent a good deal of her time alone and had learned to hold long conversations with herself, arguing out questions as well, sometimes she thought better, than a second party could have done. At this point she put her hands on her sides. "There's enough of it, and more than enough. I had it made for the front room the year poor Hannah died, and sent me that boughten carpet which just exactly fitted, and is good for ten years' wear. That rag carpeting has been rolled up and done up in tobacco and things ever since—most two years. Sarah Jane doesn't need it, and I don't know as I shall ever put it on the kitchen. I don't like a great heavy carpet in a kitchen, much, anyway; rugs, and square pieces that a body can take up and shake, are enough sight neater, to my way of thinking. But I can't afford to give away bran-new carpeting. To be sure it only cost me the warp and the weaving; and I got the warp at a bargain, and old Mother Turner never did ask me as much for weaving as she did other folks. The rags was every one of them saved up. Poor Hannah used to send me a lot of rags, and Sarah Jane and I sewed them at odd spells when we wouldn't have been doing anything. It is a good deal of bother to take care of it, and I'm always afraid the moths will get ahead of me, and eat it up. I might sell it to her for what the warp and the weaving cost me. But land! what would she pay with? I might give her a chance to do ironing. I have to turn away fine ironing every week of my life because I can't do more than accommodate my old customers. Who knows but she is a pretty good ironer? I might give her the coarse parts to iron, and watch her, and find out. Job is always at me to have somebody help with the big ironings, and I have always said I wouldn't have a girl bothering around, I would rather take less to do. But then, she is a decent quiet body, and that Nettie is just a little woman. She will have to do something to help along if they ever get started in being decent; perhaps ironing is the thing for her, and I can start her if she knows how to do it. For the matter of that, I might teach her how, if she wanted to learn. To be sure they need other things more than carpets, but it wouldn't take her long to pay for this, if I just charge for the weaving. I might throw in the warp, maybe, seeing I got it at a bargain. The two are so bent on having a carpet for that room; and Jerry, he said he had prayed about it, and while he was on his knees, it kind of seemed to him as though I was the one to get to think it out. That's queer now! Jerry don't know anything about the carpet rolled up in tobacco in the box in the garret; why should he think that I could help? I feel almost bound to, somehow, after that. I don't like to have Jerry disappointed, nor the little girl either, now that's a fact. I take to that little Nettie amazingly. Well, I know what I'll do. I'll talk with Job about it, and if he is agreed, maybe we will see what she says to it." [108]

This last was a kind of "make believe," and the good woman knew it; Job Smith thought that his wife was the wisest, most prudent, most capable woman in the world, and besides being sure to agree to whatever she had to propose, he was himself of such a nature that he would have given away unhesitatingly the very clothes he wore, if he thought somebody else needed them more than he. There was little need to fear that Job Smith would ever put a stumbling-block in the way of any benevolence. [109]

But who shall undertake to tell you how astonished Mrs. Decker was when Mrs. Smith, having duly considered, and talked with Sarah Jane, and talked with Job, and unrolled the tobacco-smelling carpet, and examined it carefully, did finally come over to the Decker home with her startling proposition. It is true that a carpet had taken perhaps undue proportions in this poor woman's eyes. Her best room during all the years of her past life had never been without a neat bright carpet; it had been the pleasant dream of her second married-life, so long as any pleasantness had been left to allow of dreaming; and she could not get away from the feeling that people who had not a scrap of carpeting for their best room, were very low down. She opened her eyes very wide while listening to Mrs. Smith's rapidly told story. What kind of a carpet could it be that was offered to her for simply the price of the weaving? for Job and his wife after some figuring with pencil and paper, had agreed together heartily to throw in the warp. She went over to the neat kitchen and examined the carpet. It was bright and pretty. There was a good deal of red in it, and there was a good deal of brown; a blending of the two colors which had been the subject of much discussion between herself and husband in the days when Mr. Decker talked anything about the comforts of his home. How well it would look in the square room which had two windows, and was really the only pleasant room in the house. Surely she could iron enough to pay for that. [110]

"I am not very strong," she said with a sigh. "I used to be, but of late I've been failing. But Nannie is so handy, and so willing, that she saves me a great deal, and she has a notion that she would like to fix up the front room and try to get hold of my Norm. It would be worth trying, maybe, but I don't know. We are very low down, Mrs. Smith." [111]

And then Mrs. Decker sank into one of the green painted chairs and cried.

"Of course it is worth trying," Mrs. Smith said, bustling about, as though she must find some

more windows to raise; tears always made her feel as though she was choking. "If I were you I would have a carpet, and curtains to the windows, and lots of nice things, and make a home fit for that boy of yours to have a good time in. There is nothing like a nice pleasant home to keep a boy from going wrong."

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Before Mrs. Decker went home, she had promised to try the ironing the very next week, and if she could do it well enough to suit Mrs. Smith, the carpet should be bought.

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Smith, looking after her, and rubbing her eyes with the corner of her apron. "The ironing shall suit; if she irons wrinkles into the collars and creases in the cuffs, I won't say a word; only I guess maybe I won't give her collars and cuffs to iron; not till she learns how. I ought to have done something to kind of help her along before; only I don't know what it would have been. It takes that boy of mine to set folks to work."

Meantime, "that boy" sat in the kitchen door, studying. Not from a book, but from his own puzzled thoughts. He did not see his way clear. Under Nettie's direction he had planned a very satisfactory sofa with a back to it, and two chairs, but how to get the material needed to finish them, and also for curtains for the new room, had sent Nettie home in bewilderment, and stranded him on the doorstep in the middle of the afternoon to think it out.

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"How much stuff does it take for curtains, anyhow?"

"For curtains?" said Mrs. Smith, coming back with a start from her ironing table and the plan she had for teaching Mrs. Decker to iron shirts. "Why, that depends on what kind of stuff it is, and how many curtains you want, and how big the windows are."

"Well, what do they use for curtains?"

Mrs. Smith still looked bewildered.

"A great many things, Jerry. They have lace curtains, and linen ones, and muslin ones, and in some of the rooms up at Mrs. Barlow's, on the hill, you know, when I helped her do up curtains that time, they had great heavy silk things, or maybe velvet, though the stuff didn't look much like either. I don't rightly know what it was, but it was heavy, and soft, and satiny, and shone like gold, in some places."

Jerry turned around on the doorstep and looked full at Mrs. Smith, and laughed. "I know," he said, "I have seen such curtains. They are damask. I am not thinking about lace, and damask, and all that sort of thing. I mean for Mrs. Decker's front room. What could be used that would do, and how much would they cost?"

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"Surely!" said Mrs. Smith, coming down to everyday life. "What a goose I was. I might have known what you were thinking about. Why, let me see. Cheese cloth makes real pretty curtains; if you have a bit of bright calico to put over the top, and a nice hem in, or maybe some bright calico at the bottom to help them hang straight, I don't know as there is anything much prettier. Though to be sure they aren't good for much to keep people from looking in; and they aren't quite suitable for winter. I suppose you want to plan for winter, too? I'll tell you what it is, I believe that unbleached muslin makes about as pretty a curtain as a body could have; put bright red at the top and bottom, and they look real nice."

"What is unbleached muslin? I mean, how much does it cost?"

"Why," said Mrs. Smith, dropping into her rocking-chair, and folding her hands on her lap to give her mind fully to the important question, "as to that, I should have to think; I'm not very good at figures. Unbleached muslin costs about eight cents a yard, or maybe ten; we'll say ten, because I've always noticed that was easier to calculate. Ten cents a yard, and two windows, say two yards to each, and no, two yards to each half, four yards to each, and twice four is eight, eight yards at ten cents a yard. How much would that be, Jerry? You can tell in a minute, I dare say."

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"Eighty cents," said Jerry with a sigh. "I am afraid she will think that is a great deal. And then there's the red to put on them. What does that cost?"

"Why, that ought to be oil calico, because the other kind ain't fast colors. I don't much believe you could get those curtains up short of fifty cents apiece; and that is a good deal for curtains, that's a fact. Paper ones don't cost so much, but then there's the rollers and the fastenings, I don't know but they do cost just as much. And then they tear."

"I don't want her to have paper ones," said Jerry decisively. "A dollar for the curtains, and I don't know how much more for the furniture. She can't imagine where the money is to come from."

"I could tell where it ought to come from," said Mrs. Smith, nodding her head and looking severe. "It ought to come out of Joe Decker's pocket. He makes his dollar a day, even now, when he doesn't half work; Job said so only last night. But furniture is dreadful dear stuff, Jerry, worse than curtains. And they need about everything. I never did see such a desolate house! And those little girls need clothes."

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"Nettie is going to make them some clothes," said Jerry; "she has some that she has outgrown; a great roll in her trunk; she is going to make them over to fit the little girls. She is at work at some of them to-day. And you know, auntie, I am making the furniture."

"Making it!"

"Well, making its skeleton. If we had some clothes to put on it, I guess it would be furniture. I've made a sofa, and two chairs, and I'm at work at a table. Only I would like to see how the

things were going to look, before I went any farther."

"Making furniture!" repeated dazed Mrs. Smith; and she shook her head. "I don't see how you can! You can do a great many things that no other boy ever thought of; but I'm afraid that's beyond you."

"Why, you see, auntie, she has seen some made, and she showed me what to do with hammer and nails. You make a frame, just the size you want for a sofa, and put a back to it, then it is padded with cotton, and covered with something bright, cretonne, I think she said they called it, only it wasn't real cretonne, but a cheap imitation, and they tack a skirt to the thing in puckers, so," and he caught up a bit of Mrs. Smith's apron to illustrate. [117]

"I see," she said, nodding her head and speaking in an admiring tone. "What a contriving little thing she is! And what about the chairs?"

"The chairs are served in very much the same way. The table is just two flat boards and a post between them, nailed firmly, then they tack red calico, or blue, or whatever they want, around it, and cover it with thin white cheese cloth or some lacey stuff, she had the name of it, but I've forgotten; it doesn't cost much, she said, and tie a sash around it, and it looks like an hour glass. The question is, where are the cotton and calico to come from?"

"Well," said Mrs. Smith, "you two do beat all! It can't take much stuff for a little table; and I can see that they might be real pretty. I want a table myself, to stand under the glass in my front room. What if you was to make two, and I'd get cloth enough for two, and she would do mine and hers, to pay for the cloth?" [118]

Jerry sprang up from his doorstep, and came over and put both arms around Mrs. Smith's trim waist.

"Hurrah!" he said; "you are the contriver. That will do splendidly. I'll go this minute and set up the skeleton of another table. I have two boards there which will just do it. Then we'll think out a way to get the rest of the stuff."

Now Nettie, busy with her fingers in the house next door, had not left the others to do all the thinking. She knew the price of "oil calico," and imitation cretonne, and unbleached muslin; she knew to a fraction how many yards of each would be needed, and the sum total appalled her. Yet she too knew that her father earned at least a dollar a day, and did not give them two a week to live on. This her mother had told her.

Also she knew that on this Saturday evening at about six o'clock, he would probably be paid for his week's work. Couldn't she contrive to coax some of the money from his keeping into hers? She had hinted the possibility of her mother's getting hold of it, and Mrs. Decker had said that the bare thought of trying made her feel faint and sick; that if she had ever seen her father in a passion such as he could get into when things did not go just to suit him, she would know what it was to ask him for anything. Nettie, who had not yet been at home a week, had some faint idea of what her father might do and say if he were very angry. Nevertheless, she was trying to plan a way to meet him before he left the shop, and secure some of that money if she could. [119]

With this thought in view, she presently laid aside the neat little petticoat on which she had been sewing, brushed her hair, put on her brown ribboned hat, and her brown gloves, watched her chance while the children were quarreling over an apple that Jerry had given them, and stole out in the direction of the shop where her father worked. She would not ask Jerry to go with her, though he looked after her from the barn window and wished she had; if her father was to grow angry and swear, and possibly strike, no one should know it but herself, if she could help it. [120]

I must not forget to tell you of one thing that she did before starting. She went into her mother's little tucked-up bedroom, put a nail over the door, which she had herself arranged for a fastening, and knelt there so long by the barrel which did duty as a table, that her mother, had she seen her, would have been frightened. But Nettie felt that she needed courage for this undertaking; and she knew where to get it.

Then she had to walk pretty fast; it was later than she thought, for just as she turned the corner by the shop where her father worked, the six o'clock bell began to ring.

"Halloo!" said one of the men, standing in the door while he untied his leather apron. "What party is this coming down the street? The neatest little woman I've seen for many a day. A stranger in this part of the world, I reckon. Doesn't fit in, somehow. Do you know who it is, Decker?"

And Mr. Decker, thus appealed to, came to the door in time to receive Nettie's bow and smile.

"That's my girl," he said, and a look of pride stole into his face. She was a trim little creature; it was rather pleasant to own her as his daughter. [121]

"Your girl!" and the astonishment which the man felt was expressed by a slight whistle. "I want to know now if that is the little one who went away six, seven years ago, was it? She's as pretty a girl as I've seen in a year. Looks smart, too. I say, Decker, you better take good care of her. She is a girl to be proud of."

At just that moment Nettie sprang up the steps.

"May I come in, father?" she said; "I wanted to see where you worked." Her voice was clear and sweet. All the men in the shop turned to look. The foreman who was paying Mr. Decker, and who had begun severely with the sentence: "Two half-days off again, Decker; that sort of thing won't"—stopped short at the sound of Nettie's voice, and gave him the two two dollar bills, and

two ones, without further words. Six dollars! If only she could get part of it! How should the delicate matter be managed? Suddenly Nettie acted on the thought which came to her. What more natural than for a child to ask for money just then and there? She needed it, and why not say it? Perhaps he would not like to refuse her entirely before all the men. And poor Nettie had a very disagreeable fear that he would certainly refuse her if she waited until the men were gone; even if she found a chance to ask him before he reached the saloon just next door, where he spent so much of his money. Or at least where his wife thought he spent it.

[122]

"May I have some of that, father? I want some money. That was one of the things I came after."

This was certainly the truth. Why not treat it as a matter of course? "Why should I take it for granted that he is going to waste all his money?" said poor Nettie to herself. All the same she knew she had good reason for supposing that he would.

"Money!" he said, as he seized the bills. "What do you know about money, or want with it?"

"Oh, I want things. The little girls must have some shoes. I promised to see about it as soon as I could. And then I want to buy your Sunday dinner; a real nice one."

The tone was a winning, coaxing one. Nettie did not know how to coax; was not very well acquainted with her father; did not know how he would endure coaxing of any sort, but some way must be tried, and this was the best one she knew of.

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"Divide with her, Decker," said the man who had first called his attention to Nettie. "She looks as though she could buy a dinner, and cook it too. If I had a trim little girl like that to look out for my comfort, hang me if I wouldn't take pleasure in keeping her well supplied." He sighed as he spoke, and nobody laughed; for most of them remembered that the man's home was desolate. Wife and daughter both buried only a few months before. This man sometimes spent his earnings on beer, but he was accustomed to say that there was nobody left to care; and that while he had them, he took care of them; which was true. Nettie looked up at the man with a curious pitiful interest. His tone was very sad. She was grateful to him for his words. Was there possibly something sometime that she could do for him? She would remember his face.

All the men were looking now, and there was Nettie's outstretched hand. Her face a good deal flushed; but it wore an expectant look. She was going to believe in her father as long as she could.

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"Go ahead, Joe, divide with the girl. Such a handsome one as that. You ought to be proud of the chance."

"You have something worth taking care of, it seems, Decker." It was the foreman who said this, as he passed on his way to the other side of the room where the men were waiting.

Whether it was a father's pride, or a father's shame, or both these motives which moved Mr. Decker, I cannot say, but he actually took a two and a one and placed them in her hands as he said hastily, "There, my girl, I've given you half; you can't complain of that."

CHAPTER VII.

LONG STORIES TO TELL.

[125]

IF only I had a good picture of Nettie, so that you might see the radiant look in her eyes just then!

She had hoped for the money, she had tried to trust her father, but she was, nevertheless, wonderfully surprised when her hand closed over three dollars.

"O father!" she said, "how nice." And then her courage rose. "Will you go with me, father, to buy the shoes? The little girls are so eager for them. I promised to take them with me to Sunday-school to-morrow, if I could get shoes, but I don't know how to buy them very well. Could you go?"

The shoe shop was farther down the street, in an opposite direction from the one where Mr. Decker generally got his liquor, and wily Nettie remembered that there was a street leading from it which would take them home without passing the saloon. Of course it was true that she needed his help to select the shoes, but it was also true that she was very glad she did. Mr. Decker was untying his apron, and rolling down his sleeves; he felt very thirsty—the sight of the money seemed to make him thirsty. He had meant to go directly to the saloon, give them one dollar on the old bill, and spend what he needed, only a very little, on beer. With the rest of the money he honestly meant to pay his rent. Yet no one ought to have understood better than he that he would not be likely to get away from that saloon with a cent of money in his pocket. For all that, he wanted to go. He wished Nettie would go away and let him alone. But the men were watching.

[126]

"You can't fit the children to shoes without having them along," he said gruffly. But Nettie was ready for him: "Oh!" she said, swiftly unrolling a newspaper, "I brought their feet along." And with a bright little laugh she plumped down two badly worn shoes on the work table.

"That left-footed one is Satie's. The other was so dreadfully worn out, I was afraid the shoemaker couldn't measure it. This is the best one of Susie's."

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It was plain to any reasonable eyes that two pairs of shoes were badly needed.

"I guess they need other things besides shoes."

It was the father who said this, and they were out on the street, and he was actually being drawn by Nettie's eager hand in the opposite direction from the saloon.

"O no," she said; "I had some clothes which I had outgrown; I have been at work at them all day, and they make nice little suits. Auntie Marshall sent them each a cunning little white sunbonnet. When we get the shoes, they will look just as nice as can be. You don't know how pleased they are about going to Sunday-school. I am so glad they will not be disappointed to-morrow."

The shoes were bought, good, strong-looking little ones, and wonderfully cheap, perhaps because Nettie did the bargaining, and the man who knew how scarce her money must be, was sorry for the little woman. It did seem a great deal to pay out—two whole dollars—for shoes when everything was needed. It was warm weather, perhaps she ought to have let the little girls go barefoot for awhile, but then she could not take them to Sunday-school very well; at least, it seemed to her that she couldn't; and father was willing to have them bought now. Who could tell when he would be willing again? [128]

He stood in the door and waited for her, wondering why he did so, why he could not leave her and go back to that saloon and get his drink. One reason was, that she gave him no chance. She appealed to him every minute for advice.

"Father, can we go to market now? I want to get just a splendid piece of meat for your Sunday dinner. I know just how to cook it in a way that you will like."

"I guess you can do that without me; I have an errand in another direction." They were on the street again. She caught his hand eagerly. "O, father, do please come with me to the market, there are so many men there I don't like to go alone; and it is so nice to take a walk with you. I haven't had one since I came. Won't you please come, father?"

Joe Decker hardly knew what to think of himself. There was something in her soft coaxing voice which seemed to take him back a dozen years into the past, and which led him along in spite of himself. [129]

The meat was bought, Nettie looking wise over the different pieces, and insisting on a neck piece, which the boy told her was not fit to eat. "I know how to make it fit," she said, with a little nod of her head.

"I want three pounds of it. And then, father, I want two carrots and two onions; I'm going to make something nice."

Only sixty-eight cents of her precious money left!

"I did need some butter," she said mournfully, "and that in the tub looks nice, but I guess I can't afford it this time."

"How much is butter?" asked Mr. Decker, suddenly rising to the needs of the moment. "Twenty-five," said the grocer, shortly. He did not know the trim little woman who had paid for her carrots and onions, and held them in a paper bag at this moment, but he did know Joe Decker and had an account against him. He had no desire to sell him any butter.

"Then give me two pounds, and be quick about it." And Mr. Decker put down a dollar bill on the counter.

The man seized it promptly and began to arrange the butter in a neat wooden dish, while he said, "By the way, Mr. Decker, when will it be convenient to settle that little account?" [130]

"I'll do it as soon as I can," said Mr. Decker, speaking low, for Nettie turned toward him startled; this was worse than she thought. She had not known of any accounts. Mr. Decker himself had forgotten it until he stood in the very door. It was months since he had bought groceries.

"Is it much, father?" Nettie asked, and he replied pettishly:

"Much? no. It is only a miserable little three dollars. I mean to pay it; he needn't be scared." Yet why he shouldn't be "scared," when he had asked for those three dollars perhaps fifty times, Mr. Decker did not say.

"Father," said Nettie, in a very low voice, "couldn't you let the man keep the fifty cents, on the account, and that would be a beginning?"

But this was too much.

"No," said Mr. Decker; "I will pay my bills when I get ready and not before; and it is none of your business when I do it. You must not meddle with what does not belong to you."

"No, sir;" said Nettie, though it was hard work to speak just then; there was a queer little lump in her throat. She was not in the habit of being spoken to in this way. The butter was ready, and the man handed back the change. [131]

Mr. Decker pocketed it, saying as he did so, "I'll have some money for you next week, I guess." And then they went away.

"If it hadn't been for the girl I'd have kept the fifty cents and got so much out of the old drunkard; but someway I couldn't bring myself to doing it with her looking on." This was what the grocer muttered as they walked away. But they did not hear him. Nettie was bent now on tolling her father down the cross street to go home.

"Father," she said, "we are going to have milk toast for supper. Mother said she would have it ready, and toast spoils, you know, if it stands long. Couldn't we go home this way and make it shorter?"

He was a good deal astonished that he did it. He was still very thirsty, but there really came to him no decent excuse for deserting his little girl and going back to the saloon. And they walked into the house together, so astonishing Mrs. Decker that she almost dropped the teapot which she was filling with hot water. Whatever other night, Mr. Decker contrived to get home to supper, he was always late on Saturday, and in a worse condition than at any other time. [132]

That was really a nice little suppertime. Mrs. Decker had done her part well, not for the husband whom she did not expect, but in gratitude to the little girl who had worked so hard all the week for herself and her neglected babies. The toast was well made, and the tea was good. Besides, there was a treat; not ten minutes before, Mrs. Job Smith had sent in a plate of ginger cookies; "for the children," she said, and the children each had one. So did the father and mother.

Mr. Decker washed his hands before he sat down to the table, for the tablecloth had been freshly washed and ironed that day, and his wife had on a clean calico apron and a strip of white cloth about her neck, and her hair was smooth.

"There!" said Nettie, displaying her meat, "now, mother, we can have that stew for to-morrow, just as we planned. Father got the meat, and the carrots, and everything. And what do you think, little girlies, father bought you each a pair of shoes!" [133]

Mrs. Decker set down the teapot again. She was just in the act of giving her husband a cup of tea, and the color came and went on her face so queerly that Nettie for a moment was frightened. As for the father, he felt very queer. Scared and silent as his little girls generally were in his presence, they could not keep back a little squeal of delight over this wonderful piece of news. Altogether, Mr. Decker could not help feeling that it really was a nice thing to be able to buy shoes and meat for his family.

"Come," he said, "give us your tea if you're going to; I'm as dry as a fish."

And the tea was poured.

The toast was good, and there was plenty of it, and someway it took longer to eat it than this family usually spent at the supper-table; and then, after supper, the shoes had to be tried on, and Nettie called the little girls to their father to see if the shoes fitted, and he took Sate up on his lap to examine them, which was a thing that had not happened to Sate in so long that Susie scowled and expected that she would be frightened, but Sate seemed to like it, and actually stole an arm around her father's neck and patted his cheek, while he was feeling of the shoe. Then Mrs. Decker had a happy thought. [134]

She winked and motioned Nettie into the bedroom and whispered: "Don't you believe he might like to see the children in their nice clothes? I ain't seen him notice them so much in a year; and he hasn't been drinking a mite, has he?"

"Not a drop," said Nettie; "I'll dress Susie." And she flew out to the kitchen.

"Father, just you wait until Susie is ready to show you something. Come here, Susie, quick." And almost in less time than it takes me to tell it, Susie was whisked into the pretty petticoats and dress which had been shortened and tightened for her that day. The dress was a plain, not over-fine white one; but it was beautifully ironed, and the white sunbonnet perched on the trim head completed the picture and made a pretty creature of Susie. I am sure I don't wonder that the child felt a trifle vain as she squeaked out in her new shoes to show herself to her father. She had not been neatly dressed long enough to consider it as a matter of course.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Decker, and there he stopped. This was certainly a wonderful change. He looked at his little daughter from head to foot, and could hardly believe his eyes. What a pretty child she was. And to think that she was his! Certainly she ought to have new shoes, and new clothes. Sate's arm was still about his neck, and Sate's sweet full lips were suddenly touched to his rough cheek. [135]

"I've got new clothes too," she said sweetly, "only I doesn't want to get down from here to put them on."

The father turned at that and kissed her. Then he sat her down hastily and got up. Something made his eyes dim. He really did not know what was the matter with him, only it all seemed to come to him suddenly that he had some very nice children, and that they ought to have clothes and food and chances like others, and that it was his own fault they hadn't.

Nettie hated tobacco, but she went herself in haste and lighted her father's pipe and brought it to him; if he must smoke, it would be so much better to have him sit in the door and do it rather than to go off down to that saloon. She hated the saloon worse than the tobacco. As she brought the pipe, she said within her hopeful little heart: "Maybe sometime he won't want either to drink or smoke. I most know we can coax him to give them both up; and then won't that be nice?" [135]

One thing was troubling her; as soon as she could, she followed her mother into the yard and questioned, "Do you know where Norm is?"

Yes, Mrs. Decker knew. He came home just after Nettie had gone out, and said he had an hour's holiday; their room had closed early for Saturday, and he was going to wash up and go down street before supper.

"My heart was in my mouth," said the poor mother; "because when there is a holiday he gets

into worse scrapes than he does any other time; he goes with a set that don't do anything but have holidays, and they always have some mischief hatched up to get Norm into. I never see the like of the boys in this town for getting others into scrapes; but I didn't dare to say a word, because Norm thinks he is getting too big for me to give him any words, and just as he was going out, that boy next door—Jerry, you said his name was, didn't you?—he came out and called Norm, real friendly, and they stood talking together; he appeared to be arguing something, and Norm holding off, and at last Norm came in and wanted the tin pail and said he had changed his mind and was going fishing; and they went off together, them two." And Mrs. Decker finished the sentence with a rare smile. She was grateful to Jerry for carrying off her boy, and grateful to Nettie for thinking about him and being anxious.

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"Good!" said Nettie with a happy little laugh, "then we will have some fried fish to-morrow for breakfast. What a nice day to-morrow is going to be."

Mr. Decker was a good deal surprised at himself, but he did not go down town again that night. After he had smoked, he felt thirsty, it is true, and at that very minute Nettie came in with the one glass which they had in the house, and it was full of lemonade.

"Did he want a nice cool drink?" she had two lemons which she bought with her own money, and she knew how to make good lemonade, Auntie Marshall used to say.

The father drank the cool liquid off almost at a swallow, said it was good, and that he guessed she knew how to do most things. By this time the little girls had been tucked away to bed, and just as Mr. Decker rose up to say he guessed he would go down street awhile, Norm appeared with a string of fish. They were beauties; he declared that he never had such luck in his life; that fellow just bewitched the fish, he believed, so they would rather be caught than not. Then came a talk about dressing them. Norm said he was sure he did not know how; and Mr. Decker said, a great fellow like him ought to know how. When he was a boy of fourteen he used to catch fish for his mother almost every day of his life, and dress them too; his mother never had to touch them until they were ready to cook. Then Nettie, flushed and eager, said:

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"O father, then you can show me how to do it, can't you? I would like to learn just the right way." And the father laughed, and looked at his wife with something like the old look on his face, and said he seemed to be fairly caught. And together they went to the box outside, and in the soft summer night, with the moon looking down on them, Nettie took her lesson in fish dressing.

When the work was all done, Norm having hovered around through it all, and watched, and helped a little, Mr. Decker went back to the kitchen and yawned, and wondered how late it was. No clock in this house to give any idea of time. There used to be, but one day it got out of order and Mr. Decker carried it down street to be fixed, and never brought it back. Mrs. Decker asked about it a good many times, then went herself in search of it, and found it in the saloon at the corner.

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"He took it for debt," the owner told her, and a poor bargain it was; it never came to time, any better than her husband did. However, just as Mr. Decker made his wonderment, the old clock over at Mrs. Smith's rose up to its duty, and dignifiedly struck nine.

"Well, I declare," said Mr. Decker, "I did not think it was as late as that. There ain't any evenings now days. Well, I guess, after all, I'll go to bed. I'm most uncommon tired to-night somehow."

Norm had already gone up to his room; and Mrs. Decker when she heard her husband's words, hurried into the bedroom to hide two happy tears.

"I declare for it, I believe you have bewitched him," she said to Nettie, who followed her to ask about the breakfast; "I ain't known him to do such a thing not in two years, as to go to bed at nine o'clock without ever going down street again. He don't act like himself; not a mite. I was most scared when I saw him take Sate in his arms; that child don't remember his doing it before, I don't believe. Did he really buy the things, child, and pay for them? Well, now, it does beat all! And Saturday night, too; that has always been his worst night. Child, if you get hold of your father, and of my Norm, there ain't anything in this world too good for you. I'd work my fingers to the bone any time to help along, and be glad to."

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It was all very sweet. Nettie ran away before the sentence was fairly finished, waiting only to say, "Good-night, mother!" She had done this every night since she came, but to-night she reached up and touched her lips to the tall woman's thin cheek. Poor Nettie had been used to kissing somebody every night when she went to bed. It had made her homesick not to do it. But she had not wanted to kiss anybody in this house, except the little girls. To-night, she wanted to kiss this mother. She reached the back door, then stopped and looked back; her father sat in his shirt sleeves, in the act of pulling off one boot. Should she tell him good-night? He had not been there for her to do it a single evening since she came home. Should she kiss him? Why not? Wasn't he her father? Yet he might not like it. She could not be sure. He was not like the fathers she had known. However, she came back on tiptoe and stooped over him, her voice low and sweet:

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"Good-night, father! I am going now." And then she put a kiss on the rough cheek, just where little Sate had left her velvet touch.

Mr. Decker started almost as though somebody had struck him. But it was not anger which filled his face.

"Good-night, my girl," he said, but his voice was husky; and Nettie ran as fast as she could across the yard to the next house.

"I did not get the things," she said to Jerry, who stood in the doorway waiting for her; "I couldn't; but, Jerry, I had such a wonderful time! Father gave me money, and we went to market, and bought shoes and he bought butter; and since we came home almost everything has happened. I can't begin to tell you. I can get some of the things on Monday. Father gave me money."

"All right," said Jerry; "I didn't get the skeletons ready, either; I meant to work after tea, but instead of that I went fishing." And he gave her a bright smile. [142]

"Oh! I know it," said Nettie, breathless almost with eagerness. "That is part of my nice time. Jerry, I am so glad you went fishing to-night, and I am so glad you caught your fish; not the ones which we are to eat for our Sunday breakfast, you know, but the other one. Do you understand?"

And Jerry laughed. "I understand," he said, "I had a nice time, too. We shall have some long stories to tell each other, I guess. We must go in now."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SABBATH TO REMEMBER.

[143]

SUNDAY was a successful day at the Deckers. The sun shone brilliantly; a trifle too warm, you might have thought it, for comfort; but the little Deckers did not notice it. The fish was beautifully browned and the coffee was delicious. Mr. Decker had a clean shirt which his wife had contrived to wash and mend, the day before, and all things were harmonious. Some time before nine o'clock. Sate and Susie were arrayed in their new white suits, and with their trim new shoes, and hair beautifully neat, they were as pretty little girls as one need want to see. Nettie surveyed them with unqualified satisfaction, and then seated them, each with a picture primer, while she made her own toilet. She put on the dress which had been her best for Sunday, all summer. It was a gingham, a trifle finer and a good deal lighter than the brown one in which she had travelled. It was neatly made, and fitted her well; and the brown hat and ribbons looked well with it. [144]

On the whole, when they set off for Sabbath-school, Jerry accompanying them, arrayed in a fresh brown linen suit, Mrs. Decker watching them from the side window, admitted that she never saw a nicer-looking set in her life! She even had the courage to call Mr. Decker to see how nice the two little girls looked, and he came and watched them out of sight. And when he said that his Nan was about as nice a looking girl as he wanted to see, she answered heartily that Nannie was the very best girl she ever saw in her life.

Fairly in the Sabbath-school, a fit of extreme shyness came over the two little Deckers. With Susie, as usual, it took the form of fierceness; she planted her two stout feet in the doorway and resolutely shook her head to all coaxings to go any farther; keeping firm hold of Sate's hand, and giving her arm a jerk now and then, to indicate to her that she was not to stir from her protector's side. The situation was becoming embarrassing. Nettie could not leave them, and Jerry would not; though some of the boys were giggling, those of his class were motioning him to leave the group and join them. The superintendent came forward and cordially invited the children in, but Susie scowled at him and shook her head. Then Jerry went around to Sate's side and held out his hand. "Sate," he said in a winning tone, "come with me over where all those pretty little girls sit, and I will get you a picture paper with a bird on it." [145]

To Susie's utter dismay, Sate who had meekly obeyed her slightest whim during all her little life, suddenly dropped the hand that held hers, and gave the other to Jerry, with a firm: "I'm going in, Susie; we came to go in, and Nettie wants us to." Poor, astonished, deserted Susie!

She had been so sure of Sate that she had neglected to keep firm hold, and now she had slid away. There was nothing left for Susie but to follow her with what grace she could.

They were seated at last. Seven little girls of nearly Nettie's size and age. As she took a seat among them, I wish I could give you an idea of how she felt. Up to this hour, it had not occurred to her that she was not as well dressed as others of her age. Not quite that, either; being a wise little woman of business, she was well aware that her clothes were plain, and cheap, and that some girls wore clothes which cost a great deal of money. But I mean that this was the first time she had taken in the thought of the difference, so that it gave her a sting. The Sabbath-school which she had been attending, was a mission, in the lower part of the city; the scholars, nearly all of them, coming from homes where there was not much to spare on dress; and the girls of her class had all of them dressed like herself, neatly and plainly. It was very different with these seven girls. She felt at once, as she seated herself, as though she had come into the midst of a flower garden where choice blossoms were glowing on every side, and she might be a poor little weed. Summer silk dresses, broad-brimmed hats aglow with flowers, kid gloves, dainty lace-trimmed parasols—what a beautiful world it was into which this poor little weed had moved? [146]

Nettie knew that her hat was coarse, and the ribbon narrow and cheap, and her gloves cotton, but these things had never troubled her before. Why should they now?

The truth is, it was not the pretty things, but the curious glances that their owners gave at the small brown thrush which had come in among them. They seemed to poor Nettie to be making a memoranda of everything she had on, from the narrow blue ribbon on her hair to the strong neat boots in which her plump feet were encased. The look in their eyes said, "How queerly she is [147]

dressed!" It was impossible to get away from the thought of their thoughts, and from the fact that the girl next to her drew her blue silk dress closer about her, and placed her pink-lined parasol on the other side, even though the pretty lady who sat before them in the teacher's seat, welcomed her kindly, and hoped she would be happy among them. Nettie hoped so, too; but she could hardly believe that it could be possible.

She looked over at Jerry. He seemed to be having a good time; there was not so much difference in boys' clothes as in girls. She did not see but he looked as well as any of them. She looked forward at the little girls. Susie had allowed herself to be led in search of Sate, and the two were at this moment side by side in a seat full of bobbing heads; they had taken off their sunbonnets, and their pretty heads bobbed about with the rest, and the white dresses of the two looked as well at a distance as the others, though Nettie could see that there were ruffles, and tucks, and embroidery and lace. But some were plain; and none of the wee ones seemed to notice or to care. It was only Nettie who had gotten among those who made her care, by the glance of their eyes, and the rustle of their finery. She tried to get away from it all; tried hard. She listened to the words read, and joined as well as she could, in the hymn sung, and answered quietly and correctly, the questions put to her; but all the while there was a queer lump in her throat, which kept her swallowing, and swallowing, and a wish in her heart that she could go back to Auntie Marshall's.

