

# **The Project Gutenberg eBook of Six Girls and the Tea Room, by Marion Ames Taggart**

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Six Girls and the Tea Room

Author: Marion Ames Taggart

Illustrator: William F. Stecher

Release date: March 1, 2015 [EBook #48389]

Language: English

\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIX GIRLS AND THE TEA ROOM \*\*\*

**E-text prepared by Beth Baran  
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team  
(<http://www.pgdp.net>)  
from page images generously made available by  
HathiTrust Digital Library  
([http://www.hathitrust.org/digital\\_library](http://www.hathitrust.org/digital_library))**

Note: Images of the original pages are available through HathiTrust Digital Library. See <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39076002272016;view=1up;seq=1>

---

SIX GIRLS  
AND THE  
TEA ROOM



MARION AMES  
TAGGART



**"THERE WERE EXCITING DAYS,  
TIRESOME TOO"**

---

*(Sequel to "Six Girls and Bob")*

## **SIX GIRLS AND THE TEA ROOM**

*A STORY*

BY

MARION AMES TAGGART

*Author of "Six Girls and Bob," "The Little Grey House," "The Wyndham Girls," etc.*

ILLUSTRATED BY  
WILLIAM F. STECHER



W. A. WILDE COMPANY  
BOSTON CHICAGO

---

*Copyrighted, 1907*  
BY W. A. WILDE COMPANY  
*All rights reserved*

SIX GIRLS AND THE TEA ROOM

---

## ***To Gertrude, amid the mountains:***

Again a story of the Six Girls of whom we are fond, is dedicated to you. It will tell you what delightful things grew out of their Tea Room, and how the "Patty-Pans flat" was filled with happiness till it overflowed into a larger home.

It proves—what you know—that the best times are not always great times. Our Six Girls—and the boys—are busy young folk, and the good things that have come to them they won by courage, perseverance and the merry hearts that are part of innocence and sweetness.

More than all, our Six Girls—and one boy—love one another so dearly that they cannot help being successful and happy. We believe—do we not?—that a loving home alone is a real home.

Margery, Happie, Gretta and Bob know well that "'tis love that makes the world go 'round." They ask love of those who read the story of their Tea Room which brought happiness to so many, in such unforeseen ways. It is the story of a winter, but a winter all sunshine.

Remembering how it was written is it fittingly dedicated to you, dear Gertrude.

---

### **CONTENTS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
CHAPTER I. <a href="#">THE PATTY-PANS AGAIN</a>	11
CHAPTER II. <a href="#">"PLEASED TO MEET YOU"</a>	26
CHAPTER III. <a href="#">THE CUP THAT CHEERS</a>	41
CHAPTER IV. <a href="#">CHRISTMAS, AND AN INVITATION</a>	54
CHAPTER V. <a href="#">"THE HANDSOME MISS ANGELA KEY-STONE"</a>	69
CHAPTER VI. <a href="#">UP-STAIRS AND DOWN-STAIRS</a>	85
CHAPTER VII. <a href="#">AN OPEN DOOR</a>	99
CHAPTER VIII. <a href="#">HARD TRAVELING</a>	115
CHAPTER IX. <a href="#">AN UNPREJUDICED VIEW</a>	130
CHAPTER X. <a href="#">"SEEING IS BELIEVING"</a>	145
CHAPTER XI. <a href="#">THE ELASTIC PATTY-PANS</a>	161
CHAPTER XII. <a href="#">THE TWO KEREN-HAPPUCHS</a>	176
CHAPTER XIII. <a href="#">A HINT OF SPRING</a>	193
CHAPTER XIV. <a href="#">LITTLE SERENA</a>	207
CHAPTER XV. <a href="#">"MONGST THE HILLS OF SOMERSET, WISHT I WAS A-ROAMIN' YET!"</a>	224
CHAPTER XVI. <a href="#">HAPPIE GRANTS AMNESTY</a>	240
CHAPTER XVII. <a href="#">JONES-DEXTER PRIDE</a>	256
CHAPTER XVIII. <a href="#">A SIEGESLIED</a>	272
CHAPTER XIX. <a href="#">PATTY-PANS NO MORE</a>	288
CHAPTER XX. <a href="#">EAST AND WEST</a>	304

---

### **ILLUSTRATIONS**

	<b>PAGE</b>
<a href="#">"THERE WERE EXCITING DAYS, TIRESOME TOO" <i>FRONTISPIECE</i></a>	36
<a href="#">"THE TEA ROOM ... BECAME A STERN FACT"</a>	54
<a href="#">"MR. FELTON CAME OUT OF HIS SANCTUM"</a>	127
<a href="#">"SHE JUMPED UP, STRAIGHTENED HER TWISTED GARMENTS...."</a>	185
<a href="#">"BOB, GRETTA AND DON DOLOR BROKE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE SNOW"</a>	261

---

## **SIX GIRLS AND THE TEA ROOM**

[11]

### **CHAPTER I THE PATTY-PANS AGAIN**

"Is this the Patty-Pans?" asked Gretta, setting down the basket that held Jeunesse Dorée, the yellow kitten, and looking around the little dining-room with great interest. And she asked it with her voice up on "Patty," and down on "Pans," because she was a true Pennsylvania country

girl.

"This is our city residence, Patty-Pans-on-the-Hudson," said Happie Scollard. "Isn't it beautifully queer, the way we're glad to see anything again? We all were in the dolefullest dumps going to Crestville last April, then we felt dumpy coming away this morning because we'd got so attached to the farm—and it was a risk taking Gretta away from home for the first time! And now we're all as glad to see our dear little Patty-Pan flat as if we hadn't loved the farm, and in the spring we'll be perfectly crazy to see the farm again—and so it goes! Sorry to leave one thing, and just jumping glad to see another!"

Miss Keren-happuch Bradbury, the Scollards' adopted aunt whose unlikely name Happie bore, laughed. "Your 'jumping gladness' is always more in evidence than your regrets, Happie," she said. "Now, my annexed family, I am going home. You can get on without me in your own domain, and I want to see what has happened in mine during these long months of our exile. Margery, Happie, I will come down to-morrow and take you to see the room that I thought would answer for your proposed tea room. There's the bell! Bob and Laura with supplies from the delicatessen shop, likely. Charlotte, go to bed early and rest well to prepare for to-morrow, if you want to resume responsibility. Good-bye, my dears. I wonder how Noah liked parting from his animals!" [12]

She started down the tiny three-foot hall in her brisk way, but Happie rushed after her and threw herself upon this "Noah" into whose Ark of refuge the Scollards had been taken the previous spring. Then the waters of affliction had threatened to submerge them, and their brave little "Charlotte-mother" was in danger of slipping away altogether, broken down by her long struggle to support her six children, as well as to educate them herself.

The Scollards had dubbed Miss Keren-happuch's farm "the Ark," with good reason, for it had preserved them, and their dearest of mothers had come back from it fit to take up her burden again. To be sure, during the nine months they had spent in Crestville the farm had proved to belong rightfully to Gretta Engel, the young girl with whom Happie had made such fast friends and who had now returned with them to share the experiences of a winter that promised to be interesting, but this did not alter nor lessen the Scollards' debt to that fine old gentlewoman, their grandmother's eccentric friend, Miss Keren-happuch Bradbury. She had been indeed their "Noah" who had saved them from destruction, and Happie ran after her at her hint of regret in leaving them, precipitating herself upon her in such wise that it was evident she had lost every bit of her former fear of her name donor. It was lucky that the little hall was but three feet wide, for Miss Keren staggered under the onslaught, though she kissed Happie's glowing cheek as heartily as the girl kissed her pale one. [13]

"I know how the animals felt when they saw Noah walking off, dearest Auntie Keren!" she cried. "They felt like bleating, and as if Shem and Ham and Japhet, and all their wives couldn't console them if Noah hadn't promised to come often to see that they were fed, and to pat their heads and let them lick his hand! You dearest of Auntie Kerens!"

"I hope the original Noah didn't have the bear as spokesman for the rest of the animals!" gasped Miss Keren. "Happie, you are smothering me. There, my dear, let me go! I hear Bob whistling up the stairs, and Laura begging him to go slower. Gretta owns the Ark now. Go and hug her!"