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When the service was over, she stood waiting, feeling shy and alone. Jerry was talking with the boys in his class, and the little girls were being kissed by their pretty teacher. Her classmates stood and looked at her. At last the teacher who had been talking with one of the secretaries turned to her with a pleasant voice:

"Well, Nettie, we are glad to have you with us. Can you come every Sabbath, do you think? Are you acquainted with these girls? No? Then you must be introduced. This is Irene Lewis, and this is Cecelia Lester," and in this way she named the seven girls, each one making in turn what seemed to poor Nettie the stiffest little bow she had ever seen. At last, Irene Lewis, who stood next to her, and wore an elegant fawn-colored silk dress trimmed with lace, tried to think of something to say.

"You haven't begun school yet, have you? I haven't seen anything of you. What grade are you in?"

Nettie explained that she had not been in a regular school; that she went afternoons to a private school which had no grades, and that now she did not expect to go at all; because mother could not spare her.

"A private school!" said Miss Irene, "and held only in the afternoon! What a queer idea! I should think morning was the time to study. What was it for?"

Then it became necessary to further explain that the girls who attended this afternoon school, had all of them work to do in the mornings, and could not be spared.

"I have heard of them," said Lorena Barstow. "They are sort of charity schools, are they not?"

Lorena was dressed in white, and looked almost weighed down with rich embroidery; but she had a disagreeable smile on her face, and a look in her eyes that made Nettie's face crimson.

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"I don't know," she said, quietly, "I never heard it called by that name. My auntie thought very well of it, and was glad to have me go." Then she turned away, and hoped that none of the girls would ask her any more questions, or try to be friendly with her. Just now, she could be glad of only one thing, and that was, that she need not go to school with these disagreeable people. She stepped quite out of sight behind the screen which shielded the next class, and waited impatiently for the little girls. They seemed to be having a very nice time, and were in no haste to come to her. Standing there, waiting, she had the pleasure of hearing herself talked about.

"Isn't she a queer little object?" said Lorena Barstow. And when one of the others was kind enough to say that she did not see anything very queer about her, Lorena proceeded to explain.

"You don't! Well, I should think you might. Did you ever see a girl in our class before, with a gingham dress on? Of course she wore her very best for the first Sunday; and her hat is of very coarse straw, just the commonest kind, and last year's shape at that; then look at her cotton gloves! I'm sure I think she is as funny a little object as ever came into this room."

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"What of it? I am sure she looks neat and clean, and she spoke very prettily, and knew her lesson better than any of us."

"I didn't say she didn't. I was only talking about her clothes."

"Clothes are not of much consequence."

"O Miss Ermina! When you dress better than any of us. Why don't you wear gingham dresses,



LORENA BARSTOW.

and cheap ribbons, and cotton gloves, if you think they look as well as nice ones?"

"I did not say that; I wear the clothes my mother gets for me; but I truly don't think they are the most important things in the world."

"Neither do I. You needn't take a person up in that way, as though you were better than anybody else. I am sure I am willing she should wear what she likes."

Then Cecelia Lester took up the conversation:

"She could not be expected to dress very well, of course. Don't you know she is old Joe Decker's daughter?"

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"Who is Joe Decker? I never heard of him."

"Well, he is just a drunkard; they live over on Hamlin street. Mrs. Decker washes for my auntie once in awhile, when they have extra company, and I have seen her there, with both the little girls. I heard that Joe's daughter who has been living out, for years, was coming home."

"Living out! that little thing! No wonder she hasn't better clothes. She has a pretty face, I think. But it seems sort of queer to have her come into our class, doesn't it? We sha'n't know what to do with her! She can't go in our set, of course."

"O, I don't know. Perhaps Ermina Farley will invite her to her party." At this point, all the others laughed, as though a funny thing had been said, but Ermina spoke quietly: "So far as her gingham dress is concerned, I am sure I would just as soon. I don't choose my friends on account of the clothes they wear; and I suppose the poor thing cannot help her father being a drunkard; but then, I shouldn't like to invite her, for fear you girls would not treat her well."

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Nettie could see the toss of Lorena Barstow's yellow curls as she answered: "Well, I must say I like to be careful with whom I associate; and mother likes to have me careful. I am sorry for the girl; but I don't know that I need make her my most intimate friend on that account. Say, girls, did you ever notice what fine eyes that boy has who came in with her? Some think he is a real handsome fellow."

"He seems to be a particular friend of this girl; I saw them on the street together yesterday, and they were talking and laughing, as though they enjoyed each other ever so much. Who is that boy?"

Lorena seemed to be prepared to answer all questions.

"He isn't much," she said, with another toss of her yellow curls. "His name is Jerry Mack; a regular Irish name, and he is Irish in face; I think he is coarse-looking; dreadful red cheeks! The girls over on the West Side say he is smart, and handsome, and all that. I don't see where they find it."

"O, he is smart," said Cecelia Lester. "My brother knows him, and he says there isn't a more intelligent boy in town. I used to think he was splendid; I have talked with him some, and he is real pleasant; but I must say I don't understand why he goes with that Decker girl all the time."

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"I don't see why he shouldn't," declared Lorena. "For my part, I think they are well matched; he works for his board at Job Smith's the carman's, and she is a drunkard's daughter; they ought to be able to have nice times together."

"Does he work for his board?" chimed in two or three voices at once.

"Why, I suppose so, or gets it without working for it. He lives there, anyway. They say his father has deserted him, run away to California, or somewhere; Jerry will have to learn the carman's trade, and support himself, and Nettie, too, maybe." Whereupon there was a chorus of giggles. Something about this seemed to be thought funny.

Ermina seemed to have left the group, so they took her up next. "Ermina Farley meant to invite him to her party, but I hardly think she will, when she finds out how all we girls feel about it. She tries to do things different from everybody else, though; so perhaps that will be the very reason why she will ask them both. I'll tell you what it is, girls, we must stand up for our rights, and not let her have everything her own way. Let's say squarely that we will not go to her party if she invites out of our set. I could endure the boy if I had to, because he is very polite, and merry; and so few of the boys around here know how to behave themselves; but if he has chosen that Decker girl for his friend, we must just let them both alone. This class isn't the place for that girl; I wonder who invited her in? I think it was real mean in Miss Wheeler to ask her to come again, without knowing how we felt about it."

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All this time was poor Nettie behind that screen. Not daring to stir, because there was no place for her to go. The little girls were still engaged with their teacher, who had Sate on her lap, and Susie by her side, and was showing them some picture cards, and apparently telling them a story about the pictures. Jerry had sat down beside a boy who was copying something which Jerry seemed to be reading to him, and various groups stood about, chatting. They were waiting for the bell to toll before they went into church. Nettie could not go without the little girls, and she could not stir without being brought into full view. And just then she felt as though it would not be possible for her to meet the eyes of anybody. If only she could run away and hide, where she need never see any of those dreadful girls again! or, for that matter, see anybody. It was true, she was a drunkard's daughter, and would go down lower and lower, until her neat dress would be in rags, and her hat, coarse as it was, would grow frayed, and be many years behind the fashion. What a cruel, wicked world it was! Who could have imagined that those pretty, beautifully dressed girls could have such cruel tongues, and say such hateful words! Didn't they know she

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was within hearing? Couldn't they have waited until she got out of the way, so that she need not have known how dreadful they were?

So far as that was concerned, they did not know it. To do them justice, I think none of them would have wounded her so, quite to her face. They might have been cold, but they would not have been cruel in her presence. They thought she went out of the room, instead of behind the screen. The bell tolled, at last, and Jerry finished his reading, and came over to her, his face bright. The girls in their beautiful plumage fluttered away like gay birds, the teacher of the little girls came toward her holding a hand of each, and saying brightly: "Are these your little sisters? What dear little treasures they are! We have had such a pleasant time together. I hope you have enjoyed your first day at Sabbath-school?"

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"Thank you, ma'am," said Nettie. She was in great doubt as to whether this was a correct answer, for the sentence had the tone of a question in it, but truthful Nettie could not say that she enjoyed it very much, and did not want to say that she had never had a more miserable time in her life.

Jerry was harder to answer. "Was it nice?" he asked her, as soon as they were fairly outside. "Did you have a good time? Those girls looked a trifle like peacocks, didn't they? I thought you were the best dressed one among them."

O, ignorant boy! If there hadn't been such a lump in Nettie's throat, she would have laughed at this bit of folly. As it was, she contrived to give him a very little shadow of a smile, and was glad that the church door was near at hand, and that there was no more time for closer questions.

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All through the morning service she was trying to forget. It was not easy to do, for there sat three of the girls in a seat on which she could look down all the time; and try as she would, it seemed impossible to keep eyes or thoughts from turning that way. The girls did not behave very well. They whispered a good deal, during the Bible reading, and giggled over a book that fell while the hymn was being sung; and though Nettie covered her eyes during prayer, she could not help hearing a soft little buzz of whispering voices, even then. Jerry looked straight before him, with bright, untroubled face, and seemed to be having a good time. Susie and Sate, who had never been in church before in their lives, behaved remarkably well. In the course of the morning Sate leaned her little brown head trustingly against Nettie and dropped asleep, and Nettie put her arm around her, arranged her pretty head comfortably, and looked lovingly down upon her, and was glad that she had a little sister to love. Two of them, indeed, for Susie sat bolt upright and looked straight before her, and took in everything with wide-open eyes, and looked so handsome with her glowing cheeks and her lovely curls, that it was almost impossible not to feel proud of the womanly little face.

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Nettie contrived to keep herself occupied with the prattle of the children during the walk home. She was not yet ready for Jerry's questions. She did not know what to say. Of one thing she felt sure; that was, that she never meant to go to that Sabbath-school again.

Dinner was nearly ready when they reached home; such an appetizing smell of soup as had never filled the Decker kitchen before. Mrs. Decker had followed the directions of her young daughter with great care; and presently a very comfortable family sat down to the table. There were no soup plates, but there were two bowls for the father and mother, and a deep saucer for Norm; and the little girls were made happy with tin cups, two of which Nettie had found and scoured, the day before. It was certainly a very pleasant time. After dinner, as Nettie was preparing to wash the dishes, her mother came out with a troubled face, and whispered:

"Norm says he guesses he will go out for a walk; and I know what that means; he gets with a mean set every Sunday, and they carouse dreadful; it is the worst day in the week for boys. I was thinking, what if you could get that boy next door to go a-fishing again; Norm enjoyed it last night first-rate; and he said that boy was as jolly company as he should ever want. If he could keep him away from that set, he would be doing a good deed."

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"But, mother," she said, "it is Sunday."

"Yes," said Mrs. Decker, "that's just what I've been saying; Sunday is the day when he gets into the worst kind of scrapes. Do you think Jerry would help us?"

"I know he would if he could; but he could not go fishing on Sunday, you know."

"Why not? I should think it was enough sight better than for Norm to go off with a set of loafers, who do all sorts of wicked things."

Poor Nettie was not skilled in argument; she did not know how to explain to her mother that Jerry must not do one wrong thing, to keep Norm from doing another wrong thing, even though the thing he chose might be the worse of the two. There was only a simple statement which she could make. "This is God's day, mother, and he says we must not do our own work, or our own pleasure on his day; and I know Jerry will try to obey him, because he is his soldier."

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Mrs. Decker looked at the red-cheeked young girl a moment, then drew a long sigh.

"Well," she said, "I know that is the way good folks talk; I used to hear plenty of it when I was young; and I was brought up to keep the Sabbath as strict as anybody; I would do it now if I could; but I'm free to confess that I would rather have Norm go a-fishing, ten times over, than to go with those fellows and get drunk."

"Yes'm," said Nettie, respectfully. "But then, God says we must obey him; and he has told us just how to keep the Sabbath day. He couldn't help us to do things for other people, if we begin by disobeying Him."

Mrs. Decker went away, the trouble still on her face, and Nettie began to wash the dishes. Suddenly, she dropped her dish towel and rushed after Norman as he lounged out of the door.

"Norman," she called, just as he was moving down the street, "won't you take the little girls and me over to that green place, that I see, the other side of the pond? There is such a pretty tree there, and it looks so pleasant on the bank. I have some story papers that I promised to read to the little girls, and that would be such a nice place for reading. Won't you?"

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Norm stopped and looked down at her in astonishment, and some embarrassment. "You can go over there without me," he said, at last; "it isn't such a dreadful ways off; there's a plank across the stream down there a ways, where it is narrow. Lots of girls go there."

Nettie looked over at it timidly. She was honestly afraid of the water, and nothing short of keeping Norm out of harm's way would have tempted her to cross a plank, with the little girls for companions. She spoke in genuine timidity.

"I wouldn't like to go over there alone, with just the children. I am not used to going about alone. Couldn't you go with us, for just a little while? It will seem so nice to have a big brother to take care of me."

Something about it all seemed suddenly rather nice to Norm. He had never been asked to take care of anybody before. He stood irresolutely for a moment, then said lazily, "Well, I don't know as I care; bring on your babies, then, and we'll go."

Nettie sped back to the kitchen, dashed after the little girls and their sunbonnets, saying to Mrs. Decker as she went: "Mother, would you mind finishing the dishes? Norman is going to take the little girls and me over to the big tree, and we are going to stay there awhile, and read."

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"I'll finish 'em," said Mrs. Decker, comfort in her tone, and she murmured, as she watched them away, Sate with her hand slipped inside of Norm's, "I declare, I never see the beat of that girl in all my life."

CHAPTER IX.

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A BARGAIN AND A PROMISE.

DURING the next few days work went on rapidly in the Decker home: or, more properly speaking, in the room over Job Smith's barn. Jerry developed such taste in the manufacture of furniture, or of "skeletons," that Nettie grew alarmed lest there should never be found clothing enough to cover them. However, matters in that respect began to look brighter. Mrs. Job Smith, as she grew into an understanding of the plan, dragged out certain old trunks from her woodhouse chamber and looked them over. There were treasures in those trunks, which even Mrs. Job herself had forgotten. A gay chintz dress of Job's mother's, which had been saved by her daughter-in-law "she couldn't rightly tell for what, only Job set store by it because it was his old mother's." Nettie fairly clapped her hands in delight over it, and then blushed crimson when she remembered it was not hers.

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"Well, now," said Mrs. Job, "I'll just tell you what it is. If you see anything in life to do with these rolls of things, here is a bundle of old muslin curtains, embroidered, you know, and dreadful pretty once, I suppose, but they are all to pieces now. Mrs. Percival, a lady I used to clear starch and iron for, gave them to me; paid me in that kind of trash, you know, though what in the world she thought I could ever do with them is more than I could imagine. But I was younger then than I am now, and was kind of meek, and I lugged home the great roll and said nothing; only I remember when I got home I just sat down on a corner of the table and cried, I was so disappointed. I had expected to be paid in money, and I had planned two or three things to surprise Job, and they had to be given up. Well, as I was saying," she added, in a brisker tone, having roused from her little dream of the past to watch Nettie's fingers linger lovingly and wistfully among the rolls of soft muslin, "they have never been the least mite of good to me. I have just kept them because it didn't seem quite the thing to throw such pretty soft stuff into the rag-bag, and they were dreadful poor trash to give away; and Sarah Jane, she is tired of having them in the attic taking up room, and if there is anything in life can be done with these things in this trunk, I wish you would just go shares, and make some things for me too. Sarah Jane would like it, first-rate."

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This sentence fairly made Nettie catch her breath. The treasures in that trunk were so wonderful to her. "I could make such lovely things!" she said, almost gasping out the words; "but, O Mrs. Smith, you can't mean it! I'm afraid I oughtn't to."

"Why, bless your heart, child, I tell you I don't know of a single useful thing in that trunk; not one; it is just a pack of rubbish, now, that's the truth; and if Sarah Jane has begged me once to let her sell it to the rag pedlers, I believe she has twenty times."

The bare thought of such a sacrifice as this almost made Nettie pale. Also it settled her resolution and her conscience. She reached forward and plunged into the delights of the despised trunk with a satisfied air. "I will make you some of the prettiest things you ever saw in your life," she said, with the air of one who knew she could do it. And Mrs. Smith laughed, and watched her with admiring eyes, and told Sarah Jane that she believed the child could do some things that other folks couldn't.

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It was after the day's work was done, and the little girls were asleep, and Nettie sat in the back door waiting for father and Norm, and wishing that they had not gone down town again, that she had a chance to say the few little words which she had made up her mind to say to Jerry. While her hands had been busy over long seams of rag carpeting, and over the wonderful trunk full of treasures, her thoughts had, much of the time, been busy with other matters. Yesterday at noon she had been sure that she should never go to that Sabbath-school again. By night, after the quiet talk under the trees with Norm and the little girls, she had not been so sure of it. The little girls could not go without her, and they had learned sweet lessons that very day, which had filled their young heads full of wondering thoughts, and they had asked questions which had at least amused Norm, and which might set him to thinking. In any case, ought she, because she had not been happy in her class, to deprive the little girls of the help which the Sabbath-school might be to them? Then how badly it would look to Norm, and to her mother, if she went no more. And what would Jerry think? On the whole, the longer she thought about it, the more she felt inclined to believe that her decision might have been a hasty one, and it was her duty to continue in that Sabbath-school, and even in that class, at least until the superintendent placed her in some other. It was a good deal of a trial to her to decide the question in this way, but she could not make any other seem right.

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There had also been another question to decide, which had been harder, and cost her more tears than the other. She was a very lonely little girl, and it seemed hard to give up a friend. But this, too, seemed to be the only right thing to do, so she made it known to Jerry in the moonlight.

"Do you know, Jerry, I have been thinking all day of something that I ought to say to you?"

"All right," said Jerry, whittling away at the stick which he was fashioning into a proper shape to do duty as a towel rack for Mrs. Job Smith's kitchen towel. "Go ahead, this is a good time to say it." And he held the stick up and took a scientific squint at it in the moonlight. "This thing would work better if the wood were a little softer. I am going to make one for your mother if it is a success, and it will be. Now what is your news?"

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"It isn't news," said Nettie, "it is only something that I have made up my mind I ought to say. Jerry, I think, that is, I don't think, I mean"— And there she stopped.

"Just so," said Jerry, nodding his head gravely, "that is plain, I am sure, and interesting; I agree with you entirely." After that, both of them had to laugh a little, and the story did not get on.

"But I truly mean it," Nettie said at last, her face growing grave again, "and I ought to say it. What I want to tell you is, that I have made up my mind that you and I must not be friends any more."

Jerry did not laugh now, he did not even whistle. His knife suddenly stopped, and he squared around to get a full view of her face.

"What!" he said at last, as though he did not think it possible that he could have understood her.

"Yes," she said firmly, "I mean it, Jerry, and it is real hard to say; you and I ought not to be friends, or, I mean we must not let folks know that we are friends. We mustn't take walks together, nor work together. I don't mean that I shall not like you all the same; but we mustn't have anything to do with each other."

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"Why not, pray? Have I done anything to make you ashamed of me? I'll try to behave myself, I'm sure."

This was so ridiculous that Nettie could not help smiling a little.

"O, Jerry!" she said, "you know better than to talk in that way. It sounds strange, I know, and it is real hard to do, but I am sure it is right, and we must do it."

"But what in the world is the trouble? Can't you give a fellow a reason for things? Is it your brother who doesn't like it?"

"O no! Norm likes you; and mother is as much obliged to you as she can be, for getting him to go a-fishing. But, you see, it is bad for you to be my friend."

"Oh-ho! I don't believe your influence is very hard on me; I don't feel as though you had led me very far astray!"

"It isn't fun, Jerry, it is sober earnest. I have heard things said that set me to thinking. I overheard the girls talk! those girls in the class, you know, yesterday. I guess they did not know I was there. They talked about me a good deal. They said I had a last year's hat on, and that is true, and my dress was only gingham, and washed at that."

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"Washed!" interrupted Jerry in bewilderment; "well, what of that? Would they have had you wear it dirty?"

But Nettie hastened on; she did not feel equal to explaining to him the subtle distinction between a brand-new dress and one that had been "done up."

"They said a good deal more than that, Jerry, and it was all true. They said I was nothing but a drunkard's daughter," and here Nettie found it hard work to control the sob in her throat.

"That is not true," said Jerry, indignantly. "Your father has not drank a drop in three days."

"Oh! but, Jerry, you know he does drink; and he has gone down town to-night, and mother is sure that he will not come home sober. It is all true, Jerry. I don't mean that I am going to give up. I shall try for father all the time; and I think maybe he will reform, after a while. And I won't

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forget our promise, and I know you won't; but it is best for us not to act like friends. They talked about you, too; they said you were handsome, and they used to like you; they thought you were smart. But now you had begun to go with me, so you couldn't be much. One of them said you were an Irish boy, that you had a real Irish name. Are you Irish, Jerry?"

"Not much! Or, hold on, I don't know but I am. Why, yes, my great-grandmother came from the North of Ireland. Father is proud of it, I remember."

"Well, I don't care where you came from, you know. Nor whether you are Irish, or Dutch, or what; I am only telling you what they said. They told how you worked at Job Smith's for your board; and one of them said your father had run away and left you."

"Well, he has; run three thousand miles away, and left me, as sure as time. But he means to run back again, when he gets ready."

"I knew that wasn't true, Jerry; and I only tell you because I thought you might want to speak about your father in a way that would show them it wasn't so. But what I want to say is, that I know they will get all over those feelings when they come to know you; and they will like you, and invite you to places, if you don't go with me; but they won't any of them have anything to do with me, on account of my father. And, Jerry, I want you not to go with me, or talk with me any more."

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"Just so," said Jerry, in an unconcerned voice. "Do you think I am making this stick too long for the frame? Our kitchen towels are pretty wide. Well, now, see here, Miss Nettie Decker, you would not make a very honest business woman if you went back on a square bargain in that fashion. You and I settled it to be partners in a very important business; and partners can't get along very well without speaking to each other. There is no use in talking. You are several days too late. The mischief is done. I'm your friend and fellow-laborer and partner in the cabinet business, and the upholstery line, and all the other lines. You will find me the hardest fellow to get rid of that ever was. I don't shake off worth a cent. I shall take walks with you every chance I can get; and shout to you from the woodshed window when you are over home, and wait for you to come out when I think it is about time you should appear, and be on hand in all imaginable places. Now I hope you understand what sort of a fellow I am."

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If the boy had looked in Nettie's face just then, he would have seen a sudden light flash over it which carried away a good deal of the look of patient endurance which it had worn for the last few hours. Still her voice was full of earnestness.

"But, Jerry, they will not have anything to do with you if you act so. By and by they will not even speak to you. And they won't invite you to their parties, nor anywhere. There is going to be a party next week, and I think you would have been invited if you hadn't gone with me Sunday; now I am afraid you won't be." And now Jerry whistled a few rollicking notes.

"All right," he said in a cheery tone. "If there is any one thing more than another that I don't like to go to, it is a girls' party where they make believe act like silly, grown-up men and women. I know just about what kind of a party those girls in that class would get up. If you have been the means of saving me from an invitation, it is just another thing to thank you for. Look here, Nettie, let us make another bargain, sober earnest, not to be broken. I don't care a red cent for the girls, nor their invitations, nor their bows; I would just as soon they did not know me when they met me as not. If that is their game, I shall like nothing better than to meet them half-way; girls who would know no better than to talk the way they did about you, are not to my liking. If because you wear clothes that are neat and nice and the best you can afford, and because I am an Irish boy and work for my board, are good reasons for not having anything to do with us, why, we will return the favor and not have anything to do with them, for better reasons than they have shown. Let's drop them. I thought some of them would be good friends to you, maybe, and help you to have a nice time; but they are not of the right sort, it seems. You and I will have just as good times as we can get up. And we will bow to them if they bow to us; if they don't we will let them pass. What is settled is, that we are bound to work out this thing together. Understand?"

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"Yes," said Nettie, with a little soft laugh, "I understand, and I don't believe I ought to let you do it. But you don't know how nice it is; and I can't tell you how lonesome I felt when I thought I ought not to talk with you any more."

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"I should like to see you help yourself," said Jerry, in a complacent tone. "You would find it the hardest work you ever did in your life not to talk to me, when I should keep up a regular fire of questions of all sorts and sizes."

Then Nettie laughed outright, but added, after a moment of silence, "But, Jerry, I think the worst of it is about father; and that is true, you know. They might not think so much about the clothes, if it were not for him."

"That has nothing to do with it," said Jerry sturdily. "You are not to blame for your father's drinking liquor. Wouldn't you stop it quick enough if you could? It is only another reason why they ought to be friends to you. Besides, there wouldn't be so much of the stuff for folks to drink, if Lorena Barstow's father did not make it."

"O Jerry! does he?"

"Yes, he does. Owns one of the largest distilleries in the country."

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"Jerry, I think I would rather have my father drink liquor than make it for other folks. At least he doesn't make money out of other people's troubles."

"So would I, enough sight," said Jerry with emphasis. Then he lifted up his voice in answer to Mrs. Job Smith who appeared in the adjoining door. "All right, auntie, we are coming." And he

carefully gathered the chips he had whittled, into his handkerchief, and rose up.

"Going over now, Nettie? I guess auntie thinks it is time to lock up."

Nettie darted within for a few minutes, then appeared, and they crossed the yard together. As they stepped on the lower step of Mrs. Smith's porch, Jerry said: "Remember this is a bargain forever and aye, Nettie; there is to be no backing out, and no caring for what folks say, or for what happens, either now or afterwards. Do you promise?"

"I promise," said Nettie with a smile. And they went into the clean kitchen. Before Jerry went to bed that night he took out of the fly leaf of his Bible the picture of a tall man, and kissed it, as he said aloud: "So you have run away and left your poor little Irish boy, have you? But when you run back again, won't they all be glad to see you, though!"

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CHAPTER X. PLEASURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT.

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THE day came at last when the front room at the Deckers was put in order. I don't suppose you have any idea how pretty that room looked when the last tack was driven, and the last fold in the curtain twitched into place! The rag carpet was very bright. "I put a good many red and yellows in it," said Mrs. Smith, "and now I know why I did it. It is just bright enough for this room. I don't see how you two could have got it down as firm as you have."

"Nettie managed it," said Mrs. Decker, "she is a master hand at putting down carpets."

The furniture was done and in place, and certainly did justice to the manufacturers. There were two "sofas" with backs which were so nicely padded that they were very comfortable things to lean against, and the gay-flowered goods that had looked "so horrid" in a dress that Mrs. Smith could never bring herself to wear it, proved to be just the thing for a sofa-cover. Between the windows was a very marvel of a table. Nobody certainly to look at it, draped in the whitest of muslin, with a pink cambric band around its waist, covered with the muslin, and looking as much like pink ribbon as possible, would have imagined that a square post, about six inches in diameter, and two feet long, with a barrel head securely nailed to each end, was the "skeleton" out of which all this prettiness was evolved. "And mine is as like it as two peas," said Mrs. Smith, "only mine is tied with blue ribbon. Who would have thought such things could be made out of what they had to work with! I declare them two young things beat all!" This time she meant Nettie and Jerry, not the two tables.

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The curtains for which, after much consideration, cheap unbleached muslin had been chosen, when their pinkish lambrequins of the same gay-flowered goods as the sofas, had been cut and scalloped, and put in place, were almost pretty enough to justify the extravagant admiration which they called forth. But the crowning glory was, after all, a chair which occupied the broad space between the window and the door. It was cushioned, back, and sides, and arms; it was dressed in a robe which had belonged to Job Smith's grandmother. It was delightful to look at, and delightful to sit in. Mrs. Decker declared that the first time she sat down in it, she felt more rested than she had in three years.

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Those two barrel chairs were triumphs of art. Jerry had been a week over the first one, planning, trying, failing, trying again; Nettie had seen one once, in the room of a house where she used to go sometimes to carry flowers to a sick woman. She had admired it very much, and the lady herself had told her how it was made, and that her nephew, a boy of sixteen, made it for her. Now, although Jerry was not a boy of sixteen, he had no idea there lived one of that age who could accomplish anything which he could not; so he persevered, and I must say his success was complete. Mrs. Smith believed there never was such a wonderful chair made, before.

Jerry who had been missing for the last half-hour, now appeared, and with long strides reached the nice little mantel and set thereon a lamp, not very large, but new and bright.

"That belongs to the firm," he said, in answer to Nettie's look. "I saw a lamp the other day that I knew would just fit nicely on that mantel, and I couldn't rest until I had tried it."

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Nettie's cheeks were red. She glanced over at her mother to see how she would like this. Nettie did not know whether a poor boy's money ought to be taken to provide a lamp for the new room; she much doubted the propriety of it. "The first money I earn, or father gives me, I can pay him back," she thought, then gave herself up to the enjoyment of her new treasure.

None of them had planned to give a reception that evening, yet I do not know but such an unusual state of things as was found at the Deckers about eight o'clock, is worthy of so dignified a name. Mr. Decker and Norm came in to supper together, and both a little late. Nettie had trembled over what kept them, and her heart gave a great bound of relief and thanksgiving, when they appeared at last, none the worse for liquor. Indeed, she did not think either of them had taken even a glass of beer. They were in good humor; a bit of what Mr. Decker called "extra good luck" had fallen to him in the shape of a piece of work which it was found he could manage better than any other hand in the shop, and for which extra wages were to be paid. And Norm had been told that he was quite a success in a certain line of work. "He kept me after hours to give the new boy a lift," said Norm, good-naturedly; "he said I knew how to do the work, and how to tell others better than the other fellows."

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It was a good time for Mrs. Decker to tell what had been going on in the square room, or rather to hint at it, and tell them when supper was over, they should go in and see. "Nannie and I haven't been folding our hands while you have been working," she said with a complacent air, and a smile for Nettie as warmed that little girl's heart, making her feel it would not be a hard thing to love this new mother a great deal.

So after supper they went in. I suppose you can hardly understand or imagine their surprise; because, you see, you have been used all your life to nicely arranged rooms. For Mr. Decker it stirred old memories. There had been a time when his best room if not so fine as this, was neat and clean, with many comforts in it. "Well, I never," he began, and then his voice choked, and he stopped.

However, Norm could talk, and expressed his surprise and pleasure in eager words. "Where did you get the table, and the gimcracks around that chair? *Is* that a chair, or a sofa, or what? Halloo! here's a new lamp. Let's have it lighted and see how it works. I tell you what it is, Nannie Decker, I guess you're a brick and no mistake." [184]

Then father was coaxed to sit down in the barrel chair, and try its strength and its softness, and guess what it was made of. And the little girls stood at his knee and put in eager words as to the effect that they helped, and altogether, there was such a time as that family had not known before.

Just as Nettie was explaining that it was dark enough to try the lamp, and Norm went for a match, Mrs. Smith made her way across the yard, and who should march solemnly behind her but Job Smith himself!

"Come right along," said Mrs. Decker heartily, as the new lamp threw a silvery light across the room. "Come and try the new sofa. Here, Mr. Smith, is a chair for you, if that is too low. Decker, he's got the seat of honor; Nettie said her pa must have the first chance in it."

The name "Nettie" seemed to slip naturally from Mrs. Decker's tongue; she had heard Jerry use it so often during the past few days, that it was beginning to seem like the proper name of that young woman. Mr. Smith sat down, slowly, solemnly, in much doubt what to do or say next. [185]

"Well, Neighbor Decker, these young folks of ours are busy people, ain't they, and seem to be getting the upper hand of us?" Then he laughed, a slow, pleasant laugh. Mrs. Smith laughed a round, admiring satisfied laugh; she was *very* proud of Job for saying that. Then they fell into conversation, the two men, about the signs of the times as regarded business, and prices, and various interests. Mr. Decker was a good talker, and here lay some of his temptations; there was always somebody in the saloons to talk with; there was never anybody in his home. Jerry came, presently, to admire the room and the lamp, and to have a little aside talk with Nettie. Norm was trying one of the lounges near them.

"How did you make this thing?" he asked Jerry, and Jerry explained, and Norm listened and asked a question now and then, until presently he said, "I know a thing that would improve it; the next time you make one, try it and see." [186]

"What is that?" asked Jerry.

"Why, look here, in this corner where you put the crossbar, if you should take a narrower piece, so, and fit it in here so," and the sofa was unceremoniously turned upside down and inside out, and planned over, Jerry in his turn becoming listener until at last he said: "I understand; I mean to fix this one, some day."

Nettie nodded, her eyes bright; it was not about the sofa that they shone; it gave her such intense pleasure as perhaps you cannot understand, to see her father sitting beside Mr. Smith, talking eagerly, and her mother and Mrs. Smith having a good time together, and Jerry and Norm interested in each other. "It is exactly like other folks!" she said to Jerry, later, "and I don't believe either father or Norm will go down street to-night." And they didn't.

It was a very happy girl who went over to Mrs. Smith's woodhouse chamber to sleep that night. She sang softly, while she was getting ready for rest; and as often as she looked out of the window towards the square room in the next house, she smiled. It looked so much better than she had ever hoped to make it; and father and Norm had seemed so pleased, and they had all spent such a pleasant evening. [187]

Alas for Nettie! All the next day her happiness lasted. She sang over her work; she charmed the little girls with stories. She made an apple pudding for dinner, she baked some choice potatoes for supper; but they were not eaten, at least only by the little girls. They waited until seven o'clock, and half-past seven, and eight o'clock for the father and brother who did not come. Jerry, who stopped at the door and learned of the anxiety, slipped away to try to find out what kept them; but he came back in a little while with a grave face and shook his head. Both had left their shops at the usual time; nobody knew what had become of them. Jerry could guess, so also could Mrs. Decker. The poor woman was too used to it to be very much astonished; but Nettie was overwhelmed. She ate no supper; she did not sing at all over the dishwashing. She watched every step on the street, and turned pale at the sound of passing voices. She put the little girls to bed, and cried over their gay chatter. She coaxed her sad-faced mother to go to bed at last, and drew a long sigh of relief when she went into her bedroom and shut the door. It had been so dreadful to hear her say: "I told you so; I knew just how it would be. They will both come staggering home. It's of no use." [188]

Nettie did not believe it. She believed that work somewhere was holding them; people often had extra work to do, or were sent on errands, but she went at last over to the woodhouse

chamber; it would not do to keep the Smiths up longer. Instead of making ready for bed, she kneeled down before the little window which gave her a view of the next house, and watched and waited. They came at last; father and son; not together. Norm came first, and stumbled, and shuffled, and growled; his voice was thick, and the few words she could catch had no connection or sense. He had too surely been drinking. But he was not so far gone as the father. *He* had to be helped along the street by some of his companions; he could not hold himself upright while they opened the door. And when the gentle wind blew it shut again, he swore a succession of oaths which made Nettie shudder and bury her face in her hands. But she did not cry. It was the first time in her young life that her heart was too heavy for tears. She drew great deep sighs as she went about, at last, preparing for bed; she wished that the tears would come, for the choking feeling might be relieved by them; but the tears seemed dried. She tossed about on her neat little bed, in a sorrow very unlike childhood. Poor, disappointed Nettie!

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The sun shone brightly the next morning, but there was no brightness in the little girl's heart. She was early down stairs, and stole away to the next house without seeing anybody. Mrs. Decker was up, with a face as wan as Nettie's.

"Well," she said, in a hopeless tone, "it's all over. Did you hear them come in last night? Both of 'em. If it had been one at a time, we could have stood it better; but both of 'em! I *did* have a little hope, as sure as you live. Your pa seemed so different by spells, and Norm, he seemed to like you, and to stay at home more, and I kind of chirked up and thought may be, after all, good times was coming to me; but it's all of no use; I've give up; and it seems to me it would have been easier to have stayed down, than to have crept up, to tumble back.

"Not that I'm blaming you, child," she said, "you did your best, and you did wonders; and I think sometimes, maybe if I had made such a brave shift as that in the beginning, things wouldn't have got where they have. But I didn't, and it's too late now."

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Not a word had Nettie to say. It was a sad breakfast-time. Mr. Decker shambled down late, and had barely time to swallow his coffee very hot, and take a piece of bread in his hand, for the seven o'clock bells were ringing, and punctuality was something that was insisted on by his foreman. Norm came later, and ate very little breakfast, and looked miserable enough to be sent back to bed again. Nettie only saw him through a crack in the door; she stayed out in the little back yard, pretending to put it in order. He made his stay very short, and went away without a word to mother or sister; and the heavy burden of life went on. Mrs. Decker prepared to do the big ironing which yesterday she had been glad over, because it would give them a chance to have an extra comfort added to the table; but which to-day seemed of very little importance.