Pretty Margery came out of a room farther down the hall and opened the door to let Miss Keren out and to let in Bob, the one Scollard boy, and Laura, the third girl. She kissed Miss Keren with her gentle, sweet manner, conveying silently her sense of the blessed difference between the circumstances of their return to the flat which Happie had dubbed "the Patty-Pans" and those under which they had closed that front door behind them in the spring to go to Crestville, and her realization that the Scollards owed this betterment to Miss Keren. [14]

Bob and Laura came in with arms filled with packages, most of which had to be carried so perfectly right side up that Laura's face was one pucker of solicitude.

Penny—Penelope, the baby,—had been vainly trying to unfasten the cords holding down the cover of Jeunesse Dorée's basket, stimulated by his imploring mews. Polly had been conducting Gretta through the flat, which struck the girl, for the first time entering a domicile other than the Crestville farmhouses, as a sort of miracle for which previous descriptions had not prepared her mind.

"No wonder Happie called it 'the Patty-Pans,'" said Gretta, as they arrived at the parlor window through a series of telescopic rooms. "It goes on, one room after another, just for all the world like such sheets of baking tins! And are there many like this in this one house?"

Polly felt delightfully experienced, at ten, beside tall Gretta of fifteen, who did not know flats.

"There are two on each floor, and this house is six stories high; this is the fourth floor, east. The Gordons—Ralph and Snigs, you know,—are just across from us, fourth floor, west. That makes twelve flats in one house," she explained carefully. "I guess they're all rented; they generally are in December, like this. They're the nicest flats for this rent mamma saw. You have to have re'frunces to get in, and mamma wouldn't like to leave us alone all day when she's gone to take charge of foreign letters for that firm down in town 'less we were in a house where they were strict about re'frunces." Polly—Mary, but no one called her that,—was a most reliable, painstaking, plump little person, and she intended to go on enlightening Gretta as to the peculiarities of flats, when there came a horrible sound of ripping, tearing, pounding, thumping, that made Gretta jump half way across the little room and then lean against the wall holding both hands to her throat, her pretty face utterly stripped of its rich color, her big eyes bigger and darker than ever as she panted: "Wh-what's that?" [15]

Polly dropped into the nearest chair and laughed so hard that for a minute she could not speak. Before she caught her breath Happie came in and joined in Polly's mirth as she saw Gretta's face and heard the frightful racket which was keeping on as loud as ever.

"You thought we were going straight up through the roof, didn't you, Gretta?" she cried. "I don't blame you, but it's only the steam heat coming on. It has been turned off so long that the pipes were full of water, and when the pipes are cold it always goes on like that. It isn't half so nice as our fireplace and the logs up at Crestville, is it? But it's safe. Come out, both of you, and help get lunch first and then eat it. What do you think? Dorée went right under the sink the minute he was let out, and looked for his pan of milk where it sat last winter! Who would have supposed he would remember? He was nothing but a kitten when we went away." [16]

She had wound her arm around Gretta and had related Dorée's proof of memory as they went down the hall. Her telescopic home looked very pretty to Happie and she could not help being glad to be back to her old life, but it was such a new life to Gretta that she was afraid of her not liking it. She was most anxious that the girl whom she loved and who had never tasted happiness, should spend every day in New York in entire content.

Margery and Laura had the table set when Happie and Gretta arrived on the scene. Bob saluted them waving a thin wooden dish with tinned corners from which he had just emptied the delicatessen-shop potato salad.

"You might run out to the pump and fetch some water, Gretta," he suggested. But Gretta shook her head.

"Come now, I'm not as bad as that!" she cried. "They have water running from spigots up in the mountain hotels, and I've seen it! And I shall not blow out the gas, either!" [17]

"Happie told you!" said Bob. "Don't you put on airs, Gretta! Mother, lady mother, come forth and regale yourself."

Mrs. Scollard hastened to accept this invitation. She patted Penny's plump, country-browned little hand, as Margery lifted her into the high chair at her mother's side. She was a pretty mother—Margery was like her—and young still; it was no wonder that her children dropped into their old places around the table beaming with happiness at seeing her once more at its head, all her old look of weakness and weariness blown away somewhere beyond the Crestville mountains.