Nettie washed the dishes, and wished she was at Auntie Marshall's, and tried to plan a way for getting there. What was the use of staying here? Hadn't she tried her very best and failed? didn't the mother say it was harder for her than though they hadn't tried at all?

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In the course of the morning, Mrs. Smith sent in a basket of corn. Sarah Jane brought it. "Some folks on a farm that mother ironed for, when they lived in town, sent her a great basket full; heaps more than we can use, and mother said it would be just the thing for your men folks; they always like corn, you know."

Mrs. Decker took the basket without a smile on her face. "Your mother is a very kind woman," she said, "the kindest one I ever knew; in fact, I haven't known many kind people, and that's the truth. She has done all she could to help us, but I don't know as we can be helped; it seems as though some people couldn't."

Sarah Jane went back and told her mother that Mrs. Decker seemed dreadful downhearted and discouraged; and Mrs. Smith replied with a sigh that she didn't know as she wondered at it; poor thing! Nettie made the dinner as nice as she could. Mr. Decker ate with a relish, and said the corn was good, and he had sometimes thought that the bit of ground back of the house might be made to raise corn; and Nettie brightened a little, and looked over at Norm and was just going to say, "Let's have a garden next summer," when he spoiled it by declaring that he wouldn't slave in a garden for anybody. It was hard enough to work ten hours a day. Then his father told him that he guessed he did not hurt himself with work; and he retorted that he guessed they neither of them would die with over-work; and his father told him to hold his tongue. In short, nothing was plainer than that these two were ashamed of themselves, and of each other, and were much more irritable than they had been for several days.

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The afternoon work was all done, and Nettie had just hung up her apron, and wondered whether she should offer to iron for awhile, or run away to the woodhouse chamber, and write to Auntie Marshall, when Jerry appeared in the door. She had not seen him since the sorrow of the night before had come upon them; Nettie thought he avoided coming in, because he too was discouraged. Her face flushed when she heard his step, and she wished something would happen so that she need not turn around to him. She felt so ashamed of her own people, and of his efforts to help them. His voice, however, sounded just as usual.

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"Through, Nettie? Then come out on the back step; I want to talk with you."

"There is no use in talking," she said, sadly. But she followed him out, and sat down listlessly on the broad low step, which the jog in Mr. Smith's house shaded from the afternoon sun.

Jerry took no notice of the words if indeed he heard them.

"I heard some news this morning," he began. "Two of the older boys at the corner, that one in Peck's store, you know, and the one next door told me that a lot of fellows were going off to-night on what he called a lark. They have hired a boat, and are going to row across to Duck Island, and

catch some fish and have a supper in that mean little hole which is kept on the island; they mean to make an all-night of it. I don't know what is to be done next; play cards, I suppose; they do, whenever they get together, and lots of drinking. It is a dreadful place. Well, I heard, by a kind of accident, that they thought of asking Norm to join 'em. At first they said they wouldn't, because he wouldn't be likely to have any money to help pay the bills; but then they remembered that he was a good rower, and thought they would get his share out of him in that way; and I say, Nettie, let's spoil their plans for them."

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"How?" asked Nettie, drearily.

Jerry talked on eagerly. "I have a plan; I rented a boat for this afternoon, and was going to ask Mrs. Decker to let me take you and the chicks for a ride, and I meant to catch some fish for our supper; but this will be better. I propose to invite Norm and two fellows that he goes with some, to go out with me, fishing. I have a splendid fishing rig, you know, and I'll lend it to them, and help them to have a good time, and then if you will plan a kind of treat when we get back—coffee, you know, and fish, and bread and butter, we could have a picnic of our own and as much fun as they would get with that set on the island. I believe Norm would go; he is just after a good time, you see, and if he gets it in this way, he will like it as well, maybe better, than though he spent the night at it and got the worst of his bargain. Anyhow, it is worth trying; if we can save him from this night's work it will be worth a good deal. Don't you think so?"

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Instead of the hearty, "yes, indeed," which he expected, Nettie said not a word; and when he turned and looked at her, to learn what was the matter, her face was red and the tears were gathering in her eyes.

"Don't you know what has happened?" she asked at last. "I thought I heard you in your room last night when he came home."

"Yes," said Jerry, speaking gravely, "I was up. What of it?"

"What of it? O Jerry!" and here the tears which had been choking poor Nettie all day had it their own way for a few minutes. She had not meant to cry; but she felt at once how quickly the tears relieved the lump in her throat.

"I don't mean that, exactly," Jerry said, after waiting a minute for the sobs to grow less deep, "of course it was a great trouble, and I have been so sorry for Mrs. Decker all day that I wanted to stay away, because I could not think of the right thing to say; but it's only another reason why we should work and plan in all ways to get ahead of them and save Norm."

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"O Jerry! don't you think it is too late?"

"Too late! What in the world can you mean? Has anything happened to-day that I haven't heard of? Where is Norm? Has he gone away anywhere?"

"O, no," said Nettie, "he has gone to work; but I mean—I meant—doesn't it all seem to you of no use at all? After we worked so hard and got everything nice, and he seemed so pleased, and stayed at home all the evening and talked with us, and then the very next night to come home like that!"

Jerry stared in blank astonishment.

"I don't believe I understand," he said at last. "You did not think that Norm was going to reform the very minute you did anything pleasant for him, did you?"

"N-no," said Nettie slowly, "I don't suppose I did; but it all seemed so dreadful! I expected something, I hardly know what, and I could not help feeling disappointed and miserable." Nettie's face was growing red; she began to suspect she might be a very foolish girl.

"Why, that is queer," said Jerry. "Now I am not disappointed a bit. I am sorry, of course, but I expected just that thing. Why, Nettie, they go after men sometimes for months and years before they get real hold and are sure of them. There is a lawyer in New York that father says kept three men busy for five years trying to save him. They didn't succeed, either, but they got him to go to the One who could save him. He is a grand man now. Suppose they had given up during those five years!"

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"Do you think it may take five years to get hold of Norm?" There were tears in Nettie's eyes, but there was a little suggestion of a smile on her face, and she waited eagerly for Jerry's answer.

"I'm sure I hope not," he said, "but if it does, we are not to give him up at the end of five years; nor *before* five years, that is certain."

Nettie wiped the tears away, and smiled outright; then sat still in deep thought for several minutes. Then she arose, decision and energy on her face.

"Thank you, Jerry; I wish you had come in this morning. I have been a goose, I guess, and I almost spoiled what we tried to do. We'll get up a nice supper if you can get Norm and the others to come. I don't believe they will, but we can try. We have coffee enough to make a nice pot of it, and Mrs. Smith sent us some milk out of that pail from the country that is almost cream. I will make some baked potato balls, they are beautiful with fish; all brown, you know; and I was going to make a johnny-cake if I could get up interest enough in it. I'm interested now, and I shouldn't wonder if I staid so," and she blushed and laughed.

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"You see," said Jerry, "you must not expect things to be done in a minute. Why, even God doesn't do things quickly, when he could, as well as not. And he doesn't get tired of people, either; and that I think is queer. Have you ever thought that if you were God, you would wipe most all the people out of this world in a second, and make some new ones who could behave

better?"

"Why, no," said Nettie, wonderment and bewilderment struggling together in her face, this strange thought sounded almost wicked to her. "Well, I do," said Jerry sturdily; "I have often thought of it; I believe almost any *man* would get out of patience with this old world, full of rum saloons, and gambling saloons and tobacco. I think it is such a good thing that men don't have the management of it.

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"I'll tell you what it is, Nettie, we shall have a pretty busy afternoon if we carry out our plans, won't we? Suppose you go and talk the thing up with your mother, and I will go and see what Norm says. Or, hold on, suppose we go together and call on him; I'll ask him to go fishing, and you ask him to bring his friends home to eat the fish. How would that do?"

It was finally agreed that that would do beautifully, and Jerry went to see whether his long flat stick fitted, while Nettie ran to her mother. Mrs. Decker was ironing, her worn face looking older and more worn, Nettie thought, than she had ever seen it before. Poor mother! Why had not she helped her to bear her heavy burden, instead of almost sulking over failure?

"O, mother," she began, "Jerry has a plan, and we want to know what you think of it; he has heard of things that are to be done this evening." And she hurried through the story of the intended frolic on the island, and the fishing party that was, if possible, to be pushed in ahead. Mrs. Decker listened in silence, and at first with an uninterested face; presently, when she took in the largeness of the plan, she stayed her iron long enough to look up and say:

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"What's the use, child? I thought you and Jerry had given up."

"O, mother," and the cheeks were rosy red now, "I'm ashamed that I felt so discouraged; Jerry isn't at all; and he thinks it is the strangest thing that I should have been! He says they have to work for years, sometimes, to get hold of people. He knew a man that they kept working after for five years, and now he is a grand man. He says we must hold on to Norm if it is five years, though I don't believe it will be. I'm going to begin over again, mother, and not get discouraged at anything. It is true, as Jerry says, that we can't expect Norm to reform all in a minute. He says the boys that Norm goes with the most are not bad fellows, only they haven't any homes, and they keep getting into mischief, because they have nowhere to go to have any pleasant times. Don't you think Norm would like it to have them asked home with him to supper, and show them how to have a real good time? Jerry says the two boys that he means board at a horrid place, where they have old bread and weak tea for supper, and where people are smoking and drinking in the back end of the room while they are eating. I am sure I don't know as it is any wonder that they go to the saloons sometimes."

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Mrs. Decker still held her iron poised in air, on her face a look that was worth studying. "Norm hasn't ever had a decent place to ask anybody to, nor a decent time of any kind since he was old enough to care much about it," she said slowly. "I thought I had done about my best, but it may be I'll find myself mistaken. Well, child, let's try it, for mercy's sake, or anything else that that boy thinks of. You and him together are the only ones that's done any thinking for Norm in years; and if I don't go half-way and more too for anybody that wants to do anything, it will be a wonder."

In a very few minutes Nettie was in her neat street dress, and the two were walking down the shady side of the main street, toward Norm's shop. They passed Lorena Barstow, and though Jerry, without thinking, took off his cap to her, she tossed her head and looked the other way.

Jerry laughed. "I did not know she was so nearsighted as all that, did you?" he asked, and then continued the sentence which the sight of her had interrupted. Nettie could not laugh; she was sore over the thought that she had so spoiled Jerry's life for him that his old acquaintances would not bow to him on the street.

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Norm was at work, and worked with energy; they stood and looked at him through the window for a few minutes. "He works fast," said Jerry, "and he works as though he would rather do it than not; Mr. Smith says there isn't a lazy streak in him. He ought to make a smart man, Nettie; and I shouldn't wonder if he would."

Then they went in. To say that Norm was astonished at sight of them, would be to tell only half the story. He stood in doubt what to say, but Jerry was equal to the occasion; nothing could have been more matter-of-course than the way in which he told about his plans for going fishing, declaring that the afternoon was prime for such work, and that he was tired of going alone. "Wouldn't Norm and his two friends go too?" Now a ride in a boat was something that Norm rarely had. In the first place, boats cost money, and in the second place they took time. To be sure, after working hours, there was time enough for rowing, but boats were sure to be scarce then, even if money had been plenty.

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Norm wiped his face with a corner of his work-apron, and admitted that he would like to go, first-rate, but did not know as he could get away. They were not over busy it was true, neither was the foreman troubled with good nature; he would be next to certain to say no, if Norm asked to be let off at five o'clock.

"Let's try him," said Jerry, and he walked boldly to the other side of the room where the foreman stood.

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CHAPTER XI. A COMPLETE SUCCESS.

THIS man was a friend of Jerry's; it was only two weeks ago that he had done him a good turn, in finding and bringing home his stray cow. He was perfectly good-natured, and found no fault at all with Norm's leaving the shop at five; in fact he said he was glad to have the boy leave in such good company.

"Would the others go?" Nettie questioned eagerly, and Norm, laughing, said he reckoned they would go quick enough if they got a chance; invitations to take boat rides were not so plenty that they could afford to lose them.

Then was time for Nettie's great surprise.

"And, Norm, will you bring them all home to supper with you? I'll have everything ready to cook the fish in a hurry as soon as you get into the house, and you can visit in the new room until they are ready."

Now indeed, I wish you could have seen Norm! It never happened to him before to have a chance to invite anybody home to supper with him. He looked at Nettie in silent bewilderment for a minute; he even rubbed his eyes as though possibly he might be dreaming; but she looked so real and so trim, and so sure of herself standing there quietly waiting his answer, that at last he stammered out:

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"What do you mean, Nannie? You aren't in dead earnest?"

"Why, of course," said Nettie, deciding in a flash upon her plan of action; she would do as Jerry had, and take all this as a matter of course. "I'm going to make a lovely johnny-cake for supper, and some new-fashioned potatoes, and we have cream for the coffee. You shall have an elegant supper; only be sure you catch lots of fish."

It was all arranged at last to their satisfaction, and the two conspirators turned away to get ready for their part of the business.

"Norm liked it," said Jerry. "Couldn't you see by his face that he did? I believe we can get hold of him after awhile, by doing things of this kind; things that make him remember he has a home, and pleasant times, like other boys."

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If Jerry had waited fifteen minutes he might have been surer of that even than he was. Norm's second invitation followed hard on the first; and Norm, who felt a little sore over certain meannesses of the night before, and who knew his foreman was within hearing and would be sure to object to this young fellow who had come to ask him to go to the island, answered loftily: "Can't do it; I've promised to go out fishing with a party; and besides, our folks are going to have company to tea."

Company to tea! He almost laughed when he said it. How very strange the sentence sounded.

"O, indeed," said Jim Noxen from the saloon. "Seems to me you are getting big."

"It sounds like it," said Norman. "I wonder if I am?" But this he said to himself; for answer to the remark, he only laughed.

"If I had a chance to keep company with a young fellow like Jerry, and a trim little woman like that sister of yours, I guess I wouldn't often be found with the other set."

This the foreman said, with a significant nod of his head toward the young fellow who represented the other set. And this, too, had its influence.

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Jerry and Nettie had a glimpse of one of Norm's friends as they passed his shop on their homeward way.

"He has a good face," said Nettie. "Poor fellow! Hasn't he any home at all? Don't you wish we could get hold of him so close that he would help us? He looks as though he might."

Then she stepped into the boat and floated idly around, while Jerry ran for the oars; and while she floated, she thought and planned. There was a great deal to be done, both then and afterwards.

"I wish you could go with us and catch a fish," said Jerry, as he saw how she enjoyed the water, "but maybe it wouldn't be just the thing."

"I know it wouldn't," said Nettie; "besides, who would make the johnny-cake, and the potato balls? There is a great deal to be done to make things match, when you are catching fish."

The fishing party was a complete success. Jerry said afterwards that the very fish acted as though they were in the secret and were bound to help. He had never seen them bite so readily. By seven o'clock, the boat was headed homeward, with more fish than even four hungry boys could possibly eat.

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"Now for supper," said Norm, who with secret delight had thought constantly of the surprise in store for Alf and Rick. "Boys, I'm going to take you home with me and show you what a prime cook my little sister is. We'll have these fish sizzling in a pan quicker than you have any notion of; and she knows how to sizzle them just right; doesn't she, Jerry?"

But Jerry was spared the trouble of a reply, for Alf with incredulous stare said, "You're gassing now."

"No, I'm not gassing. You can come home with me, honor bright, and you shall have such a supper as would make old Ma'am Turner wild."

Old Ma'am Turner, poor soul, was the woman who kept the wretched boarding house where these homeless boys boarded, and she really did know how to make things taste a little worse, probably, than any one you know of.

"What'll your mother say to your bringing folks home to supper?" questioned Rick, looking as incredulous as his friend. "She'll give us a hint of broomstick, I reckon, if we try it."

"Well," said Norm, unconcernedly, dipping the oar into the water, "try it and see, if you are a mind to, that's all I've got to say. I ain't going to force you to eat fish; but I promise you a first-class meal of them if you choose to come."

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"Oh! we'll go," said Alf, with a giggle; "if we are broomed out the next second, we'll try it, just to see what will come of it. Things is queerer in this world than folks think, often; now I didn't believe a word of it, when you said we was going out in a boat to-night; I thought it was some of your nonsense; and here the little fellow has treated us prime."

The "little fellow" was Jerry, who smiled and nodded in honor of his compliment, but said nothing; he resolved to let Norm do the honors alone.

They went with long strides to the Decker home, Jerry waiting to fasten the boat and pay his bill. Each boy carried a fine string of fish of his own catching; and appeared at the back door just as Nettie came out to look.

"O, what beauties!" she said, gleefully; "and such a nice lot of them! I'm all ready and waiting. You go in, Norm, with your friends, and we'll have them cooking as soon as we can."

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"Not much," said Norm, coming around to the board which she had evidently gotten ready for cleaning the fish, and diving his hand in his pocket in search of his jack-knife. "Let's fall to, boys, and clean these fellows. I know how, and I think likely you do, and they'll taste the better, like enough."

"Just so," said Rick Walker, who owned the face that Nettie had decided was a good one. "I'm agreeable; I know how to clean fish as well as the next one; used to do it for mother, when I was a little shaver."

Did the sentence end in a sigh, or did Nettie imagine it? All three went to work with strong skilful hands, and Nettie hopped back and forth bringing fresh water, and fresh plates, and feeling in her secret heart very grateful to the boys for doing this, which she had dreaded.

They were all done in a very short time, and each boy in turn had washed his hands in the basin which shone, and then, the shining, or the smoothness and beautiful cleanness of the great brown towel, or something, prompted Rick to take fresh water and dip his brown face into it, and toss the water about like a great Newfoundland dog.

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"I declare, that feels good!" he said. "Try it, Alf." And Alf tried it.

Then Norm led the way to the new room. It would have done Nettie's heart good if she had known how many times he had thought of that room during the last hour. He knew it would be a surprise to the boys. They had never seen anything but the Decker kitchen, and not much of that, standing at the door to wait a minute for Norm, but the few glimpses they had had of it, had not led them to suppose that there was any such place in the house as this in which he was now going to usher them. Their surprise was equal to the occasion. They stopped in the doorway, and looked around upon the prettiness, the bright carpet, the delicate curtains, the gay chairs! nothing like this was to be found at Ma'am Turner's, nor in any other room with which they were familiar.

"Whew!" said Rick, closing the word with a shrill whistle; "I think as much!" said Alf. "Who'd have dreamed it. I say, Norm, you're a sly one; why didn't you ever let on that you had this kind of thing?"

How they entertained one another during that next hour, Nettie did not know. Eyes and brain were occupied in the kitchen. Jerry came, presently, but reported that they were getting on all right in the front room, and he believed he could do better service in the kitchen; so he set the table with a delicate regard for nicety which Nettie had been taught at Auntie Marshall's, and which she knew he had not learned at Mrs. Job Smith's. Sarah Jane was rigidly clean, but never what Nettie called "nice."

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"We'll take the table in the front room," decreed Nettie as she surveyed it thoughtfully for a few minutes. "It is very warm out here, and they will like it better to be quite alone; we can put all the dishes on, with the leaves down, and set them in their places in a twinkling, after we have lifted it in there. Won't that be the way, mother?"

"Land!" said Mrs. Decker, withdrawing her head from the oven, whither it had gone to see after the new-fashioned potato balls, "I should think they could eat out here; you may depend they never saw so clean a kitchen at old Ma'am Turner's. But it is hot here, and no mistake; and I should not know what to do with myself while they was eating. Please yourself, child, and then I'll be pleased. I'm going to save one of these potatoes for your pa; I never see anything in my life look prettier than they do."

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Mrs. Decker's tones told much plainer than her words, that she liked Nettie's idea of putting the table in the front room for Norm's company. She would not have owned it, but her mother-heart was glad over a "fuss" being made for her Norm.

So the table went in; Jerry at one end, and Nettie at the other. They hushed a loud laugh by their entrance, but Jerry went immediately over to Rick Walker to show a new-fashioned knife, and Nettie's fingers flew over the table, so by the time the knife had been exhausted, she was ready to vanish.

Confess now that you would like to have had a seat at that table when it was ready. A platter of smoking fish, done to the nicest brown, without drying or burning; a bowl of lovely little brown balls, each of them about the size of an egg, a plate of very light and puffy-looking Johnny-cake, and to crown all, coffee that filled the room with such an aroma as Ma'am Turner perhaps dreamed of, but never certainly in these days smelled. Mrs. Job Smith at the last minute had sent in a pat of genuine country butter, and Sate had flown to the grocery for a piece of ice with which to keep it in countenance. [214]

Jerry set the chairs, and Nettie poured the coffee, and creamed and sugared it, and then slipped away.

She knew by the looks on the faces of the guests, that they were astonished beyond words, and she knew that Norm was both astonished and pleased. There was another supper being made ready in the kitchen. Mrs. Decker had herself tugged in the box which had been lately set up as a washbench, and spread the largest towel over it, and was serving three lovely fish, and a bowl of potato balls for "Decker" and herself.

"I guess I'm going to have company too," she said to Nettie, her face beaming. "Your pa has gone to wash up, and I thought seeing there was only two chairs, and two plates left, you wouldn't mind having him and me sit down together, for a meal, first."

"Yes, I do mind," said Nettie; "I think it is a lovely plan; I'm so glad you thought of it, and Jerry and I will keep watch that they have everything in the other room, while you eat." If you are wondering in your hearts where those important beings, Sate and Susie, were at this moment, I should have told you before, that Sarah Jane had a brilliant thought, but an hour before, and carried them out to tea. So all the Decker family were visiting that evening, save Nettie, and I think perhaps she was the happiest among them all. Every time she heard a burst of fresh fun from the front room, she laughed, too; it was so nice to think that Norm was having a good time in his own home, and nothing to worry over. [215]

It is almost a pity that, for her encouragement, she could not have heard some of the conversation in that room.

"I say, Norm," said his friend Alf, his tones muffled by reason of a large piece of johnny-cake, "what an awful sly fellow you are! You never let on that you had these kind of doings in your house. Who'd have thought that you had a stunning room like this for folks, and potatoes done up in brown satin, to eat, and coffee such as they get up at the hotels! It beats all creation!"

"That's so," said Rick, taking in a quarter of a fish at one mouthful, "I never dreamed of such a thing; what beats me, is, why a fellow who has such nice doings at home, wants to loaf around, and spend evenings at Beck's, or at Steen's. Hang me if I don't think the contrast a little too great. 'Pears to me if I had this kind of thing, I should like to enjoy it oftener than Norm seems to." [216]

Norman smiled loftily on them. Do you think he was going to own that "this kind of thing" had never been enjoyed in his home before, during all the years of his recollection? Not he; he only said that folks liked a change once in awhile, of course, and he only laughed when Rick and Alf both declared that if they knew themselves, and they thought they did, they would be content never to change back from this kind of thing to Ma'am Turner's supper table so long as they lived.

How those boys did eat! Nettie owned to herself that she was astonished; and privately rejoiced that she had made four johnny-cakes instead of three, though it had seemed almost extravagant until she remembered that it would warm up nicely for breakfast. Not a crumb would there be for breakfast. She had one regret and she told it to Jerry as she went out to him on the back stoop, having poured the third cup of coffee around, for the three in the front room. [217]

"Jerry, I am just afraid there won't be a speck of johnny-cake left for you to taste. Those boys do eat so!"

"Never mind," laughed Jerry. "We will eat the tail of a fish, if any of them have a tail left, and rejoice over our success; this thing is going to work, I believe, if we can keep it going."

"That's the trouble," said Nettie, an anxious look in her eyes. "How can we? Fish won't do every time; and there are no other things that you can catch. Besides, even this has cost a great deal. I paid eight cents for lard to fry the fish, and the butter and milk and things would have cost as much as fifteen cents certainly. Mrs. Smith furnished them this time, but of course such things won't happen again."

"A great many things happen," said Jerry, wisely. "More than you can calculate on. 'Never cross a bridge until you come to it, my boy.' Didn't I tell you that was what my father was always saying to me? I have found it a good plan, too, to follow his advice. Many a time I've worried over troubles that never came. Look here, don't you believe that if we are to do this thing and good is to come from it, we shall be able to manage it somehow?" [218]

"Why, y-e-s," said Nettie, slowly, as though she were waiting to see whether her faith could climb so high; "I suppose that is so."

"Well, if good isn't going to come of it, do we want to do it?"

"Of course not."

"All right, then," with a little laugh. "What are we talking about?" And Nettie laughed, and ran in to give her father his last cup of coffee, and to hear him say that he hadn't had so good a meal in six years.

It was a curious fact that Susie and Sate were the chief movers in the next thing that these young Fishers did to interest the particular fish whom they were after.

It began the next Sabbath morning in Sabbath-school. There, the little girls heard with deep interest that on the following Sabbath there was to be a service especially for the children. A special feature of the day was to be the decoration of the church with flowers, which the children were to bring on the previous Saturday. Susie and Sate promised with the rest, that they would bring flowers. Promised in the confident expectation of childhood that some way they could join the others and do as they did; though both little girls knew that not a flower grew in or about them. During the early part of the week they forgot it, but on Saturday morning they stood in the little front yard and saw a sight which recalled all the delights of the coming Sunday in which they seemed to be having no share. The little girls from the Orphanage on the hill were bringing their treasures. Even fat little Karl who was only five, had a potted plant in full bloom, which he was proudly carrying. Little Dutch Maggie, in her queer long apron, carried a plant with lovely satiny leaves which were prettier than any bloom, and behind her was Robert the Scotch gardener with his arms full; then young Rob Severn, Miss Wheeler's nephew, had a lovely fuchsia just aglow with blossoms, and Miss Wheeler herself, who was the matron at the Orphanage, was carrying a choice plant. All these the hungry eyes of Sate and Susie took in, as the procession passed the house, then they ran wailing to Nettie who had already become the long suffering person to whom they must pour out their woes.

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"We promised, we did," explained Sate, her earnest eyes fixed on Nettie, while her arms clasped that young lady just as she was in the act of throwing out her dishwater. "We did promise, and they will 'spect them, and they won't be there."

"Well, but, darling, what made you promise, when you knew we had no flowers? Mrs. Smith would give you some in a minute if hers were in bloom. Why didn't they wait a little later, I wonder? Then Mrs. Smith could have given us such lovely china-asters."

"We must have some to-morrow," said the emphatic Susie, and she fastened her black eyes on Nettie in a way that said: "Now you understand what must be, I hope you will at once set about bringing it to pass."

Nettie could not help laughing. "If you were a fairy queen," she said, "and could wave your wand and say, 'Flowers, bloom,' and they would obey you, we should certainly have some; as it is, I don't quite see how they are to be had. We have no friends to ask."

"I can't help it," said Susie, positively, "we *promised* to bring some, and of course we must. You said, Nettie Decker, that we must always keep our promises."

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"Now, Miss Nettie Decker, you are condemned!" said Jerry, with grave face but laughing eyes; "something must evidently be done about this business. Dandelions are gone, except the whiteheads, and they would blow away before they got themselves settled in church, I am afraid. Hold on, I have a thought, just a splendid one if can manage it; wait a bit, Susie, and we will see what we can do."

Susie, who was beginning to have full faith in this wise friend of theirs, told Sate in confidence that they were going to have some flowers to take to church, as well as the rest of them; she did not know what Jerry was going to make them out of, but she knew he would *make* some.

After that, Jerry was not seen again for several hours. In fact it was just as the dinner dishes were washed, that he appeared with a triumphant face. "Have you made some?" asked Sate, springing up from her dolly and going toward him expectantly.

"Made some what, Curly?"

"Flowers," said Sate, gravely. "Susie said she knew you would."

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Jerry laughed. "Susie has boundless faith in impossibilities," he said. "No, I haven't made the flowers, but I have the boat. That old thing that leaked so, you know, Nettie; well, I've put it in prime order, and got permission to use it, and if you and the chicks will come, we will sail away to where they make flowers, and pick all we want; unless some wicked fairy has whispered my bright thought to somebody else, and I don't believe it, for I have seen no one out on the pond to-day."

Then Sate, her eyes very large, went in search of Susie to tell her that this wonderful boy had come to take them where flowers were made, and to let them gather for themselves.

"I suppose it is heaven," said Sate, gravely, "because the real truly flowers, you know, God makes, and he has his things all up in heaven to work with, I guess."

"What a little goosie you are!" said Susie, curling her wise lip; "as if Jerry Mack could take us to heaven!"

However, she went at once to see about it, and was almost as much astonished to think that they were really going out in a boat, as she would have been if they were going to heaven. "I s'pose it's safe?" said Mrs. Decker doubtfully, watching the light in the little girls' eyes, and remembering how few pleasures had been offered them.

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"O, yes'm," said Jerry, "as safe as the road. I could row a boat, ma'am, very well indeed, father

said, when I was six years old; and you couldn't coax that clumsy old thing to tip over, if you wanted it to; and if it should, the water isn't up to my waist anywhere in the pond."

Mrs. Decker laughed, and said it sounded safe enough; and went back to her ironing, and the four happy people sailed away. If not to where the pond lilies were made, at least to where they grew in all their wild sweet beauty.

"How very strange," said Nettie, as they leaned over the great rude, flat-bottomed boat and pulled the beauties in; "how very strange that no one has gathered these for to-morrow. Why, nothing could be more lovely!"

"Well," said Jerry, "only a few people row this way, because it isn't the pleasantest part of the pond, you know, for rowing; and I guess no one has remembered that the lilies were out; there don't many people, only fishermen, go out on this pond, you know, because the boats are so ugly; and fishermen don't care for flowers, I guess. Anyhow, they haven't been here, for the buds are all on hand, just as I thought they would be by this time, when I was here on Tuesday. But I never thought of the church; so you see how little thinking is done."

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Well, they gathered great loads of the beauties, and rowed home in triumph, and put the lilies in a tub of water, and sat down to consider how best to arrange them. It was curious that Mrs. Job Smith should have been the next one with an idea.

"I should think," she said, standing in the doorway of her kitchen, her hands on her sides, "I should think a great big salver of them laid around in their own leaves, would be the prettiest thing in the world."

"So it would," said Nettie, "the very thing, if we only had the salver."

"Well, I've got that. Mrs. Sims, she gave me an old battered and bruised one, when they were moving. It is big enough to put all the cups and saucers on in town, almost; when I lugged it home, Job, he wanted to know what on *earth* I wanted of that, and says I, I don't know, but she give it to me, and most everything in this world comes good, if you keep it long enough. Sarah Ann, you run up to the corner in the back garret and get that thing, and see what they'll make of it."

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So Sarah Ann ran.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED HELPER.

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PERHAPS you do not see how the pond lilies, lovely as they were, arranged on that salver, helped Jerry and Nettie in their plans for Norm and his friends. But there is another part to that story.

After the salver had been filled with sand, and covered with moss, and soaked until it would absorb no more water, and the lilies had been laid in so thickly that they looked like a great white bank of bloom, the whole was lovely, as I said, but heavy. The walk to the church was long, and Nettie, thinking of it, surveyed her finished work with a grave face. How was it ever to be gotten to the church? She tried to lift one end of it, and shook her head. There was no hope that she could even *help* carry it for so long a distance. Mrs. Smith saw the trouble in her eyes, and guessed at its cause. "It is an awful heavy thing, that's a fact," she said, "hefting" it in her strong arms; "I don't know how you are going to manage it; Sarah Jane would help in a minute, but there's her back; she ain't got no back to speak of, Sarah Jane hasn't. And there's Job, he ain't at home; he went this morning before it was light, away over the other side of the clip hill with a load, and the last words he says to me was: 'Don't you be scairt if I don't get round very early; them roads over there is dreadful heavy, and I shall have to rest the team in the heat of the day,' and like enough he won't get back till nigh ten o'clock."

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Certainly no help could be expected from the Smith family. "We shall have to take some of the sand out," said Nettie, surveying the mound regretfully; "I'm real sorry; it does look so pretty heaped up! but Jerry can never carry it away down there alone."

Then came Jerry's bright idea. "I'll get Norman to help me."

"Norm!" said Nettie, stopping astonished in the very act of picking out some of the lilies. It had not once occurred to her that Norm could be asked to go to the church on an errand. She couldn't have told why, but Norm and the church seemed too far apart to have anything in common.

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"Yes," said Jerry, positively. "Why not? I know he'll help; and he and I can carry it like a daisy. Don't take out one of them, Nettie. I know you will spoil it if you touch it again; it is just perfect. Halloo, Norm, come this way."

Sure enough at that moment Norm appeared from the attic where he slept; he had washed his face and combed his hair, and made himself as decent looking as he could, and was starting for somewhere; and Nettie remembered with a sinking heart that it was Saturday night; Norm's worst night except Sunday.

He stopped at Jerry's call, and stood waiting.

"You are just the individual I wanted to see at this moment," said Jerry with a confident air. "This meadow here has got to be dug up and carried bodily down to the church; and it is as heavy as though its roots were struck deep in the soil. Will you shoulder an end with me?"

"To the church!" repeated Norm with an incredulous stare. "What do they want of that thing at the church?"

"They are our flowers," said Sate with a positive little nod of her head. "We promised to bring them, and they are so big and heavy we can't. Will you help?" [229]

Now Norm had really a very warm feeling in his heart for this small sister; Susie he considered a nuisance, and a vixen, but Sate with her slow sweet voice, and shy ways, had several times slipped behind his chair to escape a slap from her angry father, thus appealing to his protection, and once when he lifted her over the fence, she kissed him; he was rather willing to please Sate. Then there was Jerry who was a good fellow as ever lived, and Nettie who was a prime girl; why shouldn't he help tote the thing down to the church if that was what they wanted? To be sure he wanted to go in the other direction, and the fellows would be waiting, he supposed; but he could go there, afterwards, let them wait until he came.

"Well," he said at last, "come on, I'll help; though what they want of all this rubbish at the church is more than I can imagine." And Nettie and the little girls stood with satisfied faces watching the two move off under their heavy burden. It was something to have Norm go to church if it was only to carry flowers. [230]

Arrived at the door, Norm was seized with a fit of shyness; the doors were thrown wide open, and ladies and children were flitting about, and many tongues were going, and flowers and vines were being festooned around the gas lights, and the pillars, and wherever there was a spot for them.

"Hold on," said Norm, jerking back, thus putting the great salver in eminent peril, "I ain't going in there; all the village is there; you better pitch this rubbish out, they've got flowers enough."

"There isn't a lily among them," said Jerry. "And besides they have to go in, anyhow, we can't afford to disappoint Sate. Come on, Norm, I can't carry the thing alone, any more than I could the stove; it is unaccountably heavy."

This was true, but Jerry was very glad that it was. He had his reasons for wanting to get Norm down the aisle to the front of the pulpit. With very reluctant feet Norm followed, bearing his share of the burden, his face flushing over the exclamations with which they were at last greeted.

"Oh, oh! pond lilies! I did not know there were any this year. Where did you get them? Girls, look! Did you ever see anything more lovely?" And a group of faces were gathered about the tray, and one brown head went down among the lilies and caressed them. [231]

"Where did you get them?" she repeated; "I asked my cousin if there were any about here, and she said she thought not; and last night when I was out on the pond I looked and could not find any."

"They hide," said Jerry. "The only place on the pond where they can be found is down behind the old mill; and most people don't go there at all, because the channel is so narrow, and the water so shallow."

"Well, we are so glad you brought them! Girls, aren't they too lovely for anything? Who arranged them?"

"My sister," said Norm, to whom Jerry promptly turned with an air which said as plainly as words could have done: "You are the one to answer; she belongs to you."

"And who is that?" asked the owner of the pretty brown head, as she made way for them to pass to the table with their burden. "I am sure I would like to know her; for she certainly knows how to put flowers into lovely shapes." [232]

Then came from behind the desk a man whom Jerry knew and whom he had seen while he stood at the door. "Good evening, Jerry," he said, holding out his hand in a cordial way. "What a wonderful bank of beauty you have brought! Introduce me to your helper, please."

"Mr. Sherrill, Mr. Norman Decker," said Jerry, exactly as though he had been used to introducing people all his life; and Norm, his face very red, knew that he was shaking hands with the new minister. A very cordial hand-shake, certainly, and then the minister turning to her of the brown head, said, "Eva, come here; let me introduce you to Mr. Norman Decker. My sister, Mr. Decker."

Norm, hardly knowing what he was about, contrived another bow, and then Miss Eva said, "Decker, why, that is the name of my two little darlings about whom I have been telling you for two Sabbaths. Are they your little sisters, Mr. Decker? Little Sate and Susie?" And as Norm managed to nod an answer, she continued: "They have stolen my heart utterly; that little Sate is the dearest little thing. By the way, I wonder if these are her flowers? She promised me she would certainly get some; she said they had none in their garden, but God would make some grow for her somewhere she guessed." [233]

"Yes'm," said Jerry, seeing that Norm would not speak, "they are her flowers, hers and Susie's, they coaxed us to go for them."

"Decker," said the minister, suddenly, "you are pretty tall, I wonder if you are not just the one to help me get this wreath fastened back of the pulpit? I have been working at it for some time, and failed for the want of an arm long enough and strong enough to help me." And the two

disappeared behind the desk up the pulpit stairs to the immense satisfaction of Jerry. The ladies went on with their work; Miss Eva calling to him to help her move the table, and then to help arrange the salver on it, and then to bring more vines from the lecture room to cover the base of the floral cross; and indeed, before they knew it, both Jerry and Norm were in the thick of the engagement; Jerry flitting hither and thither at the call of the girls, and Norm following the minister from point to point, and using his long limbs to good advantage.

"Well," he said, wiping his face with his coat sleeve, as, more than an hour after their entrance, he and Jerry made their way down the churchyard walk, "that is the greatest snarl I ever got into. How that fellow can work! But he would never have got them things up in the world, if I had not been there to help him."

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"No," said Jerry "I don't believe he would. How glad they were to get the lilies! They do look prettier than anything there. I did not know who that lady was who taught the little folks. She has only been there a few weeks. She is pretty, isn't she?"

"I s'pose so," said Norm, "her voice is, anyhow. They say she's a singer. I heard the fellows down at the corner talking about her one night; Dick Welsh says she can mimic a bird so you couldn't tell which was which. I wouldn't mind hearing her sing. I like good singing."

"I suppose they will have her sing in the church," said Jerry in a significant tone. But to this, Norm made no reply.

"What was it Mr. Sherrill wanted of you just as we were coming out?" asked Jerry, after reflecting whether he had better ask the question or not.

"Wanted me to come and see how the things looked in the daytime," said Norm with an awkward laugh that ended in a half sneer; "I'll be likely to I think!"

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"Going up home, I s'pose?" said Jerry, trying to speak indifferently, and slipping his hand through Norm's arm as they reached the corner, and Norm half halted.

"Well, I suppose I might as well," Norm said, allowing himself to be drawn on by never so slight a pressure from Jerry's arm. "I was going down street, and the boys were to wait for me; but they have never waited all this while; it must be considerable after nine o'clock."

"Yes," said Jerry, "it is." And they went home.

Nettie, sitting on the doorstep, waiting, will never forget that night, nor the sinking of heart with which she waited. Her father had been kept at home, first by his employer who came to give directions about work to be attended to the first thing on Monday morning, and then by Job Smith getting home before he was expected and asking a little friendly help with the load he brought; and he had at last decided that it was too late to go out again, and had gone to bed. Mrs. Decker in her kitchen, hovered between the door and the window, peering out into the lovely night, saying nothing, but her heart throbbing so with anxiety about her boy that she could not lay her tired body away. Mrs. Job Smith in her kitchen, looked from her door and then her window, many misgivings in her heart; if that bad boy Norm should lead her good boy Jerry into mischief what should she say to his father? How could she ever forgive herself for having encouraged the intimacy between him and the Deckers?

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Presently, far down the quiet street came the sound of cheery whistling; Nettie knew the voice: nothing so very bad could have happened when Jerry was whistling like that; or was he perhaps doing it to keep his courage up? The whistle turned the corner, and in the dim starlight she could distinguish two figures; they came on briskly, Jerry and Norm. "A nice job you set us at," began Jerry, gayly, "we have just this minute got through; and here it is toward morning somewhere, isn't it?" Then all that happy company went to their beds.

After dinner the next day, Nettie studied if there were not ways in which she might coax Norm to go to church that evening. Jerry had told her of the minister's invitation. Norm had slept later than usual that morning, and lounged at home until after dinner; now he was preparing to go out. How could she keep him? How could she coax him to go with her?

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Before she could decide what to do to try to hold him, Susie took matters into her own hands by pitching head foremost out of the kitchen window, hitting her head on the stones. Then there was hurry and confusion in the Decker kitchen! Then did Mrs. Smith, and Job Smith, and Sarah Jane fly to the rescue. Though after all, Norm was the one who stooped over poor silent Susie and brought her limp and apparently lifeless into the kitchen. Jerry ran with all speed for the doctor. It was hours before they settled down again, having discovered that Susie was not dead, but had fainted; was not even badly hurt, save for a bump or two. But it took the little lady only a short time, after recovering from her fright, to discover that she was a person of importance, and to like the situation.

It happened that Norm had, by the doctor's directions, carried her from her mother's bed to the cooler atmosphere of the front room. Susie had enjoyed the ride, and now announced with the air of a conqueror, "I want Norm to carry me." So Norm, frightened into love and tenderness, lifted the little girl in his strong arms, laid the pretty head on his shoulder, and willingly tramped up and down the room. Was Susie a witch, or a selfish little girl? Certain it was that during that walk she took an unaccountable and ever increasing fancy for Norm. He must wet the brown paper on her head as often is the vinegar with which it was saturated dried away; he must hold the cup while she took a drink of water; he must push the marvel of a barrel chair in which she for a time sat in state, closer to the window; he must carry her from the chair to the table when supper was finally ready, and carry her back again when it was eaten. Nettie looked on amused and puzzled. Certainly Susie had kept Norm at home all the afternoon; but was she also likely to

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accomplish it for the evening? For Norm, to her great surprise, seemed to like the new order of things.

He blushed awkwardly when Susie gently pushed her mother aside and demanded Norm, but he came at once, with a good-natured laugh, and held her in his arms with as much gentleness and more strength than the mother could have given; and seemed to like the touch of the curly head on his shoulder. [239]

But while Nettie was putting away the dishes and puzzling over all the strange events of the afternoon, Susie was undressed, partly by Norm, according to her decree, and fell asleep in his arms and was laid on her mother's bed, and Norm slipped away!

Poor Nettie! She ran to the door to try to call him, but he was out of sight. "I tried to think of something to keep him till you came in," explained the disappointed mother, "but I couldn't do it; he laid Susie down as quick as he could, and shot away as though he was afraid you would get hold of him."

So Nettie, her face sad, prepared to go with Jerry and the Smiths down to evening meeting, and told Jerry on the way, that it did seem strange to her, so long as Susie had kept Norm busy all the afternoon, that they must let him slip away from them at last.

CHAPTER XIII. THE LITTLE PICTURE MAKERS.

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AFTER Susie Decker pitched out of the window that Sabbath afternoon she became such an object of importance that you would hardly have supposed anything else could have happened worth mentioning; but after the excitement was quite over, and Susie had been cuddled and petted and cared for more than it seemed to her she had ever been in her life before, Mr. Decker, finding nothing better to do, went out and sat down on the doorstep.

Little Sate dried her eyes and slipped away very soon after she discovered that Susie could move, and speak, and was therefore not dead. She had wandered in search of entertainment to the yard just around the corner, where had come but a few days before, a small boy on a visit.

This boy, Bobby by name, finding Sunday a hard day, had finally, after getting into all sorts of mischief within doors, been established by an indulgent auntie in the back yard, with her apron tied around his chubby neck, to protect his new suit, with a few pieces of charcoal, and permission to draw some nice Sunday pictures on the white boards of the house. [241]

This business interested Sate, and in spite of her shyness, drew her the other side of the high board fence which separated the neighbor's back yard from Mr. Decker's side one.

Just as that gentleman took his seat on the doorstep, he heard the voices of the two children; first, Bobby's confident one, the words he used conveying all assurance of unlimited power at his command—

"Now, what shall I make?"

"Make," said Sate, her sweet face thrown upward in earnest thought, "make the angel who would have come for Susie if she had died just now."

"How do you know any angel would have come for her?" asked sturdy Bobby.

"Why, 'cause I *know* there would. Miss Sherrill said so to-day; she told us about that little baby that died last night; she said an angel came after it and took it right straight up to heaven." [242]

"Maybe she don't know," said skeptical Bobby.

Then did Sate's eyes flash.

"I guess she does know, Bobby Burns, and you will be real mean, and bad if you say so any more. She knows all about heaven, and angels, and everything."

"Does angels come after all folks that dies?"

"I dunno; I guess so; no, I guess not. Only good folks."

"Is Susie good?"

"Sometimes she is," said truthful Sate, in slow, thoughtful tones, a touch of mournfulness in them that might have gone to Susie's heart had she heard and understood; "she gave me the biggest half of a cookie the other night. It was a *good deal* the biggest; and she takes care of me most always; one day she took off her shoes and put them on me, because the stones and the rough ground hurt my feet. They hurt her feet too; they bled, oh! just awful, but she wouldn't let *me* be hurt."

"Why didn't you wear your own shoes?"

"I didn't have any; mine all went to holes; just great big holes that wouldn't stay on; it was before my papa got good, and he didn't buy me any shoes at all." [243]

"Has your papa got good?"

"Yes," said Sate confidently, "I guess he has. My sister Nettie thinks so; and Susie does too. He

don't drink bad stuff any more. It was some kind of stuff he drank that made him cross; mamma said so; and the stuff made him feel so bad that he couldn't buy shoes, nor nothing; why, sometimes, before Nettie came home, we didn't have any bread! He isn't cross to-day, and he wasn't last night; and he bought me some new shoes—real pretty ones, and he kissed me. I love my papa when he is good. Do you love your papa when he is good?"

"My papa is always good," said Bobby, with that air of immense superiority.

"Is he?" asked Sate, wonder and admiration in her tone. Happy Bobby, to possess a father who was always good! "Doesn't he ever drink any of that bad stuff?"

"I guess he doesn't!" said indignant Bobby. "You wouldn't catch him taking a drop of it for anything. If he was sick and was going to die if he didn't, he says he wouldn't take it. I know all about that; the name of it is whiskey, and things; it has lots of names, but that is one of them. My father is a temperance." [244]

"What is that?"

"It is a man who promises that he won't ever taste it nor touch it, nor nothing, forever and ever. And he won't."

"Oh my!" said Sate. "Then of course you love him all the time. I mean to love my papa, all the time too. I'm most sure I can. What makes you make such a big angel? Susie isn't big; a little angel could carry her."

"This angel isn't the one who was coming for Susie; it is the one who is going to come for my papa when he dies."

"Oh! then will you make the one who will come for my papa? Make him very big and strong, for my papa is a strong man, and I don't want the angel to drop him."

Mr. Decker arose suddenly and went round to the back part of the house, and cleared his throat, and coughed, two or three times, and rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes. Had he peeped through the fence and caught a glimpse of the angel whom Bobby made, he might not have been so strangely touched; but the words of his little girl seemed to choke him, and his eyes, just then, were too dim to see angels. [245]

He was very still all the rest of the afternoon. At the tea table he scarcely spoke, and afterwards, while Mrs. Decker and Nettie were mourning over Norm's escape, he too put on his coat, and went away down the street.

Mrs. Decker came to the door when she discovered it, and looked after him. He was still in sight, but she did not dare to call. As she looked, she gathered up a corner of her apron and wiped her eyes. Presently she sat down on the step where he had been sitting so short a time before, leaned her elbows on her knees, and her cheeks on her hands, and thought sad thoughts.

She felt very much discouraged. On this first Sunday, after the new room had been made, and new hopes excited, they had slipped away, both Norm and her husband, to lounge in the saloon as usual, and to come home, late at night, the worse for liquor. She knew all about it! Hadn't she been through it many times?

The little gleam of hope which had started again, under Nettie and Jerry's encouraging words and ways, died quite out. Sitting there, Mrs. Decker made up her mind once more, that there was no kind of use in working, and struggling, and trying to be somebody. She was the wife of a drunkard; and the mother of a drunkard; Norm would be that, before long. And her little girls would grow up beggars. It was almost a pity that Susie had not been killed when she fell. Why should she want to live to be a drunkard's daughter, and a drunkard's sister? If the Heaven she used to hear about when she was a little girl, was all so, why should she not long for Susie and Sate to go there? Then if she could go away herself and leave all this misery! [246]

She had hurried with her dishes, she had hoped that when she was ready to sit down in the neat room with the new lamp burning brightly, he would sit with her as he used to do on Sunday evenings long ago. But here she was alone, as usual. More than once that big apron which she had not cared to take off after she found herself deserted, was made to do duty as a handkerchief and wipe away bitter tears.

Meantime, Nettie sat in the pretty church and looked at the lovely flowers, and listened to the wonderful singing. Miss Sherrill sang the solo of something more beautiful than Nettie had ever even imagined. "Consider the lilies how they grow." What wonderful words were these to be sung while looking down at a great bank of lilies! It is possible that the singing may have been more beautiful to Nettie because her own fingers had arranged the lilies, but it was in itself enough for any reasonable mortal's ear, and as it rolled through the church, there was more than one listener who thought of the angels, and wondered if their voices could be sweeter. Nettie's small handkerchief went to her eyes several times during the anthem; she could not have told why she cried, but the music moved her strangely. Before the anthem was fairly concluded there was something else to take her attention. Mrs. Job Smith in whose seat she sat, gave her arm a vigorous poke with a sharp elbow, and whispered in a voice which seemed to Nettie must have been heard all over the church, "For the land's sake, if there ain't your pa sitting down there under the gallery!" [247]

As soon as she dared do so, Nettie turned her head for one swift look. Mrs. Smith *must* be mistaken, but she would take one glance to assure herself. Certainly that was her father, sitting in almost the last seat, leaning his head against one of the pillars, the shabbiness of his coat showing plainly in the bright gaslight. But Nettie did not think of his coat. Her cheeks grew red, [248]

and her eyes filled again with tears. It was not the music, now; it was a strange thrill of satisfaction, and of hope. How pleasant she had thought it would be to go to church with her father. It was one of the things she had planned at Auntie Marshall's; how she would perhaps take her father's arm, being tall for her years, and Auntie Marshall said he was not a tall man, and walk to church by his side, and find the hymns for him, and receive his fatherly smile, and when she handed him his hat after service, perhaps he would say, "Thank you, my daughter," as she had heard Doctor Porter say to his little girl in the seat just ahead of theirs. Nettie's hungry little heart had wanted to hear that word applied to herself. Now all these sweet dreams of hers seemed to have been ages ago; actually it felt like years since she had hoped for such a thing, or dreamed of seeing her father in church, so swiftly had the reality crowded out her pretty dreams. Yet there he sat, listening to the reading.

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What Nettie would have done or thought had she known that Norm and two friends were at that moment seated in the gallery just over her father's head, I cannot say. On the whole, I am glad she did not know it until church was out. Especially I am glad she did not know that Norm giggled a good deal, and whispered more or less, and in various ways so annoyed the minister that he found it difficult to keep from speaking to the young men in the gallery. The fact is, he would have done so, had he not recognized in one of them his helper of the evening before, and resolved to bear his troubles patiently, in the hope that something good would grow out of this unusual appearance at church.

It would perhaps be hard work to explain what had brought Norm to church. A fancy perhaps for seeing how the flowers looked by this time. A queer feeling that he was slightly connected with the church service for once in his life; a lingering desire to know whether in the hanging of that tallest wreath, he or the minister had been right; they had differed as to the distance from one arch to the other; from the gallery he was sure he could tell which had possessed the truer eye. All these motives pressed him a little. Then they were singing when he reached the door, and Rick had said, "Hallo! that voice sounds as though it lived up in the sky. Who is that, do you s'pose?"

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Then Norm proud of his knowledge in the matter, explained that she was the minister's sister, and they said she could mimic a bird so you couldn't tell which was which.

"Poh!" Alf had said; he didn't believe a word of that; he should like to see a woman who could fool him into thinking that she was a bird! but he had added, "Let's go in and hear her." And as this was what Norm had been half intending to do ever since he started from the house, he agreed to do it at once. In they slipped and half hid themselves behind the posts in the gallery, and behaved disreputably all the evening, more because they felt shamefaced about being there at all, and wanted to keep each other in countenance, than because they really desired to disturb the service. However, they heard a great deal.

What do you think was the minister's text on that evening? "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven." I shall have to tell you that when he caught sight of Mr. Decker half-hidden behind his post and recognized him as the man who was so fast growing into a drunkard, and as the man who had never been inside the church since he had been the pastor, he was sorry that his text and subject were what they were that evening. He told himself that it was very unfortunate. That if he had dreamed of such a thing as having that man for a listener, he would have told him the story of Jesus as simply and as earnestly as he could; and not have preached a sermon that would seem to the man as a fling at himself. However, there was no help for it now; he did not recognize Mr. Decker until he had announced his text, and fairly commenced his sermon.

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It was a sermon for young people; it was intended to warn them against the first beginnings of this great sin which shut heaven away from the sinner. He need not have been troubled about not telling the story of Jesus; there was a great deal about Jesus in the sermon, as well as a great deal about the heaven prepared for those who were willing to go. I do not know that anywhere in the church you could have found a more attentive listener than Mr. Decker. At least one who seemed to listen more earnestly; from the moment that the text was repeated until the great Bible was closed, he did not take his eyes from the minister's face. Yet some of his words he did not hear. Some of the time Mr. Decker was hearing a little voice, very sweet, saying: "Make a very big strong angel to come for my papa when he dies; my papa is a strong man and I don't want the angel to drop him." Poor papa! as he thought of it, he had to look straight before him and wink hard and fast to keep the tears from dropping; he had no handkerchief to wipe them away. Think of an angel coming for him! "I love my papa when he is good!" the sweet voice had said. Was he ever good? Then he listened awhile to the sermon; heard the vivid description of some of the possible glories and joys of Heaven. Would he be likely ever to go there? Little Sate thought so; she had planned for it that very afternoon. Dear little Sate who did not want the angel to drop him.

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Now it is possible that if the sermon had been about drunkards, Mr. Decker would have been vexed and would not have listened. He did not call himself a drunkard; it is a sad and at the same time a curious fact that he did not realize how nearly he had reached the point where the name would apply to him. That he drank beer, much, and often, and that he was growing more and more fond of it, and that it kept him miserably poor, was certainly true, and there were times when he realized it; but that he was ever going to be a common drunkard and roll in the gutter, and kick his wife, and seize his children by the hair, he did not for a moment believe. But the sermon was by no means addressed to people who were even so far on this road as he. It was addressed to boys, who were just beginning to like the taste of hard cider, and spruce beer, and hop bitters, and all those harmless (?) drinks which so many boys were using. It was a plain story

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of the rapid, certain, downward journey of those who began in these simple ways. It was illustrated by certain facts which Mr. Sherrill had personally known. And Mr. Decker, as he listened, owned to himself that he knew facts which would have proved the same truth.

Then he gave a little start and shrank farther into the shadow of the pillar. The moment he admitted that, he also admitted that he was himself in danger. What nonsense that was! Couldn't he stop drinking the stuff whenever he liked? "There is a time," said the minister, "when this matter is in your own hands. You have no very great taste for the dangerous liquors, you are only using them because those with whom you associate do so. You could give them up without much effort; but I tell you, my friends, the time comes, and to many it comes very early in life, when they are like slaves bound hand and foot in a habit that they cannot break, and cannot control." Mr. Decker heard this, and something, what was it? pressed the thought home to him just then, that, if he did not belong to this last-mentioned class, neither did he to the former. He knew it would take a good deal of effort for him to give up his beer; of course it would; else he should not be such a fool as to keep himself and his family in poverty for the sake of indulging it. What if he were already a slave, bound hand and foot! What if the "stuff" which Sate said made him "cross" had already made him a drunkard! Perhaps the boys on the street called him so; though they rarely saw him stagger; his staggering was nearly always done under cover of the night. Still, now that he was dealing honestly with himself, he must own that it was less easy to go without his beer than it used to be. Since Nettie had come home he had drunk less of it than usual, and by that very means he had discovered how much it meant to him. "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven!" The minister's earnest voice repeated his text just then. Was he a drunkard? Then what about the strong angel? Little Sate was to be disappointed, after all!

Oh! I am not going to try to tell you all the thoughts which passed through Joe Decker's mind that evening. I don't think he could tell you himself, though he remembers the evening vividly. He stood up, during the closing hymn, and waited until the benediction was pronounced, and then he slipped away, swiftly; Nettie tried to get to him, but she did not succeed, and she sorrowed over it. He stumbled along in the darkness, moving almost as unsteadily as though he had been drinking. The sky was thick with clouds, and he jostled against a lady and gentleman as he crossed the street; the lady shrank away. "Who is that?" he heard her ask; and the answer came to him distinctly: "Oh! it is old Joe Decker; he is drunk, I suppose. He generally is at this time of night."

Yes, there it was! he was already counted on the streets as a drunkard. "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of heaven." It was not the minister's voice this time; yet it seemed to the poor man's excited brain that some one repeated those words in his ears. Then he heard again the sweet soft voice: "Make him very big and strong, for I don't want the angel to drop him."

CHAPTER XIV. THE CONCERT.

WITHIN the church wonderful things were going on. Jerry had caught sight of Norm as he slipped up the gallery stairs, and laid his plans accordingly. He whispered to Nettie during the singing of the closing hymn, thereby shocking her a little. Jerry did not often whisper in church.

This was what he said: "Don't you need those lilies to help trim the room to-morrow night? Let's take them home."

The moment the "amen" was spoken, he dashed out, and was at the stair door as Norm came down.

"Norm," he said, "won't you help me carry home that tray? We want the flowers for something special to-morrow."

Said Norm, "O bother! I can't help tote that heavy thing through the streets."

"What's that?" asked Rick; and when the explanation was briefly made, he added the little word of advice which so often turns the scales.

"Ho! that isn't much to do when you are going that very road. I'd do as much as that, any day, for the little chap who gave us such a tall row." This last was in undertone.

"Well," said Norm, "I don't care; I'll help; but how are we going to get the things out here?"

"Come inside," answered Jerry; "we can wait in the back seat. They will all be gone in a few minutes, then we can step up and get the salver."

Once inside the church, the rest followed easily. Mr. Sherrill who had eyes for all that was going on, came forward swiftly and held a cordial hand to Norm.

"Good-evening," he said; "I am glad to see you accepted my invitation. How did our work look by gaslight?"

"It looked," said Norm, a roguish twinkle in his eye, "it looked just as I expected it would; crooked. That there arch at the left of the pulpit wants to be hung as much as two inches lower to match the other."

"You don't say so!" said the minister, in good-humored surprise. "Does it appear so from the

gallery? Are my eyes as crooked as that? Let us go up gallery and see if I can discover it."

So to the gallery they went, Norm clearing the space with a few bounds, and taking a triumphant station where he could point out the defect to the minister.

"That is true," Mr. Sherrill said, with hearty frankness. "You are right and I was wrong. If I had taken your word last night the wreaths would have looked better, wouldn't they? Well, perhaps wreaths are not the only things which show crooked when we get higher up and look down on them. Eh, my friend?"

Norm laughed a good-humored, rather embarrassed laugh. It was remarkable that he should be up here holding a chatty, almost gay, conversation with the minister. There came over him the wish that he had behaved himself better during the service. That he had not whispered so much, nor nudged Rick's elbow to make him laugh, just at the moment that the minister's eye was fixed on them. He had a half-fancy that if the evening were to be lived over again, he would go down below and sit up straight and show this man that he could behave as well as anybody if he were a mind to. [260]

Not a word about the laughing and whispering said the minister. But he said a thing which startled Norm.

"My sister has a fancy for having the church adorned with wreaths or strings of asters in contrasting colors for next Sabbath; will you make an appointment with me to help hang them on Saturday evening? I'll promise to follow your eye to the half-inch."

Norm started, flushed, looked into the frank face and laughed a little, then seeing that the answer was waited for said: "Why, I don't care if I do, if you honestly want it."

"I honestly want it," said the minister in great satisfaction. Then they went downstairs.

Job Smith and his wife were gone.

"I will wait for my brother," said Nettie, and her heart swelled with pride as she said it.

How nice to have a brother to wait for, just as Miss Sherrill was doing. At that moment the "beautiful lady" as Sate and Susie called her, came to Nettie's side.

"Good-evening," she said pleasantly. "I hope the little girls are well; I met your brother last night; he helped my brother to hang the flowers. I see they are upstairs together now, admiring their work. My brother said he was a very intelligent helper. You do not know how much I thank you for those flowers. They helped me to sing to-night." [261]

"I thought," said Nettie, raising her great truthful eyes to the lady's face and speaking with an earnestness that showed she felt what she said, "I thought you sang as though the angels were helping you. I don't think they can sing any sweeter."

"Thank you," said Miss Sherrill; she smiled as she spoke, yet there were tears in her eyes; the honest, earnest tribute seemed very unlike a little girl, and very unlike the usual way of complimenting her wonderful voice. "I saw that you liked music," she said, "I noticed you while I was singing. Will you let me give you a couple of tickets for the concert to-morrow evening; and will you and your brother come to hear me sing? I am going to sing something that I think you will like."

Nettie went home behind the lilies and the boys, her heart all in a flutter of delight. What a wonderful thing had come to her! The concert for which the best singers in town had been so long practising, and for which the tickets were fifty cents apiece, and which she had no more expected to attend than she had expected to hear the real angels sing that week, was to take place to-morrow evening, and she had two tickets in her pocket! [262]

Mrs. Decker was waiting for them, her nose pressed against the glass; she started forward to open the door for the boys, before Nettie could reach it. There was such a look of relief on her face when she saw Norm as ought to have gone to his very heart; but he did not see it; he was busy settling the salver in a safe place.

"Has father come in?" Nettie asked, as she followed her mother to the back step, where she went for the dipper at Norm's call.

"Yes, child, he has, and went straight to bed. He didn't say two words; but he wasn't cross; and he hadn't drank a drop, I believe."

"Mother," said Nettie, standing on tiptoe to reach the tall woman's ear, and speaking in an awe-stricken whisper, "father was in church!"

"For the land of pity!" said Mrs. Decker, speaking low and solemnly.

And all through the next morning's meal, which was an unusually quiet one, she waited on her husband with a kind of respectful reverence, which if he had noticed, might have bewildered him. It seemed to her that the event of the evening before had lifted him into a higher world than hers, and that she could not tell now, what might happen. [263]

The event of the day was the concert; all other plans were set aside for that. At first Norm scoffed and declared that his ticket might be used to light the fire with, for all he cared; he didn't want to go to one of their "swell" concerts. But this talk Nettie laughed over good-naturedly, as though it were intended for a joke, and continued her planning as to when to have supper, and just when she and Norm must start.

In the course of the day, that young man discovered it to be a fine thing to own tickets for this

special concert. Before noon tickets were at a premium, and several of Norm's fellow-workmen gayly advised him to make an honest penny by selling his. During the early morning it had been delicately hinted by one young fellow that Norm Decker's tickets were made of tissue paper, which was his way of saying, that he did not believe that Norm had any; but, thanks to Nettie's thoughtful tact, the tickets were at that very moment reposing in her brother's pocket, and he drew them forth in triumph, wanting to know if anybody saw any tissue paper about those. Good stiff green pasteboard with the magic words on them which would admit two people to what was considered on all sides the finest entertainment of the sort the town had ever enjoyed.

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"Where did you get 'em, Norm? Come, tell us, that's a good fellow. You was never so green as to go and pay a dollar for two pieces of pasteboard."

"They are complimentaries," said Norm, tossing off a shaving with a careless air, as though complimentary tickets to first-class concerts were every-day affairs with him.

"Complimentary? My eyes, aren't we big!" (I am very sorry that the boys in Norm's shop used these slang phrases; but I want to say this for them: it was because they had never been taught better. Not one of them had mother or father who were grieved by such words; some of them were so truly good-hearted that I believe if such had been the case, they would never have used them again; and I wish the same might be said of all boys with cultured and careful mothers.)

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"How did you get 'em? Been selling tickets for the show, or piling chairs, or what?"

"I haven't done a living thing for one of them," said Norm composedly; and Ben Halleck came to his rescue.

"That's so, boys; or, at least if he had, it wouldn't done him no good. They don't pay for this show in any such way. The fellows that carried around bills were paid in money because they said they expected seats would be scarce; and they didn't sell no tickets around the streets. Them that wanted them had to go to the book-store and buy them. Oh, I tell you, it's a big thing. I wouldn't mind going myself if I could be complimented through. You see that Sherrill girl who lives at the new minister's is a most amazing singer, and they say everybody wants to hear her."

By this time Norm's mind was fully made up that he would go to the concert. It is a pity Nettie could not have known it. For despite the cheerful courage with which she received Norm's disagreeable statements in the morning, she was secretly very much afraid that he would not go. This would have been a great trial to her, for her little soul was as full of music as possible; and the thought of hearing that wonderful voice so soon again filled her with delight; but she was a timid little girl so far as appearing among strangers was concerned, and the idea of going alone to a concert was not to be thought of. Her mother proposed Jerry for company, but he had gone with Job Smith into the country and was not likely to return until too late. So Nettie made her little preparations with a troubled heart. There was something more to it than simply hearing fine music; it would be so like other girls whom she knew, so like the dreams of home she had indulged in while at Auntie Marshall's—this going out in the evening attended and cared for by her brother.

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Norm ate his dinner in haste, and was silent and almost gruff; nobody knows why. I have often wondered why even well brought up boys, seem sometimes to like to appear more disagreeable than at heart they are.

But by six o'clock the much-thought-about brother appeared, his face pleasant enough.

"Well, Nannie," he said, "got your fusses and fixings all ready?"

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And Nettie with beating heart and laughing eyes assured him that she would be all ready in good time, and that she had laid his clean shirt on his bed, and a clean handkerchief, and brushed his coat.

"Yes; and she ironed your shirt with her own hands," explained his mother, "and the bosom shines like a glass bottle."

"O bother!" said Norm. "I don't want a clean shirt."

But he went to his attic directly after supper and put on the shirt, and combed his hair, and rubbed his boots with Jerry's brush which he went around the back way and borrowed of Mrs. Job Smith before he came in to supper.

He had noticed how very neat and pretty Nettie looked as she walked down the church isle beside him the night before; and he had also noticed Jerry's shining boots.

His mother noticed his the moment he came down stairs. "How nice you two do look!" she said admiringly; and then the two walked away well pleased. It was a wonderful concert. Norm had not known that he was particularly fond of music, but he owned to Rick the next day, that there was something in that Sherrill girl's voice which almost lifted a fellow out of his boots.

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They had excellent seats! Nettie learned to her intense surprise that their tickets called for reserved seats. She had studied over certain mysterious numbers on the tickets, but had not understood them. It appeared also that the usher was surprised.

"Can't give you any seats," was his greeting as they presented their tickets. "Everything is full now except the reserves; you'll have to stand in the aisle; there's a good place under the gallery. Hallo! What's this? Reserved! Why, bless us, I didn't see these numbers. Come down this way; you have as nice seats as there are in the hall."

It was all delightful. Lorena Barstow and two others of the Sabbath-school class were a few seats behind them; Nettie could hear them whispering and giggling, and for a few minutes she

had an uncomfortable feeling that they were laughing at her; as I am sorry to say they were.

But neither this nor anything else troubled her long, for Norm's unusual toilet having taken much longer than was planned for, they were really among the late comers; and in a very little while the music began. Oh! how wonderful it was. Neither Nettie nor Norm had ever heard really fine concert music before, and even Norm who did not know that he cared for music, felt his nerves thrill to his fingers' ends. Then, when after the first two or three pieces Miss Sherrill appeared, she was so beautiful and her voice was so wonderful that Nettie, try as hard as she did, could not keep the tears from her foolish happy eyes. I will not venture to say how much the beautiful silk dress with its long train, and the mass of soft white lace at her throat had to do with Miss Sherrill's loveliness, though I daresay if she had appeared in a twelve-cent gingham like Nettie's, she might have sang just as sweetly. Norm, however, did not believe that.

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"Half of it is the fuss and feathers," he declared to Rick, next day, looking wise. And Rick made a wise answer.

"Well, when you add the handsome voice to the fuss and feathers, I s'pose they help, but I don't believe folks would go and rave so much just over a blue silk dress, and some gloves, and things. They all had to match, you see." So Rick, without knowing it, became a philosopher.

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As for Nettie, she told her mother that the dress was just lovely, and her voice was as sweet as any angel's could possibly be; but there was a look in her eyes which was better than all the rest; and that when she sang, "Oh that I had wings, had wings like a dove!" she, Nettie, could not help feeling that they were hidden about her somewhere, and that before the song was over, she might unfold them and soar away.

CHAPTER XV.

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A WILL AND A WAY.

"THE next thing we want to do is to earn some money."

This, Jerry said, as he sat on the side step with Nettie, after sunset. They had been having a long talk, planning the campaign against the enemy, which they had made up their minds should be carried on with vigor. At least, they had been trying to plan; but that obstacle which seems to delight to step into the midst of so many plans and overturn them, viz. money, met them at every point. So when Jerry made that emphatic announcement, Nettie was prepared to agree with him fully; but none the less did she turn anxious eyes on him as she said:

"How can we?"

"I don't know yet," Jerry said, whistling a few bars of

Oh, do not be discouraged,

and stopping in the middle of the line to answer, "But of course there is a way. There was an old man who worked for my father, who used to say so often: 'Where there's a will there's a way,' that after awhile we boys got to calling him 'Will and Way' for short, you know; his name was John," and here Jerry stopped to laugh a little over that method of shortening a name; "but it was wonderful to see how true it proved; he would make out to do the most surprising things that even my father thought sometimes could not be done. We must *make* a way to earn some money."

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Nettie laughed a little. "Well, I am sure," she said, "there is a will in this case; in fact, there are two wills; for you seem to have a large one, and I know if ever I was determined to do a thing I am now; but for all that I can't think of a possible way to earn a cent."

Now Sarah Ann Smith was at this moment standing by the kitchen window, looking out on the two schemers. Her sleeves were rolled above her elbow, for she was about to set the sponge for bread; she had her large neat work apron tied over her neat dress-up calico; and on her head was perched the frame out of which, with Nettie's skilful help, and some pieces of lace from her mother's old treasure bag, she meant to make herself a bonnet every bit as pretty as the one worn by Miss Sherrill the Sabbath before.

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"Talk of keeping things seven years and they'll come good," said Mrs. Smith, watching with satisfaction while Nettie tumbled over the contents of the bag in eager haste and exclaimed over this and that piece which would be "just lovely." "I've kept the rubbish in that bag going on to twenty years, just because the pretty girls where I used to do clear-starching, gave them to me. I had no kind of notion what I should ever do with them; but they looked bright and pretty, and I always was a master hand for bright colors, and so whenever they would hand out a bit of ribbon or lace, and say, 'Cerinthy, do you want that?' I was sure to say I did; and chuck it into this bag; and now to think after keeping of them for more than twenty years, my girl should be planning to make a bonnet out of them! Things is queer! I don't ever mean to throw away *anything*. I never was much at throwing away; now that's a fact."

Now the truth was that Sarah Ann, left to herself, would as soon have thought of making a *house* out of the contents of that bag, as a bonnet; but Nettie Decker's deft fingers had a natural tact for all cunning contrivances in lace and silk, and her skill in copying what she saw, was something before which Sarah Ann stood in silent admiration; when, therefore, she offered to construct for Sarah Ann, out of the treasures of that bag, a bonnet which should be both

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becoming and economical, Sarah Ann's gratitude knew no bounds. She went that very afternoon to the milliner's to select her frame, and had it perched at that moment as I said, on her head, while she listened to the clear young voices under the window. She had a great desire to be helpful; but money was far from plenty at Job Smith's.