The hastily prepared lunch tasted very good and everybody was doing full justice to it, when there came a pounding from the direction of the little kitchen, which made Gretta drop her fork to cry: "What's that?" and sent Bob flying towards it with a partly articulate exclamation of: "Ralph and Snigs!"

"They always pound with a stick from their dumb-waiter door on ours, and then we go to the door—the front door—and let them in," explained Polly, in her rôle of instructress to Gretta.

This time such informality was not to obtain, however. Bob came back with a broad grin on his face and a note in his hand.

"They weren't there when I got there; they must have pounded, and then dropped on the floor when they heard me coming," he said to his family. "This note was pinned on our dumb-waiter door with a skewer." [18]

He proceeded to unfold the note and read: "Mr. Ralph Gordon, Mr. Charles (alias Snigs) Gordon, present their compliments to Mrs. Charlotte Scollard, Miss Scollard, the Misses Keren-happuch, Laura, Mary and Penelope Scollard, Miss Gretta Engel and Mr. Robert Scollard, and request the pleasure of being allowed to call upon them at their earliest convenience. R. S. V. P."

Considering that the Gordon boys had been spending Thanksgiving at the farm, and had come down from it with the Scollards that very morning of the Tuesday after Thanksgiving, it really did not seem as if this formal note, nor even this pressing haste to see the family in the opposite flat, was necessary. Bob crumpled up the note, thrust it into his pocket and dashed out into the hall, where he beat a lively tattoo on the door across from the Patty-Pans' entrance, forgetting all about the rule of consideration for people above and below them, and crying: "Come on over now, you chumps! Come on over!"

Ralph and Snigs appeared, dodged Bob's affectionate blows, and came beaming into the dining-room where they shook hands all around with the Scollards from whom they had parted hardly an hour before, when they had all arrived from the train.

"Glad to see you back!" cried Ralph heartily. "How well you're looking, all of you! I hear that you have been making a long summer of it up in Madison County, Pennsylvania, among the mountains. Evidently it agreed with you. I mean to take a run up in that part of the country myself one of these days. Is this Miss Engel, whose discovery of her grandmother's will, in the horse-hair trunk where her step-grandfather had hidden it, resulted in her snatching from Miss Bradbury the farm which you called the Ark? Very glad to see you, Miss Engel. I don't remember meeting an heiress before. You ought to have prevented your grandmother from marrying a scamp for a second husband. It's wrong to be reckless with grandmothers!" [19]

"The farm isn't worth enough to call me an heiress, Mr. Gordon. I wish you could have come up to see us this summer," retorted Gretta. Which, considering how she and Ralph had chased calves, made hay, and looked after Don Dolor, the horse, together, proved that Gretta was learning how to talk nonsense with these new friends.

"Gretta's grandmother married again before she was born, Ralph," said Polly, who always set

everybody right.

"My souls and uppers, Ralph, but you are long winded! You'd better take to the law where you can use your gift of gab!" exclaimed Bob.

"Say, it was fine being up there in the Ark, but I'm mighty glad you're all back here again!" said Snigs, looking around the room and the Scollard circle in profound satisfaction. "Mother says if you could know how glad she was to get you back you'd be ashamed of having left her alone on the other side." [20]

"No we wouldn't, because if we hadn't gone she wouldn't have been so happy now," cried Happie. "Where's Whoop-la?"

"Oh, cut back and fetch Whoop-la!" Ralph ordered his junior. And Snigs hurried off, quickly returning with the Gordon tiger cat, grown big, at whom Dorée set up every hair inhospitably.

"Aunt Keren is coming to fetch us to see the future tea room to-morrow, Ralph," said Margery, bringing her mother a cup of hot tea and passing the crackers and cheese to the boys. "I am half afraid, now that the experiment is to be experimented."

"Always heard tea was bad for the nerves," said Ralph, deftly catching a bit of Neuchâtel cheese which was about to drop, on the edge of the cracker which it was meant to supplement. "What are you afraid of? You'll have a tea room that would make a Russian enlist in the Japanese army, and you'll coin money—like a counterfeiter."

"Counterfeit Japanese?" suggested Happie. "I'm not much afraid of the tea room—though I might be of the tea! As long as I don't have to drink it I won't be afraid of that either. But it does seem rather awesome to think of Margery and me running a tea room, with only Gretta and Laura to help, and mother down in town all day, superintending a foreign firm's big correspondence—I mean a big firm's foreign correspondence—and Bob in Mr. Felton's office again, and you boys at school, and nobody to fall back on till night, no matter what happened!" [21]

"It didn't seem possible," began Laura in her pompous way, "that we could make our dream of the tea room a reality, until now. But with us back in town and Aunt Keren coming to-morrow to get our approval of the room it is almost *un fait accompli*."

"Let's see, that means an accomplice of fate, doesn't it, Laura?" inquired Bob slyly. He never lost a chance of pricking the bubble of Laura's vanity. "I've not a doubt that the tea room will prove an accomplice of fate." He jumped up and mounted a chair with no warning of his intentions. "My brethren, and also my sisteren," he preached in a sermonizing voice. "This is a world in which one thing leads to another. It has not been my lot to journey far in this round planet, nor has it been my lot to see that it is round. I have been limited to a flatness that extended as far as my eye could reach. But I know—because Columbus proved it by smashing the end of an egg—that could my eye but go on and on it would soon roll over the declining edge of a rotund world. And so I know, although my sweet sixteen years have not carried me to the depths of human experience, that the world of each of us is also a round world, in which events roll around and around, much like the careless kitten that flitteth in circles after its coy tail. And even, my brethren and sisteren, as the flitting of the kitten causes the tail it pursues to circle, so do we, unknowingly, cause the events which seem to chase us. I have no doubt that Sister Laura has spoken as truly as she has spoken beautifully when, in the language of the polite successors of the ancient Gauls, she has said that the tea room would prove an accomplice of fate. Even as the drops of tea flow from the noses of the small teapots of the future refreshment room, so shall the consequences of that room's existence flow through the lives of our beloved sisters Margaret and Keren-happuch, and possibly of others unknown to us." [22]

Gretta groaned, after the fashion of congregations assembled in the old-time camp meetings in the woods, which she had seen when she was very small. Ralph and Snigs were about to applaud, but Happie checked them with a stern face as Bob descended from his chair. "Hush, you never applaud a sermon!" she whispered. "The congregation will join me in the hymn."

She began to sing, and Margery joined with an alto and Laura with a tenor, as if the "hymn" were already familiar. It was sung to the air which has been called, "Tell Aunt Rhody," and its words ran thus:

"A word of wisdom, a word of wisdom, a word of wisdom  
Is of use.  
This word is come, this word is come, this word is come  
From a goose." [23]

Ralph and Snigs shouted. "You are the greatest crowd!" exclaimed Ralph admiringly. "You are always springing something new on us. I never heard this sermon racket before. If I ought to be a lawyer, you ought to preach, Bob. And where *did* you catch the hymn?"

"Bob used to preach when we were little, and we wanted a hymn to sing at his sermons. We didn't dare sing a real hymn, for fear it would be irreverent, so mother wrote the words of this one for us. We hope that it will be a benefit to you," said Happie demurely.

Polly came in from the kitchen looking guilty. "Whoop-la jumped on the table and took the rest of the sardines," she said. "So I gave them, even half and half, to him and Dorée. I didn't like to tell you for fear Ralph would scold Whoop-la. But it was good he stole—took them, for it made Dorée stop growling at him. There was one tail, with a little piece above it, that didn't come out even after I divided, so I gave that to Whoop-la because he was company. I hope you won't say



anything to him about it."

Polly was the champion of all animals, and she was Ralph's great friend. The big boy put his arm around her affectionately. "I'll call sardines 'herrings' before Whoop-la from this very day, for fear of embarrassing him, Sweet P.," he said. [24]

The bell rang and Snigs cried, "That's mother, I'll wager what you like."

Penny ran to open the door, and Mrs. Gordon's voice called out: "I missed my boys and felt sure where to find them. May I come?"

Mrs. Scollard hastened out to meet her guest, and Margery, Happie and Gretta fell to clearing the table and washing dishes as fast as they could.

"It's a good thing I lived with you in the country before we came in town, or I never should have got used to your ways. And even now you seem different here, though I can't tell how," Gretta said to Happie as they removed the crumbs from the table.

"Of course; we're in a different state! Isn't this New York and wasn't that Pennsylvania?" inquired Happie. "Nonsense, Gretta; we're just the same, only more so."