What was it which made her at that moment think of a bit of news which she had heard while at the milliner's? Why, nothing more remarkable than that the color of Nettie Decker's hair in the fading light was just the same as Mantie Horton's. But what made her suddenly speak her bit of news, interrupting the young planners? Ah, that Sarah Ann does not know; she only knows she felt just like saying it, so she said it.

"Mantie Horton's folks are all going to move to the city; they are selling off lots of things; I saw her this afternoon when I was at the milliner's, and she says about the only thing now that they don't know what to do with is her old hen and chickens; a nice lot of chicks as ever she saw, but of course they can't take them to the city. My! I should think they would feel dreadful lonesome without chickens, nor pigs, nor nothing! *We* might have some chickens as well as not, if we only had a place to keep 'em; enough scrapings come from the table every day, to feed 'em, most."

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Before this sentence was concluded, Jerry had turned and given Nettie a sudden look as if to ask if she saw what he did; then he whistled a low strain which had in it a note of triumph; and the moment Sarah Ann paused for breath he asked: "Where do the Hortons live?"

"Why, out on the pike about a mile; that nice white house set back from the road a piece; don't you know? It is just a pleasant walk out there."

Then Sarah Ann turned away to attend to her bread, and as she did so her somewhat homely face was lighted by a smile; for an idea had just dawned upon her, and she chuckled over it: "I shouldn't wonder if those young things would go into business; he's got contrivance enough to make a coop, any day, and mother would let them have the scrapings, and welcome."

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Sarah Ann was right; though Nettie, unused to country ways and plans, did not think of such a thing, Jerry did. The next morning he was up, even before the sun; in fact that luminary peeped at him just as he was turning into the long carriage drive which led finally to the Horton barnyard. There a beautiful sight met his eyes; a white and yellow topknot mother, and eight or ten fluffy chickens scampering about her. "They are nice and plump," said Jerry to himself; "I'm afraid I haven't money enough to buy them; but then, there is a great deal of risk in raising a brood of chickens like these; perhaps he will sell them cheap."

Farmer Horton was an early riser, and was busy about his stables when Jerry reached there. He was anxious to get rid of all his live stock, and be away as soon as possible, and here was a customer anxious to buy; so in much less time than Jerry had supposed it would take, the hen and chickens changed owners and much whistling was done by the new owner as he walked rapidly back to town to build a house for his family.

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Mrs. Smith had been taken into confidence; so indeed had Job, before the purchase was made; but the whole thing was to be a profound surprise to Nettie. Therefore, she saw little of him that day, and I will not deny was a trifle hurt because he kept himself so busy about something which he did not share with her. But I want you to imagine, if you can, her surprise the next morning when just as she was ready to set the potatoes to frying, she heard Jerry's eager voice calling her to come and see his house.

"See what?" asked Nettie, appearing in the doorway, coffee pot in hand.

"A new house. I built it yesterday, and rented it; the family moved in last night. That is the reason I was so busy. I had to go out and help move them; and I must say they were as ill-behaved a set as I ever had anything to do with. The mother is the crossiest party I ever saw; and she has no government whatever; her children scurry around just where they please."

"What are you talking about?" said astonished Nettie, her face growing more and more bewildered as he continued his merry description.

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"Come out and see. It is a new house, I tell you; I built it yesterday; that is the reason I did not come to help you about the bonnet. Didn't you miss me? Sarah Ann thinks it is actually nicer than the one Miss Sherrill wore." And he broke into a merry laugh, checking himself to urge Nettie once more to come out and see his treasures.

"Well," said Nettie, "wait until I cover the potatoes, and set the teakettle off." This done she went in haste and eagerness to discover what was taking place behind Job Smith's barn. A hen and chickens! Beautiful little yellow darlings, racing about as though they were crazy; and a speckled mother clucking after them in a dignified way, pretending to have authority over them, when one could see at a glance that they did exactly as they pleased.

Then came a storm of questions. "Where? and When? and Why?"

"It is a stock company concern," exclaimed Jerry, his merry eyes dancing with pleasure. Nettie was fully as astonished and pleased as he had hoped. "Don't you know I told you yesterday we must plan a way to earn money? This is one way, planned for us. *We* own Mrs. Bidley; every feather on her knot, of which she is so proud, belongs to us, and she must not only earn her own living and that of her children, but bring us in a nice profit besides. Those are plump little fellows; I can imagine them making lovely pot pies for some one who is willing to pay a good price for them. Cannot you?"

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"Poor little chickens," said Nettie in such a mournful tone that Jerry went off into shouts of laughter. He was a humane boy, but he could not help thinking it very funny that anybody should

sigh over the thought of a chicken pot pie.

"Oh, I know they are to eat," Nettie said, smiling in answer to his laughter, "and I know how to make nice crust for pot pie; but for all that, I cannot help feeling sort of sorry for the pretty fluffy chickens. Are you going to fat them all, to eat; or raise some of them to lay eggs?"

"I don't know what *we* are going to do, yet," Jerry said with pointed emphasis on the *we*. "You see, we have not had time to consult; this is a company concern, I told you. What do you think about it?" [280]

Nettie's cheeks began to grow a deep pink; she looked down at the hurrying chickens with a grave face for a moment, then said gently: "You know, Jerry, I haven't any money to help buy the chickens, and I cannot help own what I do not help buy; they are your chickens, but I shall like to watch them and help you plan about them."

Jerry sat down on an old nail keg, crossed one foot over the other, and clasped his hands over his knees, as Job Smith was fond of doing, and prepared for argument:

"Now, see here, Nettie Decker, let us understand each other once for all; I thought we had gone into partnership in this whole business; that we were to fight that old fiend Rum, in every possible way we could; and were to help each other plan, and work all the time, and in all ways we possibly could. Now if you are tired of me and want to work alone, why, I mustn't force myself upon you."

"O, Jerry!" came in a reproachful murmur from Nettie, whose cheeks were now flaming.

"Well, what is a fellow to do? You see you hurt my feelings worse than old Mother Topknot did this morning when she pecked me; I want to belong, and I mean to; but all that kind of talk about helping to buy these half-dozen little puff-balls is all nonsense, and a girl of your sense ought to be ashamed of it." [281]

Said Nettie, "O, Jerry, I smell the potatoes; they are scorching!" and she ran away. Jerry looked after her a moment, as though astonished at the sudden change of subject, then laughed, and rising slowly from the nail-keg addressed himself to the hen.

"Now, Mother Topknot, I want you to understand that you belong to the firm; that little woman who was just here is your mistress, and if you peck her and scratch her as you did me, this morning, it will be the worse for you. You are just like some people I have seen; haven't sense enough to know who is your best friend; why, there is no end to the nice little bits she will contrive for you and your children, if you behave yourself; for that matter, I suspect she would do it whether you behaved yourself or not; but that part it is quite as well you should not understand. I want you to bring these children up to take care of themselves, just as soon as you can; and then you are to give your attention to laying a nice fresh egg every morning; and the sooner you begin, the better we shall like it." Then he went in to breakfast. [282]

There was no need to say anything more about the partnership. Nettie seemed to come to the conclusion that she must be ashamed of herself or her pride in the matter; and after a very short time grew accustomed to hearing Jerry talk about "Our chicks," and dropped into the fashion of caring for and planning about them. None the less was she resolved to find some way of earning a little money for her share of the stock company. Curiously enough it was Susie and little Sate who helped again. They came in one morning, with their hands full of the lovely field daisies. The moment Nettie looked at the two little faces, she knew that a dispute of some sort was in progress. Susie's lips were curved with that air of superior wisdom, not to say scorn, which she knew how to assume; and little Sate's eyes were full of the half-grieved but wholly positive look which they could wear on occasion.

"What is it?" Nettie asked, stopping on her way to the cellar with a nice little pat of batter which she was saving for her father's supper. Butter was a luxury which she had decided the children at least, herself included, must not expect every day. [283]

"Why," said Susie, her eyes flashing her contempt of the whole thing, "she says these are folks; old women with caps, and eyes, and noses, and everything; she says they look at her, and some of them are pleasant, and some are cross. She is too silly for anything. They don't look the least bit in the word like old women. I told her so, fifty-eleven times, and she keeps saying it!"

Nettie held out her hand for the bunch of daisies, looked at them carefully, and laughed.

"Can't you see them?" was little Sate's eager question. "They are just as plain! Don't you see them a little bit of a speck, Nannie?"

"Of course she doesn't!" said scornful Susie. "Nobody but a silly baby like you would think of such a thing."

"I don't know," said Nettie, still smiling, "I don't think I see them as plain as Sate does, but maybe we can, after awhile; wait till I get my butter put away, and I'll put on my spectacles and see what I can find."

So the two waited, Susie incredulous and disgusted, Sate with a hopeful light in her eyes, which made Nettie very anxious to find the old ladies. On her way up stairs she felt in her pocket for the pencil Jerry had sharpened with such care the evening before; yes, it was there, and the point was safe. Jerry had made a neat little tube of soft wood for it to slip into, and so protect itself. [284]

"Now, let us look for the old lady," she said, taking a daisy in hand and retiring to the closet window for inspection; it was the work of a moment for her fingers which often ached for such

work, to fashion a pair of eyes, a nose, and a mouth; and then to turn down the white petals for a cap border, leaving two under the chin for strings!

"Does your old lady look anything like that?" she questioned, as she came out from her hiding place. Little Sate looked, and clasped her hands in an ecstasy of delight: "Look, Susie, look, quick! there she is, just as plain! O Nannie! I'm *so* glad you found her."

"Humph!" said Susie, "she made her with a pencil; she wasn't there at all; and there couldn't nobody have found her. So!"

And to this day, I suppose it would not be possible to make Susie Decker believe that the spirits of beautiful old ladies hid in the daisies! Some people cannot see things, you know, show them as much as you may. [285]

But Nettie was charmed with the little old woman. She left the potatoes waiting to be washed, and sat down on the steps with eager little Sate, and made old lady after old lady. Some with spectacles, and some without. Some with smooth hair drawn quietly back from quiet foreheads, some with the old-fashioned puffs and curls which she had seen in old, old pictures of "truly" grandmothers. What fun they had! The potatoes came near being forgotten entirely. It was the faithful old clock in Mrs. Smith's kitchen which finally clanged out the hour and made Nettie rise in haste, scattering old ladies right and left. But little Sate gathered them, every one, holding them with as careful hand as though she feared a rough touch would really hurt their feelings, and went out to hunt Susie and soothe her ruffled dignity. She did not find Susie; that young woman was helping Jerry nail laths on the chicken coop; but she found her sweet-faced Sabbath-school teacher, who was sure to stop and kiss the child, whenever she passed. To her, Sate at once showed the sweet old woman. "Nannie found them," she explained; "Susie could not see them at all, and she kept saying they were not there; but Nannie said she would make them look plainer so Susie could see, and now Susie thinks she made them out of a pencil; but they were there, before, I saw them." [286]

"Oh, you quaint little darling!" said Miss Sherrill, kissing her again. "And so your sister Nettie made them plainer for you. I must say she has done it with a skilful hand. Sate dear, would you give one little old woman to me? Just one; this dear old face with puffs, I want her very much."

So Sate gazed at her with wistful, tender eyes, kissed her tenderly, and let Miss Sherrill carry her away.

She carried her straight to the minister's study, and laid her on the open page of a great black commentary which he was studying. "Did you ever see anything so cunning? That little darling of a Sate says Nannie 'found' her; she doesn't seem to think it was made, but simply developed, you know, so that commoner eyes than hers could see it; that child was born for a poet, or an artist, I don't know which. Tremayne, I'm going to take this down to the flower committee, and get them to invite Nettie to make some bouquets of dear old grandmothers, and let little Sate come to the flower party and sell them. Won't that be lovely? Every gentleman there will want a bouquet of the nice old ladies in caps, and spectacles; we will make it the fashion; then they will sell beautifully, and the little merchant shall go shares on the proceeds, for the sake of her artist sister." [287]

"It is a good idea," said the minister. "I infer from what that handsome boy Jerry has told me, that they have some scheme on hand which requires money. I am very much interested in those young people, my dear. I wish you would keep a watch on them, and lend a helping hand when you can."

CHAPTER XVI. AN ORDEAL.

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THAT was the way it came about that little Sate not only, but Susie and Nettie, went to the flower party.

They had not expected to do any such thing. The little girls, who were not used to going any where, had paid no attention to the announcements on Sunday, and Nettie had heard as one with whom such things had nothing in common. Her treatment in the Sabbath-school was not such as to make her long for the companionship of the girls of her age, and by this time she knew that her dress at the flower party would be sure to command more attention than was pleasant; so she had planned as a matter of course to stay away.

But the little old ladies in their caps and spectacles springing into active life, put a new face on the matter. Certainly no more astonished young person can be imagined than Nettie Decker was, the morning Miss Sherrill called on her, the one daisy she had begged still carefully preserved, and proposed her plan of partnership in the flower party. [289]

"It will add ever so much to the fun," she explained, "besides bringing you a nice little sum for your spending money."

Did Miss Sherrill have any idea how far that argument would reach just now, Nettie wondered.

"We can dress the little girls in daisies," continued their teacher. "Little Sate will look like a flower herself, with daisies wreathed about her dress and hair."

"Little Sate will be afraid, I think," Nettie objected. "She is very timid, and not used to seeing many people."

"But with Susie she will not mind, will she? Susie has assurance enough to take her through anything. Oh, I wonder if little Sate would not recite a verse about the daisy grandmothers? I have such a cunning one for her. May I teach her, Mrs. Decker, and see if I can get her to learn it?"

Mrs. Decker's consent was very easy to gain; indeed it had been freely given in Mrs. Decker's heart before it was asked. For Miss Sherrill had not been in the room five minutes before she had said: "Your son, Norman, I believe his name is, has promised to help my brother with the church flowers this evening. My brother says he is an excellent helper; his eye is so true; they had quite a laugh together, last week. It seems one of the wreaths was not hung plumb; your son and my brother had an argument about it, and it was finally left as my brother had placed it, but was out of line several inches. He was obliged to admit that if he had followed Norman's direction it would have looked much better." After that, it would have been hard for Miss Sherrill to have asked a favor which Mrs. Decker would not grant if she could. *She* saw through it all; these people were in league with Nettie, to try to save her boy. What wasn't she ready to do at their bidding!

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There was but one thing about which she was positive. The little girls could not go without Nettie; they talked it over in the evening, after Miss Sherrill was gone. Nettie looked distressed. She liked to please Miss Sherrill; she was willing to make many grandmothers; she would help to put the little girls in as dainty attire as possible, but she did *not* want to go to the flower festival. She planned various ways; Jerry would take them down, or Norm; perhaps even *he* would go with them; surely mother would be willing to have them go with Norm. Miss Sherrill would look after them carefully, and they would come home at eight o'clock; before they began to grow very sleepy.

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But no, Mrs. Decker was resolved; she could not let them go unless Nettie would go with them and bring them home. "I let one child run the streets," she said with a heavy sigh, "and I have lived to most wish he had died when he was a baby, before I did it; and I said then I would never let another one go out of my sight as long as I had control; I can't go; but I would just as soon they would be with you as with me; and unless you go, they can't stir a step, and that's the whole of it." Mrs. Decker was a very determined woman when she set out to be; and Nettie looked the picture of dismay. It did not seem possible to her to go to a flower party; and on the other hand it seemed really dreadful to thwart Miss Sherrill. Jerry sat listening, saying little, but the word he put in now and then, was on Mrs. Decker's side; he owned to himself that he never so entirely approved of her as at that moment. He wanted Nettie to go to the flower party.

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"But I have nothing to wear?" said Nettie, blushing, and almost weeping.

"Nothing to wear!" repeated Mrs. Decker in honest astonishment. "Why, what do you wear on Sundays, I should like to know? I'm sure you look as neat and nice as any girl I ever saw, in your gingham. I was watching you last Sunday and thinking how pretty it was."

"Yes; but, mother, they all wear white at such places; and I cut up my white dress, you know, for the little girls; it was rather short for me anyway; but I should feel queer in any other color."

"O, well," said Mrs. Decker in some irritation, "if they go to such places to show their clothes, why, I suppose you must stay at home, if you have none that you want to show. I thought, being it was a church, it didn't matter, so you were neat and clean; but churches are like everything else, it seems, places for show."

Jerry looked grave disapproval at Nettie, but she felt injured and could have cried. Was it fair to accuse her of going to church to show her clothes, or of being over-particular, when she went every Sunday in a blue and white gingham such as no other girl in her class would wear even to school? This was not church, it was a party. It was hard that she must be blamed for pride, when she was only too glad to stay at home from it.

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"I can't go in my blue dress, and that is the whole of it," she said at last, a good deal of decision in her voice.

"Very well," said Mrs. Decker. "Then we'll say no more about it; as for the little girls going without you, they sha'n't do it. When I set my foot down, it's *down*."

Jerry instinctively looked down at her foot as she spoke. It was a good-sized one, and looked as though it could set firmly on any question on which it was put. His heart began to fail him; the flower party and certain things which he hoped to accomplish thereby, were fading. He took refuge with Mrs. Smith to hide his disappointment, and also to learn wisdom about this matter of dress.

"Do clothes make such a very great difference to girls?" was his first question.

"Difference?" said Mrs. Smith rubbing a little more flour on her hands, and plunging them again into the sticky mass she was kneading.

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"Yes'm. They seem to think of clothes the first thing, when there is any place to go to; boys aren't that way. I don't believe a boy knows whether his coat ought to be brown or green. What makes the difference?"

Mrs. Smith laughed a little. "Well," she said reflectively, "there is a difference, now that's a fact. I noticed it time and again when I was living with Mrs. Jennison. Dick would go off with whatever he happened to have on; and Florence was always in a flutter as to whether she looked

as well as the rest. I've heard folks say that it is the fault of the mothers, because they make such a fuss over the girls' clothes, and keep rigging them up in something bright, just to make 'em look pretty, till they succeed in making them think there isn't anything quite so important in life as what they wear on their backs. It's all wrong, I believe. But then, Nettie ain't one of that kind. She hasn't had any mother to perk her up and make her vain. I shouldn't think she would be one to care about clothes much."

"She doesn't," said Jerry firmly. "I don't think she would care if other folks didn't. The girls in her class act hatefully to her; they don't speak, if they can help it. I suppose it's clothes; I don't know what else; they are always rigged out like hollyhocks or tulips; they make fun of her, I guess; and that isn't very pleasant."

"Is that the reason she won't go to the flower show next week?"

"Yes'm, that's the reason. All the girls are going to dress in white; I suppose she thinks she will look queerly, and be talked about. But I don't understand it. Seems to me if all the boys were going to wear blue coats, and I knew it, I'd just as soon wear my gray one if gray was respectable."

"She ought to have a white dress, now that's a fact," said Mrs. Smith with energy, patting her brown loaf, and tucking it down into the tin in a skilful way. "It isn't much for a girl like her to want; if her father was the kind of man he ought to be, she might have a white dress for best, as well as not; I've no patience with him."

"Her father hasn't drank a drop this week," said Jerry.

"Hasn't; well, I'm glad of it; but I'm thinking of what he has done, and what he will go and do, as likely as not, next week; they might be as forehanded as any folks I know of, if he was what he ought to be; there isn't a better workman in the town. Well, you don't care much about the flower party, I suppose?"

"I don't now," said Jerry, wearily. "When I thought the little girls were going, I had a plan. Sate is such a little thing, she would be sure to be half-asleep by eight o'clock; and I was going to coax Norm to come for her, and we carry her home between us. Norm won't go to a flower party, out and out; but he is good-natured, and was beginning to think a great deal of Sate; then I thought Mr. Sherrill would speak to him. The more we can get Norm to feeling he belongs in such places, the less he will feel like belonging to the corner groceries, and the streets."

"I see," said Mrs. Smith admiringly. "Well, I do say I didn't think Nettie was the kind of girl to put a white dress between her chances of helping folks. Sarah Ann thinks she's a real true Christian; but Satan does seem to be into the clothes business from beginning to end."

"I don't suppose it is any easier for a Christian to be laughed at and slighted, than it is for other people," said Jerry, inclined to resent the idea that Nettie was not showing the right spirit; although in his heart he was disappointed in her for caring so much about the color of her dress.

"Well, I don't know about that," said Mrs. Smith, stopping in the act of tucking her bread under the blankets, to look full at Jerry, "why, they even made fun of the Lord Jesus Christ; dressed him up in purple, like a king, and mocked at him! When it comes to remembering that, it would seem as if any common Christian might be almost glad of a chance to be made fun of, just to stand in the same lot with him."

This was a new thought to Jerry. He studied it for awhile in silence. Now it so happened that neither Mrs. Smith nor Jerry remembered certain facts; one was that Mrs. Smith's kitchen window was in a line with Mrs. Decker's bedroom window, where Nettie had gone to sit while she mended Norm's shirt; the other was that a gentle breeze was blowing, which brought their words distinctly to Nettie's ears. At first she had not noticed the talk, busy with her own thoughts, then she heard her name, and paused needle in hand, to wonder what was being said about her. Then, coming to her senses, she determined to leave the room; but her mother, for convenience, had pushed her ironing table against the bedroom door, and then had gone to the yard in search of chips; Nettie was a prisoner; she tried to push the table by pushing against the door, but the floor was uneven, and the table would not move; meantime the conversation going on across the alleyway, came distinctly to her. No use to cough, they were too much interested to hear her. By and by she grew so interested as to forget that the words were not intended for her to hear. There were more questions involved in this matter of dress than she had thought about. Her cheeks began to burn a little with the thought that her neighbor had been planning help for Norm, which she was blocking because she had no white dress! This was an astonishment! She had not known she was proud. In fact, she had thought herself very humble, and worthy of commendation because she went Sabbath after Sabbath to the school in the same blue and white dress, not so fresh now by a great deal as when she first came home.

When Mrs. Smith reached the sentence which told of the Lord Jesus being robed in purple, and crowned with thorns, and mocked, two great tears fell on Norm's shirt sleeve.

It was a very gentle little girl who moved about the kitchen getting early tea; Mrs. Decker glanced at her from time to time in a bewildered way. The sort of girl with whom she was best acquainted would have slammed things about a little; both because she had not clothes to wear like other children, and because she had been blamed for not wanting to do what was expected of her. But Nettie's face had no trace of anger, her movements were gentleness itself; her voice when she spoke was low and sweet: "Mother, I will take the little girls, if you will let them go."

Mrs. Decker drew a relieved sigh. "I'd like them to go because *she* asked to have them; and I can see plain enough she is trying to get hold of Norm; so is *he*; that's what helping with the

flowers means; and there ain't anything I ain't willing to do to help, only I couldn't let the little girls go without you; they'd be scared to death, and it wouldn't look right. I'm sorry enough you ain't got suitable clothes; if I could help it, you should have as good as the best of them."

"Never mind," said Nettie, "I don't think I care anything about the dress now." She was thinking of that crown of thorns. So when Miss Sherrill called the way was plain and little Sate ready to be taught anything she would teach her.

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They went away down to the pond under the clump of trees which formed such a pretty shade; and there Sate's slow sweet voice said over the lines as they were told to her, putting in many questions which the words suggested. "He makes the flowers blow," she repeated with thoughtful face, then: "What did He make them for?"

"I think it was because He loved them; and He likes to give you and me sweet and pleasant things to look at."

"Does He love flowers?"

"I think so, darling."

"And birds? See the birds!" For at that moment two beauties standing on the edge of their nest, looked down into the clear water, and seeing themselves reflected in its smoothness began to talk in low sweet chirps to their shadows.

"Oh, yes, He loves the birds, I am sure; think how many different kinds He has made, and how beautiful they are. Then He has given them sweet voices, and they are thanking Him as well as they know how, for all his goodness. Listen."

Sure enough, one of the little birds hopped back a trifle, balanced himself well on the nest, and, putting up his little throat, trilled a lovely song.

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"What does he say?" asked Sate, watching him intently.

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Sherrill, with a little laugh. Sate was taxing her powers rather too much. "But God understands, you know; and I am sure the words are very sweet to him."

Sate reflected over this for a minute, then went back to the flowers.

"What made Him put the colors on them? Does He like to see pretty colors, do you sink? Which color does He like just the very bestest of all?"

"O you darling! I don't know that, either. Perhaps, crimson; or, no, I think He must like pure white ones a little the best. But He likes little human flowers the best of all. Little white flowers with souls. Do you know what I mean, darling? White hearts are given to the little children who try all the time to do right, because they love Jesus, and want to please him."

"Sate wants to," said the little girl earnestly. "Sate loves Jesus; and she would like to kiss him."

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"I do not know but you shall, some day. Now shall we take another line of the hymn?" continued her teacher.

"I tried to teach her," explained Miss Sherrill to her brother. "But I think, after all, she taught me the most. She is the dearest little thing, and asks the strangest questions! When I look at her grave, sweet face, and hear her slow, sweet voice making wise answers, and asking wise questions, a sort of baby wisdom, you know, I can only repeat over and over the words:

"'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

"To-day I told her the story of Jesus taking the little children up in his arms and blessing them. She listened with that thoughtful look in her eyes which is so wonderful, then suddenly she held up her pretty arms and said in the most coaxing tones:

"'Take little Sate to Him, and let Him bless her, yight away.'

"Tremaine, I could hardly keep back the tears. Do you think He can be going to call her soon?"

"Not necessarily at all. There is no reason why a little child should not live very close to Him on earth. I hope that little girl has a great work to do for Christ in this world. She has a very sweet face."

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CHAPTER XVII. THE FLOWER PARTY.

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I DARE say some of you think Nettie Decker was a very silly girl to care so much because her dress was a blue and white gingham instead of being all white.

You have told your friend Katie about the story and asked her if she didn't think it was real silly to make such an ado over *clothes*; you have said you were sure you would just as soon wear a blue gingham as not if it was clean and neat. But now let me venture a hint. I shouldn't be surprised if that was because you never do have to go to places differently dressed from all the others. Because if you did, you would know that it was something of a trial. Oh! I don't say it is the hardest thing in the world; or that one is all ready to die as a martyr who does it; but what I *do* say is, that it takes a little moral courage; and, for one, I am not surprised that Nettie looked very sober about it when the afternoon came.

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It took her a good while to dress; not that there was so much to be done, but she stopped to think. With her hair in her neck, still unbraided, she pinned a lovely pink rose at her breast just to see how pretty it would look for a minute. Miss Sherrill had left it for her to wear; but she did not intend to wear it, because she thought it would not match well with her gingham dress. Just here, I don't mind owning that I think her silly; because I believe that sweet flowers go with sweet pure young faces, whether the dress is of gingham or silk.

But Nettie looked grave, as I said, and wished it was over; and tried to plan for the hundredth time, how it would all be. The girls, Cecelia Lester and Lorena Barstow and the rest of them, would be out in their elegant toilets, and would look at her so! That Ermina Farley would be there; she had seen her but once, on the first Sunday, and liked her face and her ways a little better than the others; but she had been away since then. Jerry said she was back, however, and Mrs. Smith said they were the richest folks in town; and of course Ermina would be elegantly dressed at the flower party.

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Well, she did not care. She was willing to have them all dressed beautifully; she was not mean enough to want them to wear gingham dresses, if only they would not make fun of hers. Oh! if she could *only* stay at home, and help iron, and get supper, and fry some potatoes nicely for father, how happy she would be. Then she sighed again, and set about braiding her hair. She meant to go, but she could not help being sorry for herself to think it must be done; and she spent a great deal of trouble in trying to plan just how hateful it would all be; how the girls would look, and whisper, and giggle; and how her cheeks would burn. Oh dear!

Then she found it was late, and had to make her fingers fly, and to rush about the little woodhouse chamber which was still her room, in a way which made Sarah Ann say to her mother with a significant nod, "I guess she's woke up and gone at it, poor thing!" Yes, she had; and was down in fifteen minutes more.

Oh! but didn't the little girls look pretty! Nettie forgot her trouble for a few minutes, in admiring them when she had put the last touches to their toilet. Susie was to be in a tableau where she would need a dolly, and Miss Sherrill had furnished one for the occasion. A lovely dolly with real hair, and blue eyes, and a bright blue sash to match them; and when Susie got it in her arms, there came such a sweet, softened look over her face that Nettie hardly knew her. The sturdy voice, too, which was so apt to be fierce, softened and took a motherly tone; the dolly was certainly educating Susie. Little Sate looked on, interested, pleased, but without the slightest shade of envy. She wanted no dolly; or, if she did, there was a little black-faced, worn, rag one reposing at this moment in the trundle bed where little Sate's own head would rest at night; kissed, and caressed, and petted, and told to be good until mamma came back; this dolly had all of Sate's warm heart. For the rest, the grave little old women in caps and spectacles, which wound about her dress, crept up in bunches on her shoulders, lay in nestling heaps at her breast, filled all Sate's thoughts. She seemed to have become a little old woman herself, so serious and womanly was her face.

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Nettie took a hand of each, and they went to the flower festival. There was to be a five o'clock tea for all the elderly people of the church, and the tables, some of them, were set in Mr. Eastman's grounds, which adjoined the church. When Nettie entered these grounds she found a company of girls several years younger than herself, helping to decorate the tables with flowers; at least that was their work, but as Nettie appeared at the south gate, a queer little object pushed in at the west side. A child not more than six years old, with a clean face, and carefully combed hair, but dressed in a plain dark calico; and her pretty pink toes were without shoes or stockings.

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AT THE FLOWER PARTY.

I am not sure that if a little wolf had suddenly appeared before them, it could have caused more exclamations of astonishment and dismay.

"Only look at that child!" "The idea!" "Just to think of such a thing!" were a few of the exclamations with which the air was thick. At last, one bolder than the rest, stepped towards her: "Little girl, where did you come from? What in the world do you want here?"

Startled by the many eyes and the sharp tones, the small new-comer hid her face behind an immense bunch of glowing hollyhocks, which she held in her hand, and said not a word. Then the chorus of voices became more eager:

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"Do look at her hollyhocks! Did ever anybody see such a queer little fright! Girls, I do believe she has come to the party." Then the one who had spoken before, tried again: "See here, child, whoever you are, you must go right straight home; this is no place for you. I wonder what your mother was about—if you have one—to let you run away barefooted, and looking like a fright."

Now the barefooted maiden was thoroughly frightened, and sobbed outright. It was precisely what Nettie Decker needed to give her courage. When she came in at the gate, she had felt like shrinking away from all eyes; now she darted an indignant glance at the speaker, and moved quickly toward the crying child, Susie and Sate following close behind.

"Don't cry, little girl," she said in the gentlest tones, stooping and putting an arm tenderly around the trembling form; "you haven't done anything wrong; Miss Sherrill will be here soon, and she will make it all right."

Thus comforted, the tears ceased, and the small new-comer allowed her hand to be taken; while Susie came around to her other side, and scowled fiercely, as though to say: "I'll protect this girl myself; let's see you touch her now!"

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A burst of laughter greeted Nettie as soon as she had time to give heed to it. Others had joined the groups, among them Lorena Barstow and Irene Lewis. "What's all this?" asked Irene.

"O, nothing," said one; "only that Decker girl's sister, or cousin, or something has just arrived from Cork, and come in search of her. Lorena Barstow, did you ever see such a queer-looking fright?"

"I don't see but they look a good deal alike," said Lorena, tossing her curls; "I'm sure their dresses correspond; is she a sister?"

"Why, no," answered one of the smaller girls; "those two cunning little things in white are Nettie Decker's sisters; I think they are real sweet."

"Oh!" said Lorena, giving them a disagreeable stare, "in white, are they? The unselfish older sister has evidently cut up her nightgowns to make them white dresses for this occasion."

"Lorena," said the younger girl, "if I were you I would be ashamed; mother would not like you to talk in that way."

"Well, you see Miss Nanie, you are not me, therefore you cannot tell what you would be, or do; and I want to inform you it is not your business to tell me what mother would like."

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Imagine Nettie Decker standing quietly, with the barefooted child's small hand closely clasped in hers, listening to all this! There was a pretense of lowered voices, yet every word was distinct to her ears. Her heart beat fast and she began to feel as though she really was paying quite a high price for the possibility of getting Norm into the church parlor for a few minutes that evening.

At that moment, through the main gateway, came Ermina Parley, a colored man with her, bearing a basket full of such wonderful roses, that for a minute the group could only exclaim over them. Ermina was in white, but her dress was simply made, and looked as though she might not be afraid to tumble about on the grass in it; her shoes were thick, and the blue sash she wore, though broad and handsome, had some way a quiet air of fitness for the occasion, which did not seem to belong to most of the others. She watched the disposal of her roses, then gave an inquiring glance about the grounds as she said, "What are you all doing here?"

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"We are having a tableau," said Lorena Barstow. "Look behind you, and you will see the Misses Bridget and Margaret Mulrooney, who have just arrived from ould Ireland shure."

Most of the thoughtless girls laughed, mistaking this rudeness for wit, but Ermina turned quickly and caught her first glimpse of Nettie's burning face; then she hastened toward her.

"Why, here is little Prudy, after all," she said eagerly; "I coaxed her mother to let her come, but I didn't think she would. Has Miss Sherrill seen her? I think she will make such a cunning Roman flower-girl, in that tableau, you know. Her face is precisely the shape and style of the little girls we saw in Rome last winter. Poor little girlie, was she frightened? How kind you were to take care of her. She is a real bright little thing. I want to coax her into Sunday-school if I can. Let us go and ask Miss Sherrill what she thinks about the flower-girl."

How fast Ermina Farley could talk! She did not wait for replies. The truth was, Nettie's glowing cheeks, and Susie's fierce looks, told her the story of trial for somebody else besides the Roman flower-girl; she could guess at things which might have been said before she came. She wound her arm familiarly about Nettie's waist as she spoke, and drew her, almost against her will, across the lawn. "My!" said Irene Lewis. "How good we are!"

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"Birds of a feather flock together," quoted Lorena Barstow. "I think that barefooted child and her protector look alike."

"Still," said Irene, "you must remember that Ermina Farley has joined that flock; and her feathers are very different."

"Oh! that is only for effect," was the naughty reply, with another toss of the rich curls.

Now what was the matter with all these disagreeable young people? Did they really attach so much importance to the clothes they wore as to think no one was respectable who was not dressed like them? Had they really no hearts, so that it made no difference to them how deeply they wounded poor Nettie Decker?

I do not think it was quite either of these things. They had been, so far in their lives, unfortunate, in that they had heard a great deal about dress, and style, until they had done what young people and a few older ones are apt to do, attached too much importance to these things. They were neither old enough, nor wise enough, to know that it is a mark of a shallow nature to judge of people by the clothes they wear; then, in regard to the ill-natured things said, I tell you truly, that even Lorena Barstow was ashamed of herself. When her younger sister reproved her, the flush which came on her cheek was not all anger, much of it was shame. But she had taught her tongue to say so many disagreeable words, and to pride itself on its independence in saying what she pleased, that the habit asserted itself, and she could not seem to control it. The contrast between her own conduct and Ermina Farley's struck her so sharply and disagreeably it served only to make her worse than before; precisely the effect which follows when people of uncontrolled tempers find themselves rebuked.

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Half-way down the lawn the party in search of Miss Sherrill met her face to face. Her greeting was warm. "Oh! here is my dear little grandmother. Thank you, Nettie, for coming; I look to you for a great deal of help. Why, Ermina, what wee mousie have you here?"

"She is a little Roman flower-girl, Miss Sherrill; they live on Parker street. Her mother is a nice woman; my mother has her to run the machine. I coaxed her to let Trudie wear her red dress and come barefoot, until you would see if she would do for the Roman flower-girl. Papa says her face is very Roman in style, and she always makes us think of the flower-girls we saw there. I brought my Roman sash to dress her in, if you thought well of it; she is real bright, and will do just as she is told."

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"It is the very thing," said Miss Sherrill with a pleased face; "I am so glad you thought of it. And the hollyhocks are just red enough to go in the basket. Did you think of them too?"

"No, ma'am; mamma did. She said the more red flowers we could mass about her, the better for a Roman peasant."

"It will be a lovely thing," said Miss Sherrill. Then she stooped and kissed the small brown face, which was now smiling through its tears. "You have found good friends, little one. She is very small to be here alone. Ermina, will you and Nettie take care of her this afternoon, and see that she is happy?"

"Yes'm," said Ermina promptly. "Nettie was taking care of her when I came. She was afraid at first, I think."

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"They were ugly to her," volunteered Susie, "they were just as ugly to her as they could be; they made her cry. If they'd done it to Sate I would have scratched them and bit them."

"Oh," said Miss Sherrill sorrowfully. "How sorry I am to hear it; then Susie would have been naughty too, and it wouldn't have made the others any better; in fact, it would have made them worse."

"I don't care," said Susie, but she did care. She said that, just as you do sometimes, when you mean you care a great deal, and don't want to let anybody know it. For the first time, Susie reflected whether it was a good plan to scratch and bite people who did not, in her judgment, behave well. It had not been a perfect success in her experience, she was willing to admit that; and if it made Miss Sherrill sorry, it was worth thinking about.

Well, that afternoon which began so dismally, blossomed out into a better time than Nettie had imagined it possible for her to have. To be sure those particular girls who had been the cause of her sorrow, would have nothing to do with her; and whispered, and sent disdainful glances her way when they had an opportunity; but Nettie went in their direction as little as possible, and when she did was in such a hurry that she sometimes forgot all about them. Miss Sherrill, who was chairman of the committee of entertainment, kept her as busy as a bee the entire afternoon; running hither and thither, carrying messages to this one, and pins to that one, setting this vase of flowers at one end, and that lovely basket at another, and, a great deal of the time, standing right beside Miss Sherrill herself, handing her, at call, just what she needed when she dressed the girls with their special flowers. She could hear the bright pleasant talk which passed between Miss Sherrill and the other young ladies. She was often appealed to with a pleasant word. Her own teacher smiled on her more than once, and said she was the handiest little body who had ever helped them; and all the time that lovely Ermina Farley with her beautiful hair, and her pretty ways, and her sweet low voice, was near at hand, joining in everything which she had to do. To be sure she heard, in one of her rapid scampers across the lawn, this question asked in a loud tone by Lorena Barstow: "I wonder how much they pay that girl for running errands? Maybe she will earn enough to get herself a new white nightgown to wear to parties;" but at that particular minute, Ermina Farley running from another direction on an errand precisely like her own, bumped up against her with such force that their noses ached; then both stopped to laugh merrily, and some way, what with the bump, and the laughter, Nettie forgot to cry, when she had a chance, over the unkind words. Then, later in the afternoon, came Jerry; and in less than five minutes he joined their group, and made himself so useful that when Mr. Sherrill came presently for boys to go with him to the chapel to arrange the tables, Miss Sherrill said in low tones, "Don't take Jerry please, we need him here." Nettie heard it, and beamed her satisfaction. Also she

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heard Irene Lewis say, "Now they've taken that Irish boy into their crowd—shouldn't you think Ermina Farley would be ashamed!"

Then Nettie's face fairly paled. It is one thing to be insulted yourself; it is another to stand quietly by and see your friends insulted. She was almost ready to appeal to Miss Sherrill for protection from tongues. But Jerry heard the same remark, and laughed; not in a forced way, but actually as though it was very amusing to him. And almost immediately he called out something to Ermina, using an unmistakable Irish brogue. What was the use in trying to protect a boy who was so indifferent as that?

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A SATISFACTORY EVENING.

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THE little old grandmothers with their queer caps were perhaps the feature of the evening. Everybody wanted a bouquet of them. In fact, long before eight o'clock, Jerry had been hurried away for a fresh supply, and Nettie had been established behind a curtain to "make more grandmothers." In her excitement she made them even prettier than before; and sweet, grave little Sate had no trouble in selling every one. The pretty Roman flower girl was so much admired, that her father, a fine-looking young mechanic who came after her bringing red stockings and neat shoes, carried her off at last in triumph on his shoulder, saying he was afraid her head would be turned with so much praise, but thanking everybody with bright smiling eyes for giving his little girl such a pleasant afternoon.

"She isn't Irish, after all," said Irene Lewis, watching them. "And Mr. Sherrill shook hands with him as familiarly as though he was an old friend; I wish we hadn't made such simpletons of ourselves. Lorena Barstow, what did you want to go and say she was an Irish girl for?"

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"I didn't say any such thing," said Lorena in a shrill voice; and then these two who had been friends in ill humor all the afternoon quarreled, and went home more unhappy than before. And still I tell you they were not the worst girls in the world; and were very much ashamed of themselves.

Before eight o'clock, Norm came. To be sure he stoutly refused, at first, to step beyond the doorway, and ordered Nettie in a somewhat surly tone to "bring that young one out," if she wanted her carried home. That, of course, was the little grandmother; but her eyes looked as though they had not thought of being sleepy, and the ladies were not ready to let her go. Then the minister, who seemed to understand things without having them explained, said, "Where is Decker? we'll make it all right; come, little grandmother, let us go and see about it." So he took Sate on his shoulder and made his way through the crowd; and Nettie who watched anxiously, presently saw Norm coming back with them, not looking surly at all; his clothes had been brushed, and he had on a clean collar, and his hair was combed, quite as though he had meant to come in, after all.

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Soon after Norm's coming, something happened which gave Nettie a glimpse of her brother in a new light. Young Ernest Belmont was there with his violin. During the afternoon, Nettie had heard whispers of what a lovely player he was, and at last saw with delight that a space was being cleared for him to play. Crowds of people gathered about the platform to listen, but among them all Norm's face was marked; at least it was to Nettie. She had never seen him look like that. He seemed to forget the crowds, and the lights, and everything but the sounds which came from that violin. He stood perfectly still, his eyes never once turning from their earnest gaze of the fingers which were producing such wonderful tones. Nettie, looking, and wondering, almost forgot the music in her astonishment that her brother should be so absorbed. Jerry with some difficulty elbowed his way towards her, his face beaming, and said, "Isn't it splendid?"

For answer she said, "Look at Norm." And Jerry looked.

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"That's so," he said at last, heartily, speaking as though he was answering a remark from somebody; "Norm is a musician. Did you know he liked it so much?"

"I didn't know anything about it," Nettie said, hardly able to keep back the tears, though she did not understand why her eyes should fill; but there was such a look of intense enjoyment in Norm's face, mingled with such a wistful longing for something, as made the tears start in spite of her. "I didn't know he liked *anything* so much as that."

"He likes *that*," said Jerry heartily, "and I am glad."

"I don't know. What makes you glad? I am almost sorry; because he may never have a chance to hear it again."

"He must make his chances; he is going to be a man. I'm glad, because it gives us a hint as to what his tastes are; don't you see?"

"Why, yes," said Nettie, "I see he likes it; but what is the use in knowing people's tastes if you cannot possibly do anything for them?"

"There's no such thing as it not being possible to do most anything," Jerry said good humoredly. "Maybe we will some of us own a violin some day, and Norm will play it for us. Who knows? Stranger things than that have happened."

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But this thing looked to Nettie so improbable that she merely laughed. The music suddenly ceased, and Norm came back from dreamland and looked about him, and blushed, and felt awkward. He saw the people now, and the lights, and the flowers; he remembered his hands and did not know what to do with them; and his feet felt too large for the space they must occupy.

Jerry plunged through the crowd and stood beside him.

"How did you like it?" he asked, and Norm cleared his voice before replying; he could not understand why his throat should feel so husky.

"I like a fiddle," he said. "There is a fellow comes into the corner grocery down there by Crossman's and plays, sometimes; I always go down there, when I hear of it."

If Jerry could have caught Nettie's eye just then he would have made a significant gesture; the store by Crossman's made tobacco and liquor its chief trade. So a fiddle was one of the things used to draw the boys into it! [325]

"Is a fiddle the only kind of music you like?" Jerry had been accustomed to calling it a violin, but the instinct of true politeness which was marked in him, made him say fiddle just now as Norm had done.

"Oh! I like anything that whistles a tune!" said Norm. "I've gone a rod out of my way to hear a jew's-harp many a time; even an old hand-organ sounds nice to me. I don't know why, but I never hear one without stopping and listening as long as I can." He laughed a little, as though ashamed of the taste, and looked at Jerry suspiciously. But there was not the slightest hint of a smile on the boy's face, only hearty interest and approval.

"I like music, too, almost any sort; but I don't believe I like it as well as you. Your face looked while you were listening as though you could make some yourself if you tried."

The smile went out quickly from Norm's face, and Jerry thought he heard a little sigh with the reply:

"I never had a chance to try; and never expect to have."

"Well, now, I should like to know why not? I never could understand why a boy with brains, and hands, and feet, shouldn't have a try at almost anything which was worth trying, sometime in his life." It was not Jerry who said this, but the minister who had come up in time to hear the last words from both sides. He stopped before Norm, smiling as he spoke. "Try the music, my friend, by all means, if you like it. It is a noble taste, worth cultivating." [326]

Norm looked sullen. "It's easy to talk," he said severely, "but when a fellow has to work like a dog to get enough to eat and wear, to keep him from starving or freezing, I'd like to see him get a chance to try at music, or anything else of that kind!"

"So should I. He is the very fellow who ought to have the chance; and more than that, in nine cases out of ten he is the fellow who gets it. A boy who is willing and able to work, is pretty sure, in this country, to have opportunity to gratify his tastes in the end. He may have to wait awhile, but that only sharpens the appetite of a genuine taste; if it is a worthy taste, as music certainly is, it will grow with his growth, and will help him to plan, and save, and contrive, until one of these days he will show you! By the way, you would like organ music, I fancy; the sort which is sometimes played on parlor organs. If you will come to the parsonage to-morrow night at eight o'clock, I think I can promise you something which you will enjoy. My sister is going to try some new music for a few friends, at that time; suppose you come and pick out your favorite?" [327]

All Jerry's satisfaction and interest shone in his face; to-morrow night at eight o'clock! All day he had been trying to arrange something which would keep Norm at that hour away from the aforesaid corner grocery, where he happened to know some doubtful plans were to be arranged for future mischief, by the set who gathered there. If only Norm would go to the parsonage it would be the very thing. But Norm flushed and hesitated. "Bring a friend with you," said the minister. "Bring Jerry, here; you like music, don't you, Jerry?"

"Yes, sir," said Jerry promptly; "I like music very much, and I would like to go if Norm is willing."

"Bring Jerry with you." That sentence had a pleasant sound. Up to this moment it was the younger boy who had patronized the elder. Norm called him the "little chap," but for all that looked up to him with a curious sort of respect such as he felt for none of the "fellows" who were his daily companions; the idea of bringing him to a place of entertainment had its charms. [328]

"May I expect you?" asked the minister, reading his thoughts almost as plainly as though they had been printed on his face, and judging that this was the time to press an acceptance.

"Why, yes," said Norm, "I suppose so."

One of these days Norman Decker will not think of accepting an invitation with such words, but his intentions are good, now, and the minister thanks him as though he had received a favor, and departs well pleased.

And now it is really growing late and little Sate must be carried home. It was an evening to remember.

They talked it over by inches the next morning. Nettie finishing the breakfast dishes, and Jerry sitting on the doorstep fashioning a bracket for the kitchen lamp.

Nettie talked much about Ermina Farley. "She is just as lovely and sweet as she can be. It was beautiful in her to come over to me as she did when she came into that yard; part of it was for [329]

little Trudie's sake, and a great deal of it was for my sake. I saw that at the time; and I saw it plainer all the afternoon. She didn't give me a chance to feel alone once; and she didn't stay near me as though she felt she ought to, but didn't want to, either; she just took hold and helped do everything Miss Sherrill gave me to do, and was as bright and sweet as she could be. I shall never forget it of her. But for all that," she added as she wrung out her dishcloth with an energy which the small white rag hardly needed, "I know it was pretty hard for her to do it, and I shall not give her a chance to do it again."

"I want to know what there was hard about it?" said Jerry, looking up in astonishment. "I thought Ermina Farley seemed to be having as good a time as anybody there."

"Oh, well now, I know, you are not a girl; boys are different from girls. They are not so kind-of-mean! At least, some of them are not," she added quickly, having at that moment a vivid recollection of some mean things which she had endured from boys. "Really I don't think they are," she said, after a moment's thoughtful pause, and replying to the quizzical look on his face. "They don't think about dresses, and hats, and gloves, and all those sorts of things as girls do, and they don't say such hateful things. Oh! I *know* there is a great difference; and I know just how Ermina Farley will be talked about because she went with me, and stood up for me so; and I think it will be very hard for her. I used to think so about you, but you—are real different from girls!"

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"It amounts to about this," said Jerry, whittling gravely. "Good boys are different from bad girls, and bad boys are different from good girls."

Nettie laughed merrily. "No," she said, "I do know what I am talking about, though you don't think so; I know real splendid girls who couldn't have done as Ermina Farley did yesterday, and as you do all the time; and what I say is, I don't mean to put myself where she will *have* to do it, much. I don't want to go to their parties; I don't expect a chance to go, but if I had it, I wouldn't go; and just for her sake, I don't mean to be always around for her to have to take care of me as she did yesterday. I have something else to do." Said Jerry, "Where do you think Norm is to take me this evening?"

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"Norm going to take you!" great wonderment in the tone. "Why, where could he take you? I don't know, I am sure."

"He is to take me to the parsonage at eight o'clock to hear some wonderful music on the organ. He has been invited, and has had permission to bring me with him if he wants to. Don't you talk about not putting yourself where other people will have to take care of you! I advise you to cultivate the acquaintance of your brother. It isn't everybody who gets invited to the parsonage to hear such music as Miss Sherrill can make."

The dishcloth was hung away now, and every bit of work was done. Nettie stood looking at the whittling boy in the doorway for a minute in blank astonishment, then she clasped her hands and said: "O Jerry! Did they do it? Aren't they the very splendidest people you ever knew in your life?"

"They are pretty good," said Jerry, "that's a fact; they are most as good as my father. I'll tell you what it is, if you knew my father you would know a man who would be worth remembering. I had a letter from him last night, and he sent a message to my friend Nettie."

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"What?" asked Nettie, her eyes very bright.

"It was that you were to take good care of his boy; for in his opinion the boy was worth taking care of. On the strength of that I want you to come out and look at Mother Speckle; she is in a very important frame of mind, and has been scolding her children all the morning. I don't know what is the trouble; there are two of her daughters who seem to have gone astray in some way; at least she is very much displeased with them. Twice she has boxed Fluffie's ears, and once she pulled a feather out of poor Buff. See how forlorn she seems!"

By this time they were making their way to the little house where the hen lived, Nettie agreeing to go for a very few minutes, declaring that if Norm was going out every evening there was work to do. He would need a clean collar and she must do it up; for mother had gone out to iron for the day. "Mother is so grateful to Mrs. Smith for getting her a chance to work," she said, as they paused before the two disgraced chickens; "she says she would never have thought of it if it had not been for her; you know she always used to sew. Why, how funny those chickens look! Only see, Jerry, they are studying that eggshell as though they thought they could make one. Now don't they look exactly as though they were planning something?"

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"They are," said Jerry. "They are planning going to housekeeping, I believe; you see they have quarreled with their mother. They consider that they have been unjustly punished, and I am in sympathy with them; and they believe they could make a house to live in out of that eggshell if they could only think of a way to stick it together again. I wish *we* could build a house out of eggshells; or even one room, and we'd have one before the month was over."

"Why?" said Nettie, stooping down to see why Buff kept her foot under her. "Do you want a room, Jerry?"

"Somewhat," said Jerry. "At least I see a number of things we could do if we had a room, that I don't know how to do without one. Come over here, Nettie, and sit down; leave those chickens to sulk it out, and let us talk a little. I have a plan so large that there is no place to put it."

READY TO TRY.

"YOU see," said Jerry, as Nettie came, protesting as she walked that she could stay but a few minutes, because there was Norm's collar, and she had four nice apples out of which she was going to make some splendid apple dumplings for dinner, "you see we must contrive something to keep a young fellow like Norm busy, if we are going to hold him after he is caught. It doesn't do to catch a fish and leave him on the edge of the bank near enough to flounce back into the water. Norm ought to be set to work to help along the plans, and kept so busy he wouldn't have time to get tired of them."

"But how could that be done?" Nettie said in wondering tones, which nevertheless had a note of admiration in them. Jerry went so deeply into things, it almost took her breath away to follow him.

"Just so; that's the problem which ought to be thought out. I can think of things enough; but the room, and the tools to begin with, are the trouble." [335]

"What have you thought of? What would you do if you could?"

"O my!" said Jerry, with a little laugh; "don't ask me that question, or your folks will have no apple dumplings to-day. I don't believe there is any end to the things which I would do if I could. But the first beginnings of them are like this: suppose we had a few dollars capital, and a room."

"You might as well suppose we had a palace, and a million dollars," said Nettie, with a long-drawn sigh.

"No, because I don't expect either of those things; but I do mean to have a room and a few dollars in capital for this thing some day; only, you see, I don't want to wait for them."

"Well, go on; what then?"

"Why, then we would start an eating-house, you and I, on a little bit of a scale, you know. We would have bread with some kind of meat between, and coffee, in cold weather, and lemonade in hot, and a few apples, and now and then some nuts, and a good deal of gingerbread—soft, like what auntie Smith makes—and some ginger-snaps like those Mrs. Dix sent us from the country, and, well, you know the names of things better than I do. Real good things, I mean, but which don't cost much. Such as you, and Sarah Ann, and a good many bright girls learn how to make, without using a great deal of money. Those things are all rather cheap, which I have mentioned, because we have them at our house quite often, and the Smiths are poor, you know. But they are made so nice that they are just capital. Well, I would have them for sale, just as cheap as could possibly be afforded; a great deal cheaper than beer, or cigars, and I would have the room bright and cheery; warm in winter, and as cool as I could make it in summer; then I would have slips of paper scattered about the town, inviting young folks to come in and get a lunch; then when they came, I would have picture papers if I could, for them to look at, and games to play, real nice jolly games, and some kind of music going on now and then. I'd run opposition to that old grocery around the corner from Crossman's, with its fiddle and its whiskey. That's the beginning of what I would do. Just what I told you about, that first night we talked it over. The fellows, lots of them, have nowhere to go; it keeps growing in my mind, the need for doing something of the sort. I never pass that mean grocery without thinking of it." [336]

You should have seen Nettie's eyes! The little touch of discouragement was gone out of them, and they were full of intense thought.

"I can see," she said at last, "just how splendid it might grow to be. But what did you mean about Norm? there isn't any work for him in such a plan. At least, I mean, not until he was interested to help for the sake of others."

"Yes, there is, plenty of business for him. Don't you see? I would have this room, open evenings, after the work was done, and I would have Norm head manager. He should wait on customers, and keep accounts. When the thing got going he would be as busy as a bee; and he is just the sort of fellow to do that kind of thing well, and like it too," he added.

"O Jerry," said Nettie, and her hands were clasped so closely that the blood flowed back into her wrists, "was there ever a nicer thought than that in the world! I know it would succeed; and Norm would like it so much. Norm likes to do things for others, if he only had the chance." [337]

"I know it; and he likes to do things in a business way, and keep everything straight. Oh! he would be just the one. If we only had a room, there is nothing to hinder our beginning in a very small way. Those chickens are growing as fast as they can, and by Thanksgiving there will be a couple of them ready to broil; then the little old grandmothers did so well."

"I know it; who would have supposed that almost four dollars could be made out of some daisy grandmothers! Miss Sherrill gave me one dollar and ninety-five cents which she said was just half of what they had earned. I do think it was so nice in her to give us that chance! She couldn't have known how much we wanted the money. Jerry, why couldn't we begin, just with that? It would start us, and then if the things sold, why, the money from them would keep us started until we found a way to earn more. Why can't we?"

"Room," said Jerry, with commendable brevity. "Why, we have a room; there's the front one that we just put in such nice order. Why not? It is large enough for now, and maybe when our business grew we could get another one somehow." [339]

Jerry stopped fitting the toe of his boot to a hole which he had made in the ground, and looked at the eager young woman of business before him. "Do you mean your mother would let us have the room, and the chance in the kitchen, to go into such business?"

"Mother would do *anything*," said Nettie emphatically, "anything in the world which might possibly keep Norm in the house evenings; you don't know how dreadfully she feels about Norm. She thinks father," and there Nettie stopped. How could a daughter put it into words that her mother was afraid her father would lead his son astray?

"I know," said Jerry. "See here, Nettie, what is the matter with your father? I never saw him look so still, and—well, queer, in some way. Mr. Smith says he doesn't think he is drinking a drop; but he looks unlike himself, somehow, and I can't decide how."

"I don't know," said Nettie, in a low voice. "We don't know what to think of him. He hasn't been so long without drinking, mother says, in four years. But he doesn't act right; or, I mean, natural. He isn't cross, as drinking beer makes him, but he isn't pleasant, as he was for a day or two. He is real sober; hardly speaks at all, nor notices the things I make; and I try just as hard to please him! He eats everything, but he does it as though he didn't know he was eating. Mother thinks he is in some trouble, but she can't tell what. He can't be afraid of losing his place—because mother says he was threatened that two or three times when he was drinking so hard, and he didn't seem to mind it at all; and why should he be discharged now, when he works hard every day? Last Saturday night he brought home more money than he has in years. Mother cried when she saw what there was, but she had debts to pay, so we didn't get much start out of it after all. Then we spend a good deal in coffee; we have it three times a day, hot and strong; I can see father seems to need it; and I have heard that it helped men who were trying not to drink. When I told mother that, she said he should have it if she had to beg for it on her knees. But I don't know what is the matter with father now. Sometimes mother is afraid there is a disease coming on him such as men have who drink; she says he doesn't sleep very well nights, and he groans some, when he is asleep. Mother tries hard," said Nettie, in a closing burst of confidence, "and she *does* have such a hard time! If we could only save Norm for her."

"I'll tell you who your mother looks like, or would look like if she were dressed up, you know. Did you ever see Mrs. Burt?"

"The woman who lives in the cottage where the vines climb all around the front, and who has birds, and a baby? I saw her yesterday. You don't think mother looks like her!"

"She would," said Jerry, positively, "if she had on a pink and white dress and a white fold about her neck. I passed there last night, while Mrs. Burt was sitting out by that window garden of hers, with her baby in her arms; Mr. Burt sat on one of the steps, and they were talking and laughing together. I could not help noticing how much like your mother she looked when she turned her side face. Oh! she is younger, of course; she looks almost as though she might be your mother's daughter. I was thinking what fun it would be if she were, and we could go and visit her, and get her to help us about all sorts of things. Mr. Burt knows how to do every kind of work about building a house, or fixing up a room."

"He is a nice man, isn't he?"

"Why, yes, nice enough; he is steady and works hard. Mr. Smith thinks he is quite a pattern; he has bought that little house where he lives, and fixed it all up with vines and things; but I should like him better if he didn't puff tobacco smoke into his wife's face when he talked with her. He doesn't begin to be so good a workman as your father, nor to know so much in a hundred ways. I think your father is a very nice-looking man when he is dressed up. He looks smart, and he is smart. Mr. Smith says there isn't a man in town who can do the sort of work that he can at the shop, and that he could get very high wages and be promoted and all that, if"—

Jerry stopped suddenly, and Nettie finished the sentence with a sigh. She too had passed the Burt cottage and admired its beauty and neatness. To think that Mr. Burt owned it, and was a younger man by fifteen years at least than her father—and was not so good a workman! then see how well he dressed his wife; and little Bobby Burt looked as neat and pretty in Sunday-school as the best of them. It was very hard that there must be such a difference in homes. If she could only live in a house like the Burt cottage, and have things nice about her as they did, and have her father and mother sit together and talk, as Mr. and Mrs. Burt did, she should be perfectly happy, Nettie told herself. Then she sprang up from the log and declared that she must not waste another minute of time; but that Jerry's plan was the best one she had ever heard, and she believed they could begin it.

With this thought still in mind, after the dinner dishes were carefully cleared away, and her mother, returned from the day's ironing, had been treated to a piece of the apple dumpling warmed over for her, and had said it was as nice a bit as she ever tasted, Nettie began on the subject which had been in her thoughts all day:

"What would you think of us young folks going into business?"

"Going into business!"

"Yes'm. Jerry and Norm and me. Jerry has a plan; he has been telling me about it this morning. It is nice if we can only carry it out; and I shouldn't wonder if we could. That is, if you think well of it."

"I begin to think there isn't much that you and Jerry can't do, with Norm, or with anybody else, if you try; and you both appear to be ready to try to do all you can for everybody."

Mrs. Decker's tone was so hearty and pleased, that you would not have known her for the same woman who looked forward dismally but a few weeks ago to Nettie's home-coming. Her heart had so warmed to the girl in her efforts for father and brother, that she was almost ready to agree to anything which she could have to propose. So Nettie, well pleased with this beginning, unfolded with great clearness and detail, Jerry's wonderful plan for not only catching Norm, but setting him up in business.

Mrs. Decker listened, and questioned and cross-questioned, sewing swiftly the while on Norm's jacket which had been torn, and which was being skilfully darned in view of the evening to be spent at the parsonage.

"Well," she said at last, "it looks wild to me, I own; I should as soon try to fly as of making anything like that work in this town; but then, you've made things work, you two, that I'd no notion could be done, and between you, you seem to kind of bewitch Norm. He's done things for you that I would no sooner have thought of asking of him than I would have asked him to fly up to the moon; and this may be another of them. Anyhow, if you've a mind to try it, I won't be the one to stop you. I've been that scared for Norm, that I'm ready for anything. Oh! the *room*, of course you may use it. If you wanted to have a circus in there, I think I'd agree, wild animals and all; I've had worse than wild animals in my day. No, your father won't object; he thinks what you do is about right, I guess. And for the matter of that, he doesn't object to anything nowadays; I don't know what to make of him."

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The sentence ended with a long-drawn, troubled sigh.

Just what this strange change in her husband meant, Mrs. Decker could not decide; and each theory which she started in her mind about it, looked worse than the last.

Norm's collar was ready for him, so was his jacket. He was somewhat surly; the truth was, he had received what he called a "bid" to the merry-making which was to take place in the back room of the grocery, around the corner from Crossman's, and he was a good deal tried to think he had cut himself off by what he called a "spooney" promise, from enjoying the evening there. At the same time there was a certain sense of largeness in saying he could not come because he had received an invitation elsewhere, which gave him a momentary pleasure. To be sure the boys coaxed until they had discovered the place of his engagement, and joked him the rest of the time, until he was half-inclined to wish he had never heard of the parsonage; but for all that, a certain something in Norman which marked him as different from some boys, held him to his word when it was passed; and he had no thought of breaking from his engagement. It was an evening such as Norman had reason to remember. For the first time in his life he sat in a pleasantly furnished home, among ladies and gentlemen, and heard himself spoken to as one who "belonged."

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Three ladies were there from the city, and two gentlemen whom Norman had never seen before; all friends of the Sherrills come out to spend a day with them. They were not only unlike any people whom he had ever seen before, but, if he had known it, unlike a great many ladies and gentlemen, in that their chief aim in life was to be found in their Master's service; and a boy about whom they knew nothing, save that he was poor, and surrounded by temptations, and Satan desired to have him, was in their eyes so much stray material which they were bound to bring back to the rightful owner if they could.

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To this end they talked to Norman. Not in the form of a lecture, but with bright, winning words, on topics which he could understand, not only, but actually on certain topics about which he knew more than they. For instance, there was a cave about two miles from the town, of which they had heard, but had never seen and Norm had explored every crevice in it many a time. He knew on which side of the river it was located, whether the entrance was from the east or the south; just how far one could walk through it, just how far one could creep in it, after walking had become impossible, and a dozen other things which it had not occurred to him were of interest to anybody else. In fact, Norm discovered in the course of the hour that there was such a thing as conversation. Not that he made use of that word, in thinking it over; his thoughts, if they could have been seen, would have been something like this: "These are swell folks, but I can understand what they say, and they seem to understand what I say, and don't stare as though I was a wild animal escaped from the woods. I wonder what makes the difference between them and other folks?"

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But when the music began! I have no words to describe to you what it was to Norm to sit close to an organ and hear its softest notes, and feel the thrill of its heavy bass tones, and be appealed to occasionally as to whether he liked this or that the best, and to have a piece sung because the player thought it would please him; she selected it that morning, she told him, with this thought in view.

"Decker, you ought to learn to play," said one of the guests who had watched him through the last piece. "You *look* music, right out of your eyes. Miss Sherrill, here is a pupil for you who might do you credit. Have you ever had any instrument, Decker?"

Then Norm came back to every-day life, and flushed and stammered. "No, he hadn't, and was not likely to;" and wondered what they would think if they were to see the corner grocery where he spent most of his leisure time.

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The questioner laughed pleasantly. "Oh, I'm not so sure of that. I have a friend who plays the violin in a way to bring tears to people's eyes, and he never touched one until he was thirty years old; hadn't time until then. He was an apprentice, and had his trade to master, and himself to get well started in it before he had time for music; but when he came to leisure, he made music a delight to himself and to others."

"A great deal can be done with leisure time," said another of the guests. "Mr. Sherrill, you remember Myers, your college classmate? He did not learn to read, you know, until he was seventeen."

"What?" said Norm, astonished out of his diffidence; "didn't know how to read!"

"No," repeated the gentleman, "not until he was seventeen. He had a hard childhood—was kicked about in the world, with no leisure and no help, had to work evenings as well as days, but when he was seventeen he fell into kinder hands, and had a couple of hours each evening all to himself, and he mastered reading, not only, but all the common studies, and graduated from college with honor when he was twenty-six."

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Now Norm had all his evenings to lounge about in, and had not known what to do with them; and he could read quite well.

CHAPTER XX. THE WAY MADE PLAIN.

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IT was a beautiful Sabbath afternoon; just warm enough to make people feel still and pleasant. The soft summer sunshine lay smiling on all the world, and the soft summer breeze rustled the leaves of the trees, and stole gently in at open windows. In the front room of the Deckers, the family was gathered, all save Mr. Decker. He could be heard in his bedroom stepping about occasionally, and great was his wife's fear lest he was preparing to go down town and put himself in the place of temptation at his old lounging place. Sunday could not be said to be a day of rest to Mrs. Decker. It had been the day of her greatest trials, so far. Norm was in his clean shirt and collar, which had been done up again by Nettie's careful hands and which shone beautifully. He was also in his shirt sleeves; that the mother was glad to see; *he* was not going out just yet, anyway. Mrs. Decker had honored the day with a clean calico dress, and had shyly and with an almost shamefaced air, pinned into it a little cambric ruffle which Nettie had presented her, with the remark that it was just like the one Mrs. Burt wore, and that Jerry said she looked like Mrs. Burt a little, only he thought she was the best-looking of the two. Mrs. Decker had laughed, and then sighed; and said it made dreadful little difference to her how she looked. But the sigh meant that the days were not so very far distant when Mr. Decker used to tell her she was a handsome woman; and she used to smile over it, and call him a foolish man without any taste; but nevertheless used to like it very much, and make herself look as well as she could for his sake.

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She hadn't done it lately, but whose fault was that, she should like to know? However, she pinned the ruffle in, and whether Mr. Decker noticed it or not, she certainly looked wonderfully better. Norm noticed it, but of course he would not have said so for the world. Nettie in her blue and white gingham which had been washed and ironed since the flower party, and which had faded a little and shrunken a little, still looked neat and trim, and had the little girls one on either side of her, telling them a story in low tones; not so low but that the words floated over to the window where Norm was pretending not to listen: "And so," said the voice, "Daniel let himself be put into a den of dreadful fierce lions, rather than give up praying."

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"Did they frow him in?" this question from little Sate, horror in every letter of the words.

"Yes, they did; and shut the door tight."

"I wouldn't have been," said fierce Susie; "I would have bitten, and scratched and kicked just awful!"

"Why didn't Daniel shut up the window just as *tight*, and not let anybody know it when he said his prayers?"

Oh little Sate! how many older and wiser ones than you have tried to slip around conscience corners in some such way.

"I don't know all the reasons," said Nettie, after a thoughtful pause, "but I suppose one was, because he wouldn't act in a way to make people believe he had given up praying. He wanted to show them that he meant to pray, whether they forbade it or not."

"Go on," said Susie, sharply, "I want to know how he felt when the lions bit him."

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"They didn't bite him; God wouldn't let them touch him. They crouched down and kept as *still*, all night; and in the morning when the king came to look, there was Daniel, safe!"

"Oh my!" said Sate, drawing a long, quivering sigh of relief; "wasn't that just splendid!"

"How do you know it is true?" said skeptical Susie, looking as though she was prepared not to believe anything.

"I know it because God said it, Susie; he put it in the Bible."

"I didn't ever hear him say it," said Susie with a frown. A laugh from Norm at that moment gave Nettie her first knowledge of him as a listener. Her cheeks grew red, and she would have liked to slip away into a more quiet corner but Sate was in haste to hear just what the king said, and what Daniel said, and all about it, and the story went on steadily, Daniel's character for true bravery shining out all the more strongly, perhaps, because Nettie suspected herself of being a coward, and not liking Norm to laugh at her Bible stories. As for Norm, he knew he was a

coward; he knew he had done in his life dozens of things to make his mother cry; not because he was so anxious to do them, nor because he feared a den of lions if he refused, but simply because some of the fellows would laugh at him if he did.

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That Sabbath day had been a memorable one to the Decker family in some respects; at least to part of it. Nettie had taken the little girls with her to Sabbath-school, and then to church. Mrs. Smith had given her a cordial invitation to sit in their seat, but it was not a very large seat, and when Job and his wife, and Sarah Ann and Jerry were all there, as they were apt to be, there was just room for Nettie without the little girls; so she went with them to the seat directly under the choir gallery where very few sat. It was comfortable enough; she could see the minister distinctly, and though she had to stretch out her neck to see the choir, she could hear their sweet voices; and surely that was enough. All went smoothly until the sermon was concluded. Sate sat quite still, and if she did not listen to the sermon, listened to her own thoughts and troubled no one.

But when the anthem began, Sate roused herself. That wonderful voice which seemed to fill every corner of the church! She knew the voice; it belonged to her dear teacher. She stretched out her little neck, and could catch a glimpse of her, standing alone, the rest of the choir sitting back, out of sight. And what was that she was saying, over and over? "Come unto Me, unto Me, unto Me"—the words were repeated in the softest of cadences—"all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." Sate did not understand those words, certainly her little feet were not weary, but there was a sweetness about the word "rest" as it floated out on the still air, which made her seem to want to go, she knew not whither. Then came the refrain: "Come unto Me, unto Me," swelling and rolling until it filled all the aisles, and dying away at last in the tenderest of pleading sounds. Sate's heart beat fast, and the color came and went on her baby face in a way which would have startled Nettie had she not been too intent on her own exquisite delight in the music, to remember the motionless little girl at her left.

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"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, learn of Me," called the sweet voice, and Sate, understanding the last of it felt that she wanted to learn, and of that One above all others. "For I am meek and lowly of heart"—she did not know what the words meant, but she was drawn, drawn. Then, listening, breathless, half resolved, came again that wondrous pleading, "Come unto Me, unto Me, unto Me." Softly the little feet slid down to the carpeted floor, softly they stepped on the green and gray mosses which gave back no sound; softly they moved down the aisle as though they carried a spirit with them, and when Nettie, hearing no sound, yet turned suddenly as people will, to look after her charge, little Sate was gone! Where? Nettie did not know, could not conjecture. No sight of her in the aisle, not under the seat, not in the great church anywhere. The door was open into the hall, and poor little tired Sate must have slipped away into the sunshine outside. Well, no harm could come to her there; she would surely wait for them, or, failing in that, the road home was direct enough, and nothing to trouble her; but how strange in little Sate to do it! If it had been Susie, resolute, independent Susie always sufficient to herself and a little more ready to do as she pleased than any other way! But Susie sat up prim and dignified on Nettie's right; not very conscious of the music, and willing enough to have the service over, but conscious that she had on her new shoes, and a white dress, and a white bonnet, and looked very well indeed. Meantime, little Sate was not out in the sunshine. She had not thought of sunshine; she had been called; it was not possible for her sweet little heart to get away from the feeling that some one was calling her, and that she wanted to go. What better was there to do than follow the voice? So she followed it, out into the hall, up the gallery stairs, still softly—the new shoes made no sound on the carpet—through the door which stood ajar, quite to the singer's side, there slipped this quiet little woman who had left her white bonnet by Nettie, and stood with her golden head rippling with the sunlight which fell upon it. There was a rustle in the choir gallery, a soft stir over the church, the sort of sound which people make when they are moved by some deep feeling which they hardly understand; there was a smile on some faces, but it was the kind of smile which might be given to a baby angel if it had strayed away from heaven to look at something bright down here. The tenor singer would have drawn away the small form from the soloist, but she put forth a protecting hand and circled the child, and sang on, her voice taking sweeter tone, if possible, and dying away in such tenderness as made the smiles on some faces turn to tears, and made the echo linger with them of that last tremulous "Come unto Me."