"Don't you dread that tea room, honest?" asked Gretta.

"Just a wee bit, but don't you say I said so," returned Happie. "If we can make it go and be useful it will be beautiful. The only thing I really dread about it is its failing."

It had been partly Gretta's plan, at least she had suggested and added to Margery and Happie's idea of a tea room, in which they were to try to make a little of the money they needed that winter. Kind Miss Keren-happuch Bradbury had promised to guarantee their rent and had found the room for the purpose. To-morrow she was going to show it to them. It did seem formidable, now that it was taking such definite shape, the plan of setting up the library and tea room which they had discussed in far-off Crestville. But the Mrs. Stewart from whom they would rent the room was to be above them, with her dancing school, to chaperon them, and perhaps their youth would make the little enterprise go the better. At least it was not Happie's way to be timorous. [25]

"Of course I'm not really afraid, Gretta," she said, with the little toss of her bright red-brown hair which Gretta knew and loved. And she led the way into the tiny kitchen of the flat like an amazon at the head of her warriors.

[26]

---

## CHAPTER II

### "PLEASED TO MEET YOU"

**N**o one had ever known Miss Keren-happuch Bradbury to miss an appointment.

The four girls were ready for her betimes, for she never kept any one waiting and had the strongest objection to unpunctuality in another.

She rang the bell of the small apartment ten minutes earlier than the Scollards had looked for her, and appeared erect and brisk as ever, with that combination of thorough breeding and disregard for externals which was peculiar to herself.

This time, however, it seemed that Miss Bradbury had passed her own limit of garments which, however fine and costly in their day, were stamped with the fact that their day had been marked on a calendar long superseded.

"My children, I'm a frump!" she announced on entering, without other greeting. "I am sure that you will be ashamed to be seen with me. I should have made our investigating day a later one, and got myself clad in the garments of the present year of grace first of all things. Do look at this coat! Its sleeves cry aloud, like the great-mouthed trombones they resemble, that they were made two years ago. One's sleeves always turn traitor and betray one! My coat is not so bad, except the sleeves. Will you mind seriously? And will you promise to walk one on each side of me, pressed close every minute, so no one can see how disgraceful I am? I look as though I had indeed come out of the Ark yesterday!" [27]

"You always look like a dear, old-fashioned gentlewoman, Aunt Keren," said Margery, sincerely and affectionately.

"It's beautiful cloth, Auntie Keren; it hasn't lost its gloss one bit," Happie added consolingly. The Scollards were under the impression that Miss Bradbury's obsolete effect was not a matter of choice, that she had too little money to discard good garments merely because they were out of fashion.

"There's one thing: you don't outgrow your things now!"

"Literally and physically?" cried Miss Keren-happuch. "Why should I? Surely there ought to be some compensation in being beyond the sixtieth goal!"

"But we do," insisted Happie. "We are worse in our last winter's coats than you are in yours. Your sleeves are behind the times, but ours are above our wrists, Margery's and mine. Laura is safe because she inherits. We were wishing for frilled muffs when you came."

"And I think it would be more sensible to wish for new coats," Polly added.



"Such as we are we must get under way. Those who know us will know we have been rustivating, and the other four millions, more or less, won't care," said Miss Bradbury turning towards the door. "Are Polly and Penny to be safely left alone? We may not get back to luncheon." [28]

"Mrs. Gordon promised to keep her eye on them," said Margery, stooping to kiss her two little sisters good-bye.

How noisy, bewilderingly noisy, crowded and unclean the streets of the great city seemed to Margery and Happie after the wind-swept spaces, the deep silence of the mountains! Gretta did not see them in detail. She walked them clutching Happie's arm, her one idea to thread safely between trolleys, trucks, automobiles and all the other monsters that charged down upon her, to which Margery and Happie seemed recklessly indifferent, and Miss Bradbury and Laura, each in her different way, horribly oblivious.

"Oh, Auntie Keren, it isn't here, is it?" cried Happie, as Miss Bradbury turned into a most desirable street, close to the shopping district and between Broadway and Fifth Avenue. She had steadily refused to tell the girls where she had found the place she thought would be best for the proposed tea room. This neighborhood took their breath away. It was so dismaying, yet so very desirable!