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But little Sate, when she reached the choir gallery, saw something which startled her out of her sweet resolute calm. Away on the side, up there, where few people were, sat her own father; and rolling down his cheeks were tears. Sate had never seen her father cry before. What was the matter? Had she been naughty, and was it making him feel bad? She stole a startled glance at the face of her teacher, whose arm was still around her and had drawn her toward the seat into which she dropped, when the song was over. No, *her* face was quiet and sweet; not grieved, as Sate was sure it would be, if she had been naughty. Neither did the people look cross at her; many of them had bowed their heads in prayer, but some were sitting erect, looking at her and smiling; surely she had made no noise. Why should her father cry? She looked at him; he had shaded his face with his hand. Was he crying still? Little Sate thought it over, all in a moment of time, then suddenly she slipped away from the encircling arm, moved softly across the intervening space, into the side gallery, and was at her father's side, with her small hand on his sleeve. He stooped and took her in his arms, and the tears were still in his eyes; but he kissed her, and *kissed* her, as little Sate had never been kissed before; she nestled in his arms and felt safe and comforted.

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The prayer was over, the benediction given, and the worshipers moved down the aisles. Sate rode comfortably in her father's arms, down stairs, out into the hall, outside, in the sunshine,



LITTLE SATE IN THE CHOIR GALLERY.

waiting for Nettie and for her white sunbonnet. Presently Nettie came, hurried, flushed, despite her judgment, anxious as to where the bonnetless little girl could have vanished. "Why, Sate," she began, but the rest of the sentence died in astonished silence on her lips, for Sate held her father's hand and looked content.

They walked home together, the father and his youngest baby, saying nothing, for Sate was one of those wise-eyed little children who have spells of sweet silence come over them, and Nettie, with Susie, walked behind, the elder sister speculating: [361] "Where did little Sate find father? Did he pick her up on the street somewhere, and would he be angry, and not let Nettie take her to church any more? Or did he, passing, spy her in the churchyard and come in for her?"

Nettie did not know, and Sate did not tell; principally because she did not understand that there was anything to tell. So while the people in their homes talked and laughed about the small white waif who had slipped into the choir, the people in this home were entirely silent about it, and the mother did not know that anything strange had happened. It is true, Susie began to inquire reprovingly, but was hushed by Nettie's warning whisper; certainly Nettie was gaining a wonderful control over the self-sufficient Susie. The child respected her almost

enough to follow her lead unquestioningly, which was a great deal for Susie to do.

So they sat together that sweet Sabbath afternoon, Nettie telling her Bible stories, and wondering how she should plan. What did Norm intend to do a little later in the day? What was there she could do to keep him from lounging down street? Why was her father staying so long in the choked-up bedroom? What was the matter with her father these days, and how long was anything going to last? Why did she feel, somehow, as though she stood on the very edge of something which startled and almost frightened her? Was it because she was afraid her father would not let her take Sate and Susie to church any more? [362]

With all these thoughts floating through her mind, it was rather hard to keep herself closely confined to Daniel and his experiences. Suddenly the bedroom door opened and her father came out. Everybody glanced up, though perhaps nobody could have told why. There was a peculiar look on his face. Mrs. Decker noticed it and did not understand it, and felt her heart beat in great thuds against the back of her chair. Little Sate noticed it, and went over to him and slipped her hand inside his. He sat down in the state chair which Nettie and her mother had both contrived to have left vacant, and took Sate in his arms. This of itself was unusual, but after that, there was silence, Sate nestling safely in the protective arms and seeming satisfied with all the world. Nettie felt her face flush, and her bosom heave as if the tears were coming, but she could not have told why she wanted to cry Norm seemed oppressed with the stillness, and broke it by whistling softly; also he had a small stick and was whittling; it was the only thing he could think of to do just now. It was too early to go out; the boys would not be through with their boarding-house dinners yet. Suddenly Mr. Decker broke in on the almost silence. "Hannah," he said, then he cleared his voice, and was still again, "and you children," he added, after a moment, "I've got something to tell you if I knew how. Something that I guess you will be glad to hear. I've turned over a new leaf at last. I've turned it, off and on, in my mind a good many times lately, though I don't know as any of you knew it. I've been thinking about this thing, well, as soon as Nannie there came home, at least; but I haven't understood it very well, and I s'pose I don't now; but I understand it enough to have made up my mind; and that's more than half the battle. The long and short of it is, I have given myself to the Lord, or he has got hold of me, somehow; it isn't much of a gift, that's a fact, but the queer thing about it is, he seems to think it worth taking. I told him last night that if he would show a poor stick like me how to do it, why, I'd do my part without fail; and this morning he not only showed the way plain enough, but he sent my little girl to help me along." [363]

The father's voice broke then, and a tear trembled in his eye. Sate had held her little head erect and looked steadily at him as soon as he began to talk, wonder and interest, and some sort of still excitement in her face as she listened. At his first pause she broke forth:

"Did He mean you, papa, when He said 'Come unto Me'? Was He calling you, all the time? and did you tell Him you would?"

"Yes," he said, bending and kissing the earnest face, "He meant me, and He's been calling me loud, this good while; but I never got started till to-day. Now I'm going along with Him the rest of the way." [364]

"I'm so glad," said little Sate, nestling contentedly back, "I'm so glad, papa; I'm going too."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NEW ENTERPRISE.

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ONE bright and never-to-be-forgotten day, Nettie and Jerry stood together in the "new" room and surveyed with intense satisfaction all its appointments. They were ready to begin business. On that very evening the room was to be "open to the public!" They looked at each other as they repeated that large-sounding phrase, and laughed gleefully.

There had been a great deal to do to get ready. Hours and even days had been spent in planning. It astonished both these young people to discover how many things there were to think of, and get ready for, and guard against, before one could go into business. There was a time when with each new day, new perplexities arose. During those days Jerry had spent a good deal of his leisure in fishing; both because at the Smiths, and also at the Deckers, fish were highly prized, and also because, as he confided to Nettie, "a fellow could somehow think a great deal better when his fingers were at work, and when it was still everywhere about him."

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There were times, however, when his solitude was disturbed. There had been one day in particular when something happened about which he did not tell Nettie. He was in his fishing suit, which though clean and whole was not exactly the style of dress which a boy would wear to a party, and he stood leaning against a rail fence, rod in hand, trying to decide whether he should try his luck on that side, or jump across the logs to a shadier spot; trying also to decide just how they could manage to get another lamp to stand on the reading table, when he heard voices under the trees just back of him.

They were whispering in that sort of penetrating whisper that floats so far in the open air, and which some, girls, particularly, do not seem to know can be heard a few feet away. Jerry could hear distinctly; in fact unless he stopped his ears with his hands he could not help hearing.

And the old rule, that listeners never hear any good of themselves, applied here.

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"There's that Jerry who lives at the Smiths'," said whisperer number one, "do look what a fright; I guess he has borrowed a pair of Job Smith's overalls! Isn't it a shame that such a nice-looking boy is deserted in that way, and left to run with all sorts of people?"

"I heard that he wasn't deserted; that his father was only staying out West, or down South, or somewhere for awhile."

"Oh! that's a likely story," said whisperer number one, her voice unconsciously growing louder. "Just as if any father who was anybody, would leave a boy at Job Smith's for months, and never come near him. I think it is real mean; they say the Smiths keep him at work all the while, fishing; he about supports them, and the Deckers too, with fish and things."

At this point the amused listener nearly forgot himself and whistled.

"Oh well, that's as good a way as any to spend his time; he knows enough to catch fish and do such things, and when he is old enough, I suppose he will learn a trade; but I must say I think he is a nice-looking fellow."

"He would be, if he dressed decently. The boys like him real well; they say he is smart; and I shouldn't wonder if he was; big eyes twinkle as though he might be. If he wouldn't keep running with that Decker girl all the time, he might be noticed now and then."

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At this point came up a third young miss who spoke louder. Jerry recognized her voice at once as belonging to Lorena Barstow. "Girls, what are you doing here? Why, there is that Irish boy; I wonder if he wouldn't sell us some fish? They say he is very anxious to earn money; I should think he would be, to get himself some decent clothes. Or maybe he wants to make his dear Nan a present."

Then followed a laugh which was quickly hushed, lest the victim might hear. But the victim had heard, and looked more than amused; his eyes flashed with a new idea.

"Much obliged, Miss Lorena," he said softly, nodding his head. "If I don't act on your hint, it will be because I am not so bright as you give me credit for being."

Then the first whisperer took up the story:

"Say, girls, I heard that Ermina did really mean to invite him to her candy pull, and the Decker girl too; she says they both belong to the Sunday-school, and she is going to invite all the boys and girls of that age in the school, and her mother thinks it would not be nice to leave them out. You know the Farleys are real queer about some things."

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Lorena Barstow flamed into a voice which was almost loud. "Then I say let's just not speak a word to either of them the whole evening. Ermina Farley need not think that because she lives in a grand house, and her father has so much money, she can rule us all. I for one, don't mean to associate with a drunkard's daughter, and I won't be made to, by the Farleys or anybody else."

"Her father isn't a drunkard now. Why, don't you know he has joined the church? And last Wednesday night they say he was in prayer meeting."

"Oh, yes, and what does that amount to? My father says it won't last six weeks; he says drunkards are not to be trusted; they never reform. And what if he does? That doesn't make Nan Decker anything but a dowdy, not fit for us girls to go with; and as for that Irish boy! Why doesn't Ermina go down on Paddy Lane and invite the whole tribe of Irish if she is so fond of them?"

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"Hush, Lora, Ermina will hear you."

Sure enough at that moment came Ermina, springing briskly over logs and underbrush. "Have I kept you waiting?" she asked gayly. "The moss was so lovely back there; I wanted to carry the whole of it home to mother. Why, girls, there is that boy who sits across from us in Sabbath-school.

"How do you do?" she said pleasantly, for at that moment Jerry turned and came toward them, lifting his hat as politely as though it was in the latest shape and style.

"Have you had good luck in fishing?"

"Very good for this side; the fish are not so plenty here generally as they are further up. I heard you speaking of fish, Miss Barstow, and wondering whether I would not supply your people? I should be very glad to do so, occasionally; I am a pretty successful fellow so far as fishing goes."

You should have seen the cheeks of the whisperers then! Ermina looked at them, perplexed for a moment, then seeing they answered only with blushes and silence *she* spoke: "Mamma would be very glad to get some; she was saying yesterday she wished she knew some one of whom she could get fish as soon as they were caught. Have you some to-day for sale?"

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"Three beauties which I would like nothing better than to sell, for I am in special need of the money just now."

"Very well," said Ermina promptly, "I am sure mamma will like them; could you carry them down now? I am on my way home and could show you where to go."

"Ermina Farley!" remonstrated Lorena Barstow in a low shocked tone, but Ermina only said: "Good-by, girls, I shall expect you early on Thursday evening," and walked briskly down the path toward the road, with Jerry beside her, swinging his fish. If the girls could have seen his eyes just then, they would have been sure that they twinkled.

They had a pleasant walk, and Ermina did actually invite him to her candy-pull on Thursday evening; not only that, but she asked if he would take an invitation from her to Nettie Decker. "She lives next door to you, I think," said Ermina, "I would like very much to have her come; I think she is so pleasant and unselfish. It is just a few boys and girls of our age, in the Sunday-school."

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How glad Jerry was that she had invited them! He had been so afraid that her courage would not be equal to it. Glad was he also to be able to say, frankly, that both he and Nettie had an engagement for Thursday evening; he would be sure to give Nettie the invitation, but he knew she could not come. Of course she could not, he said to himself; "Isn't that our opening evening?" But all the same it was very nice in Ermina Farley to have invited them.

"Here is another lamp for the table," said Jerry gayly, as he rushed into the new room an hour later and tossed down a shining silver dollar. He had exchanged the fish for it. Then he sat down and told part of their story to Nettie. About the whisperers, however, he kept silent. What was the use in telling that?

But from them he had gotten another idea. "Look here, Nettie, some evening we'll have a candy-pull, early, with just a few to help, and sell it cheap to customers."

So now they stood together in the room to see if there was another thing to be done before the opening. A row of shelves planed and fitted by Norm were ranged two thirds of the way up the room and on them were displayed tempting pans of ginger cookies, doughnuts, molasses cookies, and soft gingerbread. Sandwiches made of good bread, and nice slices of ham, were shut into the corner cupboard to keep from drying; there was also a plate of cheese which was a present from Mrs. Smith. She had sent it in with the explanation that it would be a blessing to her if that cheese could get eaten by somebody; she bought it once, a purpose, as a treat for Job, and it seemed it wasn't the kind he liked, and none of the rest of them liked any kind, so there it had stood on the shelf eying her for days. There was to be coffee; Nettie had planned for that. "Because," she explained, "they *all* drink beer; and things to eat, can never take the place of things to drink."

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It had been a difficult matter to get the materials together for this beginning. All the money which came in from the "little old grandmothers," as well as that which Jerry contributed, had been spent in flour, and sugar, and eggs and milk. Nettie was amazed and dismayed to find how much even soft gingerbread cost, when every pan of it had to be counted in money. A good deal of arithmetic had been spent on the question: How low can we possibly sell this, and not actually lose money by it? Of course some allowance had to be made for waste. "We'll have to name it waste," explained Nettie with an anxious face, "because it won't bring in any money; but of course not a scrap of it will be wasted; but what is left over and gets too dry to sell, we shall have to eat."

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Jerry shook his head. "We must sell it," he said with the air of a financier. Then he went away thoughtfully to consult Mrs. Job, and came back triumphant. She would take for a week at half price, all the stale cake they might have left. "That means gingercake," he explained, "she says the cookies and things will keep for weeks, without getting too old."

"Sure enough!" said radiant Nettie, "I did not think of that."

There were other things to think of; some of them greatly perplexed Jerry; he had to catch many fish before they were thought out. Then he came with his views to Nettie.

"See here, do you understand about this firm business; it must be you and me, you know?"

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Nettie's bright face clouded. "Why, I thought," she said, speaking slowly, "I thought you said, or you meant—I mean I thought it was to help Norm; and that he would be a partner."

Jerry shook his head. "Can't do it," he said decidedly. "Look here, Nettie, we'll get into trouble right away if we take in a partner. He believes in drinking beer, and smoking cigarettes, and doing things of that sort; now if he as a partner introduces anything of the kind, what are we to do?"

"Sure enough!" the tone expressed conviction, but not relief. "Then what are we to do, Jerry? I don't see how we are going to help Norm any."

"I do; quite as well as though he was a partner. Norm is a good-natured fellow; he likes to help people. I think he likes to do things for others better than for himself. If we explain to him that we want to go into this business, and that you can't wait on customers, because you are a girl, and it wouldn't be the thing, and I can't, because it is in your house, and I promised my father I would spend my evenings at home, and write a piece of a letter to him every evening; and ask him to come to the rescue and keep the room open, and sell the things for us, don't you believe he will be twice as likely to do it as though we made him as young as ourselves, and tried to be his equals?"

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Then Nettie's face was bright. "What a contriver you are!" she said admiringly. "I think that will do just splendidly."

She was right, it did. Norm might have curled his lip and said "pooh" to the scheme, had he been placed on an equality; for he was getting to the age when to be considered young, or childish, is a crime in a boy's eyes. But to be appealed to as one who could help the "young fry" out of their dilemma, and at the same time provide himself with a very pleasant place to stay, and very congenial employment while he stayed, was quite to Norm's mind.

And as it was an affair of the children's, he made no suggestions about beer or cigars; it is true he thought of them, but he thought at once that neither Nettie or Jerry would probably have anything to do with them, and as he had no dignity to sustain, he decided to not even mention the matter. These two planned really better than they knew in appealing to Norm for help. His curious pride would never have allowed him to say to a boy, "We keep cakes and coffee for sale at our house; come in and try them." But it was entirely within the line of his ideas of respectability to say: "What do you think those two young ones over at our house have thought up next? They have opened an eating-house, cakes and things such as my sister can make, and coffee, dirt cheap. I've promised to run the thing for them in the evening awhile; I suppose you'll patronize them?"

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And the boys, who would have sneered at *his* setting himself up in business, answered: "What, the little chap who lives at Smith's? And your little sister! Ho! what a notion! I don't know but it is a bright one, though, as sure as you live. There isn't a spot in this town where a fellow can get a decent bite unless he pays his week's wages for it; boys, let's go around and see what the little chaps are about."

The very first evening was a success.

Nettie had assured herself that she must not be disappointed if no one came, at first.

"You see, it is a new thing," she explained to her mother, "of course it will take them a little while to get acquainted with it; if nobody at all comes to-night, I shall not be disappointed. Shall you, Jerry?"

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"Why, yes," said Jerry, "I should; because I know of one boy who is coming, and is going to have a ginger-snap and a glass of milk. And that is little Ted Locker who lives down the lane; they about starve that boy. I shall like to see him get something good. He has three cents and I assured him he could get a brimming glass of milk and a ginger-snap for that. He was as delighted as possible."

"Poor fellow!" said Nettie, "I mean to tell Norm to let him have two snaps, wouldn't you?"

And Jerry agreed, not stopping to explain that he had furnished the three cents with which Ted was to treat his poor little stomach. So the work began in benevolence.

Still Nettie was anxious, not to say nervous.

"You will have to eat soft gingerbread at your house, for breakfast, dinner and supper, I am afraid," she said to Jerry with a half laugh, as they stood looking at it. "I don't know why I made four tins of it; I seemed to get in a gale when I was making it."

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"Never you fear," said Jerry, cheerily. "I'll be willing to eat such gingerbread as that three times a day for a week. Between you and me," lowering his voice, "Sarah Ann can't make very good gingerbread; when we get such a run of custom that we have none left over to sell, I wish you'd teach her how."

I do not know that any member of the two households could be said to be more interested in the new enterprise than Mr. Decker. He helped set up the shelves, and he made a little corner shelf on purpose for the lamp, and he watched the entire preparations with an interest which warmed Nettie's heart. I haven't said anything about Mr. Decker during these days, because I found it hard to say. You are acquainted with him as a sour-faced, unreasonable, beer-drinking man; when suddenly he became a man who said "Good morning" when he came into the room, and who sat down smooth shaven, and with quiet eyes and smile to his breakfast, and spoke

gently to Susie when she tipped her cup of water over, and kissed little Sate when he lifted her to her seat, and waited for Mrs. Decker to bring the coffee pot, then bowed his head and in clear tones asked a blessing on the food, how am I to describe him to you? The change was something which even Mrs. Decker who watched him every minute he was in the house and thought of him all day long, could not get accustomed to. It astonished her so to think that she, Mrs. Decker, lived in a house where there was a prayer made every night and morning, and where each evening after supper Nettie read a few verses in the Bible, and her father prayed; that every time she passed her own mother's Bible which had been brought out of its hiding-place in an old trunk, she said, under her breath, "Thank the Lord." No, she did not understand it, the marvelous change which had come over her husband. She had known him as a kind man; he had been that when she married him, and for a few months afterwards.

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She had heard him speak pleasantly to Norm, and show him much attention; he had done it before they were married, and for awhile afterwards; but there was a look in his face, and a sound in his voice now, such as she had never seen nor heard before.

"It isn't Decker," she said in a burst of confidence to Nettie. "He is just as good as he can be; and I don't know anything in the world he ain't willing to do for me, or for any of us; and it is beautiful, the whole of it; but it is all new. I used to think if the man I married could only come back to me I should be perfectly happy; but I don't know this man at all; he seems to me sometimes most like an angel."

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Probably you would have laughed at this. Joe Decker did not look in the least like the picture you have in your mind of an angel; but perhaps if you had known him only a few weeks before, as Mrs. Decker did, and could have seen the wonderful change in him which she saw, the contrast might even have suggested angels.

Nettie understood it. She struggled with her timidity and her ignorance of just what ought to be said; then she made her earnest reply:

"Mother, I'll tell you the difference. Father prays, and when people pray, you know, and mean it, as he does, they get to looking very different."

But Mrs. Decker did not pray.

CHAPTER XXII.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE.

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AS a matter of fact there wasn't a cake left. Neither doughnut nor gingersnap; hardly a crumb to tell the successful tale. Nettie surveyed the empty shelves the next morning in astonishment. She had been too busy the night before to realize how fast things were going. Naturally the number and variety of dishes in the Decker household was limited and the evening to Nettie was a confused murmur of, "Hand us some more cups." "Can't you raise a few more teaspoons somewhere?" "Give us another plate," or, "More doughnuts needed;" and Nettie flew hither and thither, washed cups, rinsed spoons, said, "What did I do with that towel?" or, "Where in the world is the bread knife?" or, "Oh! I smell the coffee! maybe it is boiling over," and was conscious of nothing but weariness and relief when the last cup of coffee was drunk, and the last teaspoon washed.

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But with the next morning's sunshine she knew the opening was a success. She counted the gains with eager joy, assuring Jerry that they could have twice as much gingerbread next time.

"And you'll need it," said Norm. "I had to tell half a dozen boys that there wasn't a crumb left. I felt sorry for 'em, too; they were boarding-house fellows who never get anything decent to eat."

Already Norm had apparently forgotten that he was one who used frequently to make a similar complaint.

There was a rarely sweet smile on Nettie's face, not born of the chink in the factory bag which she had made for the money; it grew from the thought that she need not hide the bag now, and tremble lest it should be taken to the saloon to pay for whiskey. What a little time ago it was that she had feared that! What a changed world it was!

"But there won't be such a crowd again," she said as they were putting the room in order, "that was the first night."

"Humph!" said that wise woman Susie with a significant toss of her head; "last night you said we mustn't expect anybody because it was the first night."

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Then "the firm" had a hearty laugh at Nettie's expense and set to work preparing for evening.

I am not going to tell you the story of that summer and fall. It was beautiful; as any of the Deckers will tell you with eager eyes and voluble voice if you call on them, and start the subject.

The business grew and grew, and exceeded their most sanguine expectations. Mr. Decker interested himself in it most heartily, and brought often an old acquaintance to get a cup of coffee. "Make it good and strong," he would say to Nettie in an earnest whisper. "He's thirsty, and I brought him here instead of going for beer. I wish the room was larger, and I'd get others to come."

In time, and indeed in a very short space of time, this grew to be the crying need of the firm: "If we only had more room, and more dishes!" There was a certain long, low building which had once been used as a boarding-house for the factory hands, before that institution grew large and moved into new quarters, and which was not now in use. At this building Jerry and Nettie, and for that matter, Norm, looked with longing eyes. They named it "Our Rooms," and hardly ever passed that they did not suggest some improvement in it which could be easily made, and which would make it just the thing for their business. They knew just what sort of curtains they would have at the windows, just what furnishings in front and back rooms, just how many lamps would be needed. "We will have a hanging lamp over the centre table," said Jerry. "One of those new-fashioned things which shine and give a bright light, almost like gas; and lots of books and papers for the boys to read."

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"But where would we get the books and papers?" would Nettie say, with an anxious business face, as though the room, and the table, and the hanging lamp, were arranged for, and the last-mentioned articles all that were needed to complete the list.

"Oh! they would gather, little by little. I know some people who would donate great piles of them if we had a place to put them. For that matter, as it is, father is going to send us some picture-papers, a great bundle of them; send them by express, and we must have a table to put them on."

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So the plans grew, but constantly they looked at the long, low building and said what a nice place it would be.

One morning Jerry came across the yard with a grave face. "What do you think?" he said, the moment he caught sight of Nettie. "They have gone and rented our rooms for a horrid old saloon; whiskey in front, and gambling in the back part! Isn't it a shame that they have got ahead of us in that kind of way?"

"Oh dear me!" said Nettie, drawing out each word to twice its usual length, and sitting down on a corner of the woodbox with hands clasped over the dish towel, and for the moment a look on her face as though all was lost.

But it was the very same day that Jerry appeared again, his face beaming. This time it was hard to make Nettie hear, for Mrs. Decker was washing, and mingling with the rapid rub-a-dub of the clothes was the sizzle of ham in the spider, and the bubble of a kettle which was bent on boiling over, and making the half-distracted housekeeper all the trouble it could. Yet his news was too good to keep; and he shouted above the din: "I say, Nettie, the man has backed out! Our rooms are not rented, after all."

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"Goody!" said Nettie, and she smiled on the kettle in a way to make it think she did not care if everything in it boiled over on the floor; whereupon it calmed down, of course, and behaved itself.

So the weeks passed, and the enterprise grew and flourished. I hope you remember Mrs. Speckle? Very early in the autumn she sent every one of her chicks out into the world to toil for themselves and began business. Each morning a good-sized, yellow-tinted, warm, beautiful egg lay in the nest waiting for Jerry; and when he came, Mrs. Speckle cackled the news to him in the most interested way.

"She couldn't do better if she were a regularly constituted member of the firm with a share in the profits," said Jerry.

The egg was daily carried to Mrs. Farley's, where there was an invalid daughter, who had a fancy for that warm, plump egg which came to her each morning, done up daintily in pink cotton, and laid in a box just large enough for it. But there came a morning which was a proud one to Nettie. Jerry had returned from Mrs. Farley's with news. "The sick daughter is going South; she has an auntie who is to spend the winter in Florida, so they have decided to send her. They start to-morrow morning. Mrs. Farley said they would take our eggs all the same, and she wished Miss Helen could have them; but somebody else would have to eat them for her."

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Then Nettie, beaming with pleasure, "Jerry, I wish you would tell Mrs. Farley that we can't spare them any more at present; I would have told you before, but I didn't want to take the egg from Miss Helen; I want to buy them now, every other morning, for mother and father; mother thinks there is nothing nicer than a fresh egg, and I know father will be pleased."

What satisfaction was in Nettie's voice, what joy in her heart! Oh! they were poor, very poor, "miserably poor" Lorena Barstow called them, but they had already reached the point where Nettie felt justified in planning for a fresh egg apiece for father and mother, and knew that it could be paid for. So Mrs. Speckle began from that day to keep the results of her industry in the home circle, and grew more important because of that.

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Almost every day now brought surprises. One of the largest of them was connected with Susie Decker. That young woman from the very first had shown a commendable interest in everything pertaining to the business. She patiently did errands for it, in all sorts of weather, and was always ready to dust shelves, arrange cookies without eating so much as a bite, and even wipe teaspoons, a task which she used to think beneath her. "If you can't trust me with things that would smash," she used to say with scornful gravity, to Nettie, "then you can't expect me to be willing to wipe those tough spoons."

But in these days, spoons were taken uncomplainingly. Susie had a business head, and was already learning to count pennies and add them to the five and ten cent pieces; and when Jerry said approvingly: "One of these days, she will be our treasurer," the faintest shadow of a blush

would appear on Susie's face, but she always went on counting gravely, with an air of one who had not heard a word.

On a certain stormy, windy day, one of November's worst, it was discovered late in the afternoon that the molasses jug was empty, and the boys had been promised some molasses candy that very evening. [390]

"What shall we do?" asked Nettie, looking perplexed, and standing jug in hand in the middle of the room. "Jerry won't be home in time to get it, and I can't leave those cakes to bake themselves; mother, you don't think you could see to them a little while till I run to the grocery, do you?"

Mrs. Decker shook her head, but spoke sympathetically: "I'd do it in a minute, child, or I'd go for the molasses, but these shirts are very particular; I never had such fine ones to iron before, and the irons are just right, and if I should have to leave the bosoms at the wrong minute to look at the cakes, why, it would spoil the bosoms; and on the other hand, if I left the cakes and saved the bosoms, why, they would be spoiled."

This seemed logical reasoning. Susie, perched on a high chair in front of the table, was counting a large pile of pennies, putting them in heaps of twenty-five cents each. She waited until her fourth heap was complete, then looked up. "Why don't you ask me to go?" [391]

"Sure enough!" said Nettie, laughing, "I'd 'ask' you in a minute if it didn't rain so hard; but it seems a pretty stormy day to send out a little chicken like you."

"I'm not a chicken, and I'm not the leastest bit afraid of rain; I can go as well as not if you only think so."

"I don't believe it will hurt her!" said Mrs. Decker, glancing doubtfully out at the sullen sky. "It doesn't rain so hard as it did, and she has such a nice thick sack now."

It was nice, made of heavy waterproof cloth, with a lovely woolly trimming going all around it. Susie liked that sack almost better than anything else in the world. Her mother had bought it second-hand of a woman whose little girl had outgrown it; the mother had washed all day and ironed another day to pay for it, and felt the liveliest delight in seeing Susie in the pretty garment.

The rain seemed to be quieting a little, so presently the young woman was robed in sack and waterproof bonnet with a cape, and started on her way.

Half-way to the grocery she met Jerry hastening home from school with a bag of books slung across his shoulder. [392]

"Is it so late as that?" asked Susie in dismay. "Nettie thought you wouldn't be at home in a good while; the candy won't get done."

"No, it is as early as this," he answered laughing; "we were dismissed an hour earlier than usual this afternoon. Where are you going? after molasses? See here, suppose you give me the jug and you take my books and scud home. There is a big storm coming on; I think the wind is going to blow, and I'm afraid it will twist you all up and pour the molasses over you. Then you'd be ever so sticky!"

Susie laughed and exchanged not unwillingly the heavy jug for the books. There had been quite wind enough since she started, and if there was to be more, she had no mind to brave it.

"If you hurry," called Jerry, "I think you'll get home before the next squall comes." So she hurried; but Jerry was mistaken. The squall came with all its force, and poor small Susie was twisted and whirled and lost her breath almost, and panted and struggled on, and was only too thankful that she hadn't the molasses jug. [393]

Nearly opposite the Farley home, their side door suddenly opened and a pleasant voice called: "Little girl, come in here, and wait until the shower is over; you will be wet to the skin."

It is true Susie did not believe that her waterproof sack *could* be wet through, but that dreadful wind so frightened her, twisting the trees as it did, that she was glad to obey the kind voice and rush into shelter.

"Why, it is Nettie's sister, I do believe!" said Ermina Farley, helping her off with the dripping hood.

"You dear little mouse, what sent you out in such a storm?"

Miss Susie not liking the idea of being a mouse much more than she did being a chicken, answered with dignity, and becoming brevity.

"Molasses candy!" said Mrs. Farley, laughing, yet with an undertone of disapproval in her voice which keen-minded Susie heard and felt, "I shouldn't think that was a necessity of life on such a day as this."

"It is if you have promised it to some boys who don't ever have anything nice only what they get at our house; and who save their pennies that they spend on beer, and cider, and cigars to get it." [394]

Wise Susie, indignation in every word, yet well controlled, and aware before she finished her sentence that she was deeply interesting her audience! How they questioned her! What was this? Who did it? Who thought of it? When did they begin it? Who came? How did they get the money to buy their things? Susie, thoroughly posted, thoroughly in sympathy with the entire movement, calm, collected, keen far beyond her years, answered clearly and well. Plainly she saw that this

lady in a silken gown was interested.

"Well, if this isn't a revelation!" said Mrs. Farley at last. "A young men's Christian association not only, but an eating-house flourishing right in our midst and we knowing nothing about it. Did you know anything of it, daughter?"

"No, ma'am," said Ermina. "But I knew that splendid Nettie was trying to do something for her brother; and that nice boy who used to bring eggs was helping her; it is just like them both. I don't believe there is a nicer girl in town than Nettie Decker." [395]

Mrs. Farley seemed unable to give up the subject. She asked many questions as to how long the boys stayed, and what they did all the time.

Susie explained: "Well, they eat, you know; and Norm doesn't hurry them; he says they have to pitch the things down fast where they board, to keep them from freezing; and our room is warm, because we keep the kitchen door open, and the heat goes in; but we don't know what we shall do when the weather gets real cold; and after they have eaten all the things they can pay for, they look at the pictures. Jerry's father sends him picture papers, and Mr. Sherrill brings some, most every day. Miss Sherrill is coming Thanksgiving night to sing for them; and Nettie says if we only had an organ she would play beautiful music. We want to give them a treat for Thanksgiving; we mean to do it without any pay at all if we can; and father thinks we can, because he is working nights this week, and getting extra pay; and Jerry thinks there will be two chickens ready; and Nettie wishes we could have an organ for a little while, just for Norm, because he loves music so, but of course we can't." [396]

Long before this sentence was finished, Ermina and her mother had exchanged glances which Susie, being intent on her story, did not see.

She was a wise little woman of business; what if Mrs. Farley should say: "Well, I will give you a chicken myself for the Thanksgiving time, and a whole peck of apples!" then indeed, Susie believed that their joy would be complete; for Nettie had said, if they could only afford three chickens she believed that with a lot of crust she could make chicken pie enough for them each to have a large piece, hot; not all the boys, of course, but the seven or eight who worked in Norm's shop and boarded at the dreary boarding-house; they would so like to give Norm a surprise for his birthday, and have a treat say at six o'clock for all of these; for this year Thanksgiving fell on Norm's birthday. The storm held up after a little, and Susie, trudging home, a trifle disgusted with Mrs. Farley because she said not a word about the peck of apples or the other chicken, was met by Jerry coming in search of her. The molasses was boiling over, he told her, and so was her mother, with anxiety lest the wind had taken her, Susie, up in a tree, and had forgotten to bring her down again. He hurried her home between the squalls, and Susie quietly resolved to say not a word about all the things she had told at the Farley home. What if Nettie should think she hadn't been womanly to talk so much about what they were doing! If there was one thing that this young woman had a horror of during these days, it was that Nettie would think she was not womanly. The desire, nay, the determination to be so, at all costs had well nigh cured her of her fits of rage and screaming, because in one of her calm moments Nettie had pointed out to her the fact that she never in her life heard a *woman* scream like that. Susie being a logical person, argued the rest of the matter out for herself, and resolved to scream and stamp her foot no more. [397]

Great was the astonishment of the Decker family, next morning. Mrs. Farley herself came to call on them. She wanted some plain ironing done that afternoon. Yes, Mrs. Decker would do it and be glad to; it was a leisure afternoon with her. Mrs. Farley wanted something more! she wanted to know about the business in which Nettie and her young friend next door were engaged; and Susie listened breathlessly, for fear it would appear that she had told more than she ought. But Mrs. Farley kept her own counsel, only questioning Nettie closely, and at last she made a proposition that had well nigh been the ruin of the tin of cookies which Nettie was taking from the oven. She dropped the tin! [398]

"Did you burn you, child?" asked Mrs. Decker, rushing forward.

"No, ma'am," said Nettie, laughing, and trying not to laugh, and wanting to cry, and being too amazed to do so. "But I was so surprised and so almost scared, that they dropped.

"O Mrs. Farley, we have wanted that more than anything else in the world; ever since Mr. Sherrill saw how my brother Norman loved music, and said it might be the saving of him; Jerry and I have planned and planned, but we never thought of being able to do it for a long, long time."

Yet all this joy was over an old, somewhat wheezy little house organ which stood in the second-story unused room of Mrs. Farley's house, and which she had threatened to send to the city auction rooms to get out of the way. [399]

She offered to lend it to Nettie for her "Rooms," and Nettie's gratitude was so great that the blood seemed inclined to leave her face entirely for a minute, then thought better of it and rolled over it in waves.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE CROWNING WONDER.

AND they did have the Thanksgiving supper!

It seemed wonderful to Nettie, even then, and long afterwards the wonder grew, that so many things occurred about that time to help the scheme along. At first it was to be a very simple little affair; two of the boys, Rick for instance, and Alf, invited to come in an hour or so before the room was open for the evening, and have a little supper by themselves—a chicken, and possibly some cranberry sauce if she could compass it, though cranberries were very expensive at that season, and besides, they ate sugar in a way which was perfectly alarming! A pie of some sort she had quite set her heart on, but whether it would be pumpkin or not, depended on how they succeeded in saving up for extra milk. The circumstances of the Deckers were changing steadily, but when a man has tumbled to the foot of a hill, and lain there quite awhile, it is generally a slow process to get up and climb back to where he was before. [401]

Mr. Decker's wages were good, and in time he expected to be able to support his family in at least ordinary comfort; but when he came fully to his senses, he stood for awhile appalled before the number of things which had been sold to pay his bill at the saloon, and the number of things which in the meantime had worn out, and not been replaced by new ones; then the rent was two months back, and Job Smith had been all that stood between him and a home. There was a great deal to do if the Deckers were to get back to the place from which they began to roll down hill; so extra expenses for cranberries, or even milk, were not to be thought of, if they must be drawn from the family funds.

The business of the firm was flourishing; but you must remember that the central feature of the enterprise was to keep prices very low, lower than beer and bad cigars, and the enterprise of the dealers in these things is so great, that if you are willing to put up with the meanest sorts you can always get them very low indeed. To compete with them, Jerry and Nettie had to study the most rigid economy to keep their shelves supplied, and even to sometimes "shut their eyes and make a reckless dash at apples or peanuts, regardless of expense." This was the way in which Jerry occasionally apologized for an extra quantity of these luxuries. [402]

Still, in the most interesting ways the Thanksgiving supper grew. Mrs. Decker secured within a week of the time, an unexpected ironing which she could do in two evenings, and she it was who proposed the wild scheme of having two chickens and having them hot, and stuffing them with bread crumbs as she used to do years ago, and having gravy and some baked potatoes. She agreed to furnish the extra potatoes, and a few turnips, just to make it feel like Thanksgiving. Nettie was astonished, but pleased. It would be more work, but what of that? Think of being able to make a real supper for Norm's birthday! Then Mrs. Smith at just the right moment had a present of two pumpkins from her country friends; as they could never make away with two pumpkins before they would spoil, of course the Deckers must take part of one, at least. About that time the minister bought a cow, and what did he do but come himself one night to know if Mrs. Decker had any use for skimmed milk; they were very fond of cream at their house, and skimmed milk gathered faster than they knew what to do with it. [403]

"Any use for skim milk!" Mrs. Decker could only repeat the words in a kind of ecstasy at her good luck, and she almost wondered that the yellow pumpkin standing behind the door in the closet did not laugh outright.

But the crowning wonder came, after all, on the morning before the eventful day. Jake, the Farleys' man of all work, brought it in a basket which was large and closely covered, and very heavy looking. It was left at the door with Susie, who went to answer the knock, "For Miss Nettie." Susie repeated the name with a lingering tone as though she liked the sound of the unusual prefix. Then they gathered about the basket. A great solemn-looking turkey with a note in his mouth, which said: "A Thanksgiving token for Nettie, from her friend ERMINA FARLEY."

A turkey in the Decker oven! Mr. Decker surveyed the great fellow in silence for a few minutes, then said impressively, "If we don't have a new cook stove before another Thanksgiving day comes around, my name is not Decker." [404]

Mrs. Job Smith left her pies half-made, and ran in, in a friendly way, to see the wonder; and at once remarked that he would exactly fit into their oven, and she wasn't going to cook their turkey till the day afterwards, because they had got to go to Job's uncle's for Thanksgiving; so that matter was settled. It was then that the Deckers decided to make a reckless plunge into society and invite every boy in Norm's shop to a three o'clock dinner, with turkey and cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie and turnip, and all the rest.

What a day it was! They grew nearly wild in their efforts to keep all the secrets from Norm, and act as though nothing unusual was happening. Especially was this the case after the morning express brought a package for Nettie from her dear old home, with two mince pies, and a box of Auntie Marshall's doughnuts, and a bag of nuts, and as much as two pounds of the loveliest candy she ever saw; sent by the young man of the home who was clerk in a wholesale confectioner's. It took Mrs. Decker and Nettie not five minutes to resolve, looking curiously into each other's faces the while to see if they really had become insane, that they would have a regular dessert following the dinner! [405]

"It is only once a year," said Nettie apologetically.

"It is only once in five years!" said Mrs. Decker solemnly. "I haven't had a Thanksgiving in five years, child; and I never expected to have another."

Everybody was busy all day long. Mrs. Smith was in and out, helping as faithfully as though Norm was her boy, and Sarah Ann just gave herself up to the importance of the occasion, and did

not go to her uncle's at all. "I can go there any time," she said good naturedly, "or no time; they always forget that we are alive till Thanksgiving Day, and then they ask us because they kind of think they've got to. Uncle Jed is a clerk, and his wife makes dresses for the folks on Belmont street, and they feel stuck up four feet above us; I'd rather eat cold pork and potatoes at home than to go there any day. I'm dreadful glad of an excuse that father thinks is worth giving."

Susie was a young woman of importance that day. Nettie, who had discovered exactly how to manage her, gave her work to do which suited her ideas of what a grown person like herself ought to be about; and when she wanted the table cleared from the picture papers of the night before, instead of telling Miss Susie to fold them away, said, "What do you think, Susie, would it be best for us to fold these papers away in the closet for to-day, and have this table left clear for the nuts and the candies?"

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"Yes," said Susie, with her grown-up air, "I think it would; I'll attend to it." And she did it beautifully.

"It is well we have no little bits of folks around," said Nettie, when the nuts were being cracked, "they would be tempted to eat some, and then I'm afraid we would not have enough to go around." And Susie, gravely assenting to this theory, arranged the nuts in Mrs. Smith's blue saucers, an equal number in each, and ate not one!

Little Sate went with Jerry to give the invitations to the boys, and to charge them to keep the whole thing a profound secret from Norm; they came home by way of the Farley woods, and little Sate appeared at the door with her arms laden with such lovely branches of autumn leaves, that Nettie exclaimed in wild delight, and left her turnips half-peeled to help adorn the walls of the front room. This suggested the idea, and by three o'clock that room was a bower of beauty. Red and golden and lovely brown leaves mixed in with the evergreen tassels of the pines, with here and there pine cones, and red berries peeping out from everywhere. "You little darling," said Nettie, kissing Sate, "you have made a picture of it, like what they paint on canvas, only a thousand times lovelier."

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And Sate, looking on, with her wide sweet eyes aglow with feeling, fitted the picture well.

So the feast was spread, and the astonished and hungry boys came, and feasted. And Norm, too astonished at first to take it in, began presently to understand that all this preparation and delight were in honor of his birthday! And though he said not a word, aloud, he kept up in his soul a steady line of thought; the centre of which was this:

"I don't deserve it, that's a fact; there's mother doing everything for me, and Nettie working like a slave, and the children going without things to give me a treat. I'll be in a better fix to keep a birthday before it gets around again, see if I'm not!"

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His was not the only thinking which was done that day. Rick, merry enough all the afternoon, and enjoying his dinner as well as it was possible for a hungry fellow to do, nevertheless had a sober look on his face more than once, and said as he shook hands with Norm at night: "I'll tell you what it is, my boy, if I had your kind of a home, and folks, I'd be worth something in the world; I would, so. I ain't sure, between you and me, but I shall, anyhow; just for the sake of getting into such Thanksgiving houses once in awhile. By and by a fellow will have to carry himself pretty straight, or that sister of yours won't have nothing to do with him; I can see that in her eyes."

Then he went home. And cold though his room was he sat down, even after he had pulled off his coat, as a memory of some thoughtful word of Nettie's came over him, and went all over it again; then he brought his hard hand down with a thud on the rickety table, on which he leaned and said: "As sure as you live, and breathe the breath of life, old fellow, you've got to turn over a new leaf; and you've got to begin to-night."

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It was less than a week after the Thanksgiving excitements that the town got itself roused over something which reached even to the children. Jerry came home from school with it, and came directly to Nettie, his cheeks aglow with the news. "There's to be the biggest kind of a time here next Thursday, Nettie; don't you think General McClintock is coming, to give a lecture, and they are going to give him a reception at Judge Bentley's and I don't know what all, and the schools are all going to dismiss and go down to the train in procession to meet him, and they are going to sing, *Hail to the Chief*, and the band is to play, *See, the conquering Hero comes*, and I don't know what isn't going to be done."

"Who is General McClintock?" said ignorant Nettie, composedly drying her plate as though all the generals in the world were nothing to her. Then did Jerry come the nearest impatience that Nettie had ever seen in him; and he launched forth in such a wild praise of General McClintock and such an excited account of the things which he had done and said, and prevented, and pushed, that Nettie was half bewildered and delightfully excited when he paused for breath. Henceforth the talk of the town was General McClintock.

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"It is a wonder they asked him to speak on temperance," said Nettie, disdain in her voice; she had not a high opinion of the temperance enthusiasm of the town in which she lived.

"They didn't," said Jerry. "He asked himself; they wanted him to talk about the war, or the tariff, or the great West, or some other stupid thing, but he said, 'No, sir! the great question of the day is temperance, and I shall speak on that, or nothing!'"

"How do you happen to know so much about him?" Nettie questioned one day when Jerry was at his highest pitch of excitement.

"Ho!" he said, almost in scorn, "I have known about him ever since I was born; everybody knows General McClintock." Then Nettie felt meek and ignorant.

Nothing had ever so excited Jerry as the coming of the hero; and indeed the town generally seemed to have caught fire. General McClintock seemed to be the theme of every tongue. Connected with these days, Nettie had her perplexities and her sorrows. In the first place, Jerry was obstinately determined that she should join the procession with him to meet General McClintock. In vain she protested that she did not belong to the public schools. He did, he said, and that was enough. [411]

Then when Nettie urged and almost cried, he had another plan: "Well, then, we won't go as scholars. We'll go ahead, as private individuals; I'm only a kind of a scholar, anyhow, just holding on for a few weeks till my father comes; we'll go up there early and get a good place before the procession forms and see the whole of it. I know the marshal real well; he's a good friend of mine, and I know he will give us a place."

It was of no use for Nettie to protest; to remind him that the girls would think she was putting herself forward, to say that she had nothing to wear to such a gathering. She might as well have talked to a stone for all the impression she made. She had never seen him so resolute to have his own way. He did not care what she wore, it made not the slightest difference to him what the girls said, and he *did* ask it of her as a kindness to him, and he should be hurt so that he could never get over it if she refused to go; he had never wanted anything so much in his life, and he *could* not give it up. So Nettie, reluctant, sorrowful, promised, and cried over it in her room that night. She wanted to please Jerry, for his father was coming now in a few weeks perhaps, and Jerry would go away with him, and she should never see him again; and what in the world would she do without him? And here she cried harder than ever. [412]

Then came up that dreadful question of clothes; her one winter dress was too short and too narrow and a good deal worn. Auntie Marshall had thought last winter that it would hardly do for a church dress, and here it was still her best. There was no such thing as a new one for the present; for mother had not had anything in so long, she must be clothed, and Nettie was willing to wait; but she was not willing to take a conspicuous place on a public day and be stared at and talked about.

However, Jerry continued merciless to the very last; nothing else would satisfy him. He hurried her in a breathless state down the hill to the platform, smiled and nodded to his friend the marshal, who nodded back in the most confidential manner, and perched them on the corner of the temporary platform, right behind the reception committee! It was every whit as disagreeable as Nettie had planned that it should be. Of course Lorena Barstow was among the leaders in the young people's procession, and of course she contrived to get enough to be heard, and to say in a most unnecessarily loud voice: [413]

"Do look at that Decker girl perched up there on the platform. If she doesn't contrive to make herself a laughing stock everywhere! Girls, look at her hat; she must have worn it ever since they came out of the ark. What business is she here, anyway? She doesn't belong to the schools?"

There was much more in the same vein; much pushing and crowding, and laughing and hateful speeches about folks who crowded in where they didn't belong, and poor Nettie, the tears only kept back by force of will, looked in vain for sympathy into Jerry's fairly dancing eyes. What ailed the boy? She had never seen him so almost wild with eager excitement before. Judge Barstow and Dr. Lewis were both on the reception committee, of course, and under cover of this, their daughters wedged their way to the front, and whispered to the fathers. Loud whispers: [414]

"Papa, that ridiculous Decker girl and the little Irish boy with her ought not to be perched up there in that conspicuous place. She doesn't belong here, anyway; she isn't a scholar."

Then Judge Barstow in good-humored tones to Jerry: "My boy, don't you think you would find it quite as pleasant down there among the others? This little girl doesn't want to be up here, I am sure; suppose you both go down and fall behind the procession? You can see the General when the carriage passes; it is to be thrown open so every one can see."

Then the marshal: "If you please, Judge Barstow, it won't do for them to try to get through now. The crowd is so great they might be hurt; there is plenty of room where they stand. They will do no harm."

Now the tears must come from the indignant eyes. No, they shall not. Jerry doesn't even wink. He only laughs, in the highest good humor. Has Jerry gone wild with excitement? "It will all be over in two minutes," explains Judge Barstow. "He wished to drive directly to his hotel, and have perfect quiet for two hours. He declined to be entertained at a private house, or to say a word at the depot. I suppose he is fatigued, and doesn't like to trust his voice to speak in the open air; so the committee are to shake hands with him as rapidly as possible, and show him to his carriage, and not wait on him for two hours. He has ordered a private dinner at the Keppler House." [415]

Suddenly there is the whistle of the train, the band plays *See, the conquering Hero comes!* With the second strain the train comes to a halt, and a tall, broad-shouldered man with iron gray hair and a military air all about him steps from the platform amid the cheers of thousands. Now indeed there was some excuse for Lorena Barstow's loud exclamations of disapproval! There was Jerry, pushing his way among the throng, holding so firmly all the while to Nettie's hand that escape was impossible—pushing even past the reception committee, notwithstanding the detaining hand of Judge Barstow, who says,

"See here, my boy, you are impudent, did you know it?"

"I beg pardon," says Jerry respectfully, but he slips past him, just as General McClintock with courteous words is thanking the committee of reception, declining their pressing personal invitations, his eyes meantime roving over the crowd in search of something or somebody. Suddenly they melt with a tenderness which does not belong to the soldier, and the firm lips quiver as his voice says: "O my boy!" and Jerry the Irish boy flings himself into General McClintock's arms, and the world stands agape!

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Just a second, and his hand holds firmly to the sack which covers Nettie's startled frightened form, then he releases himself and turns to her: "Father, this is Nettie!"

"Sure enough!" said the General, and his tall head bends and the mustached lips of the old soldier touch Nettie's cheek, and the cheering, hushed for a second, breaks forth afresh! It is a moment of the wildest excitement. Even then Nettie tries to break away and is held fast. And an officer of the day advances with the military salute and assures the General that his carriage is in waiting. And the General himself hands the bewildered Nettie in, with a friendly smile and an assuring: "Of course you must go. My boy planned this whole thing three months ago; and you and I must carry out his programme to the letter." Then Jerry springs like a cat into the carriage, and the scholars sing, *Hail to the Chief*, and the carriage, drawn by four horses, rolls down the road made wide for it by the homeguard in full uniform, and the General lifts his hat and bows right and left, and smiles on Nettie Decker sitting by his side, and almost devours with his hungry, fatherly eyes, her friend the Irish boy on the opposite seat. And the scholars almost forget to sing, in their great and ever-increasing amazement.

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CHAPTER XXIV. THE PAST AND PRESENT.

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NETTIE DECKER sat by the window of her father's house, looking out into the beautiful world; taking one last look at the flowers, and the trees, and the lawn, and all the beautiful and familiar things. Saying good-by to them, for in a brief two hours she was to leave them, and the old home.

She is Nettie Decker still, but you will not be able to say that of her in another hour. She has changed somewhat since you last saw her in her blue gingham dress a trifle faded, or in her brown merino much the worse for time.

To-day she is twenty years old. A lovely summer day, and her birthday is to be celebrated by making it her wedding day. The blue gingham has been long gone; so has the brown merino. The dress she wears to-day looks unlike either of them. It is white, all white; she has a suitable dress at last for a gala day. Soft, rich, quiet white silk. Long and full and pure; not a touch of trimming about it anywhere. Not even a flower yet, though she holds one in her hand in doubt whether she will add it to the whiteness.

I think it will probably be pushed among the folds of soft lace which lie across her bosom; for that would please little Sate's artist eye, and Nettie likes to please Sate.

While she sits there, watching the birds, and the flowers, and thinking of the strange sweet past, and the strange sweet present, there pass by almost underneath the window two young ladies; moving slowly, glancing up curiously at the open casement, from which Nettie draws a little back, that she may not be seen.

"That is Nettie's room where the window is open," says one of the ladies. "It is a lovely room; I was in it once when the circle met there; it is furnished in blue, with creamy tints on the walls and furniture. I don't think I ever saw a prettier room. Nettie has excellent taste."

"Do you say her brother is to be at the wedding?"

"O, yes indeed! He came day before yesterday; he is a splendid-looking fellow, and smart; they say he is the finest student Yale has had for years. He graduated with the very highest honors, and now he is studying medicine. I heard Dr. Hobart say that he would be an honor to the profession. You ought to hear him play; I thought he would be a musician, he is so fond of music, and really he plays exquisitely on the organ. Last spring when he was home he played in church all day, and I heard ever so many people say they had never heard anything finer in any church."

"I don't remember him. Was he in our set?"

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NETTIE DECKER HAS A SUITABLE DRESS
AT LAST.

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"O no! he wasn't in any set when you were here. Why, Irene Lewis, you must remember the Deckers! They weren't in any set."

"Oh! I remember them, of course; don't you know what fun we used to make of Nettie? Didn't we call her Nan? I remember she always wore an old blue and white gingham to Sunday-school."

"That was years ago; she dresses beautifully now, and in exquisite taste. She must make a lovely bride. I should like to get a glimpse of her."

"The McClintocks are very rich, I have been told."

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"Oh! immensely so; and they say General McClintock just idolizes Nettie. I don't wonder at that; she is a perfectly lovely girl."

"Seems to me, Lorena, my dear, about the time I left this part of the world you did not think so much of her as you do now. I remember you used to make all sorts of fun of her, and real hateful speeches, as schoolgirls will, you know. I have a distinct recollection of a flower party where she was, and my conscience, I remember, troubled me at the time for saying so many disagreeable things about her that afternoon; but I recollect I comforted myself with the thought that you were much worse than I. You used to lead off, in those days, you know."

"Oh! I remember; I was a perfect little idiot in those days. Yes, I was disagreeable enough to Nettie Decker; if she hadn't been a real sweet girl she would never have forgotten it; but I don't believe she ever thinks of it, and really she is so utterly changed, and all the family are, that I hardly ever remember her as the same girl."

"What became of that little Irish boy she used to be so fond of—Jerry, his name was?"

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"Now, Irene Lewis! you don't mean to tell me you have never heard about him! Well, you have been out of the world, sure enough."

"I have never heard a word of him from the time I went with Uncle Lawrence out West. Father moved in the spring, you know, so instead of my coming back early in the spring as I expected, I never came until now? What about Jerry? Did he distinguish himself in any way? I always thought him a fine-looking boy."

"That is too funny that you shouldn't know! Why, the Irish boy, Jerry, as you call him, is the Gerald McClintock whom Nettie Decker is to marry at twelve o'clock to-day."

"Gerald McClintock! How can that be? That boy's name was Jerry Mack."

"Indeed it wasn't. We were all deceived in that boy. It does seem so strange that you have never heard the story! Why, you see, he was General McClintock's son all the time."

"Why did he pretend he was somebody else?"

"He didn't pretend; or at least I heard he said he didn't begin it. It seems that Mrs. Smith, the car-man's wife, you know, used to live in General McClintock's family before his wife died; and Job Smith lived there as coachman. When they married, General McClintock broke up housekeeping, and went South with his family. Then Mrs. McClintock died, and the General and this one boy boarded in New York, and Gerald attended school. In the spring the General was called to California on some important law business—you know he is a celebrated lawyer, and they say his son is going to be even more brilliant than his father—well, the father had to go, and the boy made him promise that he might spend the summer vacation with Mrs. Smith out here. The McClintocks had been very fond of her and her husband and trusted them both; so the General agreed to it, thinking he would be back long before the vacation closed."

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"But he was delayed by one thing and another, and the boy coaxed to stay on, and study in the public school here; he was a pupil in Whately Institute at home. Imagine him taking up with our common schools! so he stayed until the first of December, and then his father came."

"Such a time as that was! You see we all knew of General McClintock, of course, and when it was found we could get him to lecture, the people nearly went wild over it. We couldn't understand why we should have such good fortune, when we knew ever so many places—large cities—had been refused; but it was all explained after he came."

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"It was a beautiful day when he came; all the schools were closed, and we formed a procession and marched to the depot, and the band was there, and great crowds. I remember as though it were yesterday how astonished we were to see Nettie Decker and that boy in a conspicuous place on the corner of the platform. Nettie had on her old brown merino, and looked so queer and seemed so out of place, that I went and spoke to father about it, and he advised them to go down and join the procession; but it seems the marshal knew what he was about, and objected to their moving. Then the train came, and there was a great excitement, and in the midst of it, the General almost took that boy Jerry in his arms, and kissed and kissed him! Then he kissed Nettie Decker, and while we stood wondering what on earth it all meant, they all three entered an elegant carriage drawn by four horses, and were carried to the Keppler House."

"They had an elegant private dinner, they three; and in fact all the time the General was here, he kept Nettie Decker with them; he treated her more like a daughter than a stranger. I don't think there was ever such an excitement in this town about anything as we had at that time; the circumstances were so peculiar, you know."

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"But I don't understand it, yet. Why did he call himself Jerry Mack? What was his object in deceiving us all?"

"He hadn't the slightest intention of doing so. I heard he said such a thought never entered his

mind until we began it. It seems when he was a little bit of a fellow he tried to speak his name, Gerald McClintock, and the nearest he could approach to it, was, Jerry Mack. Of course they thought that was cunning, and it grew to be his pet name; so before they knew it, the servants and all his boy friends called him so, all the time. When he came here Mrs. Smith and her husband naturally used the old name; then somebody, I'm sure I don't know who, started the story that he was an Irish boy working at the Smiths for his board; and it seems he heard of it, and it amused him so much he decided to let people think so if they wanted to; he coaxed the Smiths not to tell who he was, or why he was here; and they so nearly worshipped him, that if he had asked them to say he was a North American Indian I believe they would have done it. It seems he liked Nettie Decker from the first, and was annoyed because she wasn't invited in our set. But I am sure I don't know how we were to blame; she had nothing to wear, and how were we to know that she was a very smart girl, and real sweet and good? The Deckers were very poor, and Mr. Decker drank, you know, and Norm was sort of a loafer, and we thought they were real low people."

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"I remember Ermina Farley was friendly with Nettie, and with the boy, too."

"O yes, Ermina was always peculiar; she is yet. I have always thought that perhaps Ermina knew something about the McClintocks, but she says she didn't. I heard her say the other day that somebody told her he was an Irish boy, whose father had run away and left him; and the Smiths gave him a home out of pity; and she supposed of course it was so, and was sorry for him. Then she always thought he was handsome, and smart; well, so did I, I must say."

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"I wonder who started that absurd story about his father deserting him?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; somebody imagined it was so, I suppose, and spoke of it; such things spread, you know, nobody seems to understand quite how."

"Well, as I remember things, Jerry—I shall always call him that name, I don't believe I could remember to say Mr. McClintock if I should meet him now—as I remember him, he seemed to be as poor as Nettie; he dressed very well, but not as a gentleman's son, and he seemed to be contriving ways to earn little bits of money. Don't you remember that old hen and chickens he bought? And he used to go to the Farleys every morning with a fresh egg for Helen; sold it, you know, for I was there one morning when Mrs. Farley paid him."

"I know it; he was always contriving ways to earn money; why, Irene, don't you remember his selling fish to Ermina Farley that day when we were talking down by the pond? I have always thought he heard more than we imagined he did, that day; I don't clearly remember what we said, but I know we were running on about Nettie Decker and about Jerry; I used to sort of dislike them both, because Ermina Farley was always trying to push them forward."

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"I would give something to know exactly what we did say that day. For awhile I did not like to meet any of the McClintocks; it always seemed to me as though they were thinking about that time. But they have been perfectly polite and cordial to me, always; and Nettie Decker is a perfect lady. But I know all about the poverty. It seems the boy Jerry had been very fond of giving away money, and books, and all sorts of things to people whom he thought needed them; and his father began to be afraid he would have no knowledge of the value of money, and would give carelessly, you know, just because he felt like it. So the General had a long talk with him, and made an arrangement that while he was gone West, Jerry should have nothing to give away but what he earned. He might earn as much as he liked, or could, and give it all away if he chose; but not a penny besides, and he was not to appeal to his father to help anybody in any way whatever. Of course the father was to pay all his bills for necessary things—they say he paid a splendid price to the Smiths for taking care of him. Poor Mrs. Smith cried when he went away, as though he had been her own child. Well, of course that crippled him, in his pocket money, but they say his father was very much pleased to find how many schemes he had started for earning money. That plan about the business was his from beginning to end, and just see what it has grown to!"

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"What? I don't know; remember, I only came night before last, and haven't heard anything about the town since the day I left it."

"Why, the Norman House, the most elegant hotel in town, is the outgrowth of that enterprise begun in the Decker's front room! Mr. Decker owns the whole thing, now, and manages it splendidly. His wife is a perfect genius, they say, about managing. She oversees the housekeeping herself, and the cooking is perfect they say. General McClintock was so pleased with the beginning, that he bought that long low building on Smith street that first time he was here, and fitted it up for Norman and Nettie to run. He carried his son away with him, of course, but they stayed long enough to see that matter fairly under way. The Norman House is managed on the same general principles; strictly temperance, of course. The General is as great a fanatic about that as the Deckers are, and the prices are very low—lower than other first-class houses, while the table is better, and the rooms are beautifully furnished. They say it is because Mrs. Decker is such an excellent manager that they can afford things at such low prices. Then, besides, there is a lunch room for young men, where they can get excellent things for just what they cost; that is a sort of benevolence. General McClintock devotes a certain amount to it each year; and there is a splendid young man in charge of the room; you saw him once, Rick Walker, his name is. He used to be considered a sort of hard boy, but there isn't a more respected young man in town than he. He is book-keeper at the Norman House, and has the oversight of this Home Dining Room. You ought to go in there; it is very nicely furnished, and they have flowers, plants, you know, and birds, and a fountain, and pictures on the walls, and for fifteen cents you can get an excellent dinner. Everybody likes Rick Walker; they say he has a great influence over the boys in town, almost as great as Norman Decker; *he* used to be in charge of it all, before he

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went to college."

"Still, I shouldn't think the McClintocks would have liked Nettie Decker to be in quite so public a place," interrupted her listener. "Oh! she wasn't public; why, she went to New York to a private school the very next winter after the General came home. She boarded with them; the General's sister came East with him, and was the lady of the house; then he sent her to Wellesley, you know. Didn't you know that? She graduated at Wellesley a year ago. Yes, the McClintocks educated her, or began it; her father has done so well that I suppose he hasn't needed their help lately. He is a master builder, you know, and keeps at his business, and owns and manages this hotel, besides. Oh! they are well off; you ought to see Mrs. Decker. She is a very pretty woman, and a real lady; they say Nettie and Norman are so proud of her! What was I telling you? Oh! about the room; they have a library connected with it, and a reading room, and everything complete; it is such a nice thing for our young men. A great many wealthy gentlemen contribute to the library. There is a little alcove at the further end of the reading room, where they keep cake and lemonade, and nuts and little things of all sorts. They are very cheap, but the boys can't get any cigars there; I'm so glad of that. The Norman House is in very great favor—quite the fashion, and it makes such a difference with the boys who are just beginning to imagine themselves young men, and who want to be manly, to have an elegant place like that frown on all such things. My brother Dick, you remember him? He was a little fellow when you lived here—he went into the Norman House one day and called for a cigar; he was just beginning to smoke, and I suppose he did it because he thought it would sound manly. It was in the spring when Norman was at home on vacation, and it seems he expressed so much astonishment that Dick was quite ashamed; I don't think he has smoked a cigar since."

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"The Deckers seem to be quite a centre of interest in town."

"Well, they are. They are a sort of exceptional family somehow; their experience has been so romantic. Mr. Decker has become such a nice man; Deacon Decker, he is, a prominent man in the church, and everywhere. Oh! do you remember those two cunning little girls? I always thought they were sweet. Susie is a perfect lady; she is going with Nettie and her husband to Washington; but little Sate is a beauty. They say she is going to be a poet and an artist, and she looks almost like an angel. General McClintock admires her very much; he says she shall have the finest art teachers in Europe. I never saw a family come up as they did, from nothing, you may say. But then it was all owing to that fortunate accident of being friends with Gerald McClintock, and having the Farleys interested in them. Did I tell you Norman was engaged to Ermina Farley? O yes! they will marry as soon as he graduates from the medical college, and then he will take her abroad and take a post graduate course in medicine there. I suppose they will take Sate with them then. They say that is the plan. No, I certainly never saw anything like their success in life. Mrs. Smith doesn't believe in luck, you know, nor much in money, though since her Job has a position in the Norman House that pays better than carting, they have built an addition to their house, and, Sarah Ann says, "live like folks." She is housekeeper at the Norman House—Mrs. Decker's right-hand woman. Mrs. Smith says the Lord had a great deal to do with the Decker family; that Nettie came home resolved to be faithful to Him, and to trust Him to save her father and brother, and so He did it, of course. It seems she and Jerry promised each other to work for Norman and the father in every possible way until they were converted; and they did. I must say I think they are real wonderful Christians, all of them. I like to hear Mr. Decker pray better than almost any other man in our meeting; and as for Norman, he leads a meeting beautifully. They say Mr. Sherrill thought at first that he ought to preach; but now he says he is reconciled; there is greater need for Christian physicians than for ministers. Mr. Sherrill has always been great friends with all the Deckers; you remember he was, from the first. Norman studied with him all the time he was managing that first little bit of a restaurant in the square room of the old Decker house. They tore down that house last month, to make room for a carriage drive around the back of their new house, and they say Nettie cried when the square room was torn up.

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"She has some of the quaintest furniture! Sofas, she calls them, made out of boxes; and a queer old-fashioned hour-glass stand, and a barrel chair, which have been sent on with all her elegant things, to New York; she is going to furnish a room for Gerald and her with them; he made them, it seems, when they began that queer scheme. Who would have supposed it could grow as it did? It really seems as though the Lord must have had a good deal to do with it, doesn't it? I tell you, Irene, it is wonderful how many young men they have helped save, those two. It seems a pity sometimes that they could not have told us girls what they were about and let us help; but then, I don't know as we would have helped if we had understood; I used to be such a perfect little idiot then! Well, it was Nettie Decker got hold of me at last. Norman signed the pledge that night when General McClintock lectured here, and during the winter he was converted; but it was two years after that before I made up my mind. I was miserable all that time, too; because I knew I was doing wrong. And I didn't treat Nettie wonderfully well any of the time; but when she came to me with her eyes shining with tears, and said she had been praying for me ever since that day of the flower party, I just broke down.

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"O Irene, there's the carriage with the bride and groom and Norman and Ermina. Doesn't the bride look lovely! I wish they had had a public wedding and let us all see her! But they say General McClintock thinks weddings ought to be very private. Never mind, we will see her at the reception next week; but then, she won't be Nettie Decker; we shall have to say good-by to her."

And Miss Lorena Barstow stood still in the street, and shaded her eyes from the sunlight to watch the bridal party as the carriage wound around the square, looking her last with tender, loving eyes, upon Nettie Decker.

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A DOZEN OF THEM. By Pansy. Boston: D. Lothrop Company. Price 60 cents. A Sunday-school story, written in Pansy's best vein, and having for its hero a twelve-year-old boy who has been thrown upon the world by the death of his parents, and who has no one left to look after him but a sister a little older, whose time is fully occupied in the milliner's shop where she is employed. Joe, for that is the boy's name, finds a place to work at a farmhouse where there is a small private school. His sister makes him promise to learn by heart a verse of Scripture every month. It is a task at first, but he is a boy of his word, and he fulfills his promise, with what results the reader of the story will find out. It is an excellent book for the Sunday-school.

AT HOME AND ABROAD. Stories from *The Pansy* Boston: D. Lothrop Company. Price, \$1.00. A score of short stories which originally appeared in the delightful magazine, *The Pansy*, have been here brought together in collected form with the illustrations which originally accompanied them. They are from the pens of various authors, and are bright, instructive and entertaining.

ABOUT GIANTS. By Isabel Smithson. Boston: D. Lothrop Company. Price 60 cents. In this little volume Miss Smithson has gathered together many curious and interesting facts relating to real giants, or people who have grown to an extraordinary size. She does not believe that there was ever a race of giants, but that those who are so-called are exceptional cases, due to some freak of nature. Among those described are Cutter, the Irish giant, who was eight feet tall, Tony Payne, whose height exceeded seven feet, and Chang, the Chinese giant, who was on exhibition in this country a few years ago. The volume contains not only accounts of giants, but also of dwarfs, and is illustrated.

AMERICAN AUTHORS. By Amanda B. Harris. Boston: D. Lothrop Company. Price \$1.00. This is one of the books we can heartily commend to young readers, not only for its interest, but for the information it contains. All lovers of books have a natural curiosity to know something about their writers, and the better the books, the keener the curiosity. Miss Harris has written the various chapters of the volume with a full appreciation of this fact. She tells us about the earlier group of American writers, Irving, Cooper, Prescott, Emerson, and Hawthorne, all of whom are gone, and also of some of those who came later, among them the Cary sisters, Thoreau, Lowell, Helen Hunt, Donald G. Mitchell and others. Miss Harris has a happy way of imparting information, and the boys and girls into whose hands this little book may fall will find it pleasant reading.

TILTING AT WINDMILLS: A Story of the Blue Grass Country. By Emma M. Connelly. Boston: D. Lothrop Company. 12mo, \$1.50.

Not since the days of "A Fool's Errand" has so strong and so characteristic a "border novel" been brought to the attention of the public as is now presented by Miss Connelly in this book which she so aptly terms "Tilting at Windmills." Indeed, it is questionable whether Judge Tourgee's famous book touched so deftly and yet so practically the real phases of the reconstruction period and the interminable antagonisms of race and section.

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Miss Connelly's work in this, her first novel, will make readers anxious to hear from her again and it will certainly create, both in her own and other States, a strong desire to see her next forthcoming work announced by the same publishers in one of their new series—her "Story of the State of Kentucky."

THE ART OF LIVING. From the Writings of Samuel Smiles. With Introduction by the venerable Dr. Peabody of Harvard University, and Biographical Sketch by the editor, Carrie Adelaide Cooke. Boston: D. Lothrop Company. Price \$1.00.

Samuel Smiles is the Benjamin Franklin of England. His sayings have a similar terseness, aptness and force; they are directed to practical ends, like Franklin's; they have the advantage of being nearer our time and therefore more directly related to subjects upon which practical wisdom is of practical use.

Success in life is his subject all through, *The Art of Living*; and he confesses on the very first

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Is it worth while to join the mad rush for the lottery; or to take the old road to slow success?

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Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation errors repaired.

First book list page, "Eaoh" changed to "Each" (Each volume 16mo)

Page 4, "208" changed to "226" to reflect actual first page of Chapter XII.

Page 4, "230" changed to "304" to reflect actual first page of Chapter XVII.

Page 4 and 5, each page number reference increased by two to match actual location of remaining chapters. (*i.e.* 318 is now 320 to reflect location of Chapter XVIII)

Page 29, "botton" changed to "bottom" (for in the bottom of)

Page 69, "nowdays" changed to "nowadays" (the pennies nowadays)

Page 88, "keees" changed to "knees" (soon on her knees)

Page 200, "think" changed to "thing" (thing that I should)

Page 202, "interruped" changed to "interrupted" (of her had interrupted)

Page 212, "sat" changed to "set" (he set the table)

Page 269, "unsual" changed to "unusual" (unusual toilet having)

Page 385, extra word "the" removed from text. Original read (have at the the windows)

Page 407, "pealed" changed to "peeled" (turnips half-peeled)

Page 437, "esson" changed to "lesson" (lesson is the joy)

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