"We never could pay the rent of a room near here, Aunt Keren," said Margery.

"Higher rents mean more business, my novices in the Art of Getting Rich!" said Miss Bradbury keeping on her unruffled way. "This block is my judgment for you; we will talk it over afterwards. If the rent is not forth-coming at first, you understand that I am responsible for it. If the tea room really amounts to anything it will be likely to pay more than rent here. Elsewhere, I doubt it would get beyond making its own lower rent. Do you see that house with the square bow window, like a shop, but close curtained with green sash curtains? That is Mrs. Stewart's dancing school, and she is anxious to sub-let the shop on the lower floor. She will give it to you at a reasonable figure, and it has the great advantage of being under the rooms which she uses, where you can have the benefit of the dear little woman's advice and chaperonage. I have known Mrs. Stewart for a long time, admiring her and pitying her with all my heart. Here we are!" [29]

A curtained door led down three steps into the shop, but Miss Bradbury rang the house bell and a maid admitted her, with the four girls in her train, into the hall and into a reception-room at its rear.

A little lady with a charming face, who moved with the rhythm of a poem, came swiftly into the room to greet the arrivals.

"Oh, I hope you'll like the little shop!" she cried girlishly, giving Margery a quick glance of admiration that instantly included handsome Gretta and Happie, with her irregular, attractive face. "It never was used as a shop. I am its first tenant and I used it for dancing classes until I decided that the children were better kept altogether on the first floor—this would be a basement shop, you know, if the house were quite normal." [30]

"Then you are not dismayed by the apparition of such youthful tenants?" suggested Miss Keren. "Margery, this girl, will keep her eighteenth birthday sooner than she would if she realized the penalties of being grown up. Happie, my unfortunate namesake, is fifteen, Laura is thirteen—but she is not a responsible person, only an assistant in the project, as is Gretta, this Pennsylvania girl of ours who has turned out the real owner of my farm—I mean the farm that I thought I owned. Then, little Madam Terpsichore, will you let us see the room?"

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mrs. Stewart, leading the way. She opened the door upon a large room, bare of all furniture except a piano, and a few chairs neatly piled one upon another as if they had been arrested in playing leap frog.

The woodwork of the room was white, panelled in green; there was about it great cheerfulness and suggestions of all sorts of possibilities. The girls looked at one another with bright, excited eyes.

"You like it," Miss Keren stated, not needing to ask.

"We love it, Aunt Keren—if we can afford to," said Happie whimsically.

"Love does not count cost," said Miss Keren. "Mrs. Stewart and I mapped out the general lay of the land—your kingdom—thus: a curtain across here, partly drawn, to cut off some of the light at the rear and allow lanterns where you serve tea on small tables. A gas stove here—tapping this pipe and hidden by a screen. On this, water perpetually boiling. A dresser here, also hidden as you see,—the screen would cut off this entire corner,—for teacups, cakes and all that sort of thing. Around the front, book-shelves, if you decide to add a circulating library to your tea room, as you planned at first to do. And possibly tables here, too, if necessary—candies? Happie, your fudge could be a feature. With hangings, touches of color wisely bestowed, and a little planning, this could be made a delightful room, Mrs. Stewart and I think. But I don't want to bias you." [31]

"It would be perfect, Aunt Keren," said Margery. "No one could help liking it. And the street—there isn't a better location in town, of course. If you think we may risk it. You see, we never had anything so important to decide, and it is hard to settle even less things without mother. You must decide for us. Only—please, Auntie Keren dear, don't reckon on your supplying deficiencies of rent. It would be bad enough if you had to do it! So don't risk anything, counting on stepping in, will you?"

"Yes, and you know we are going to do this seriously, as a business. I'm sure it will be more fun than anything we ever did in all our lives, but if it were only that, we ought to be at home [32]

scrubbing," Happie supplemented her sister, leaving to her hearers the application of her remarks.

"Well, my girls, I truly think that your chance of success is greater here than elsewhere, warranting a little more rent. It isn't much more. Mrs. Stewart is most modest in her views. I think it is decided, Mrs. Stewart!" said Miss Keren.

"You will take it, Miss Scollard?" asked Mrs. Stewart.

"If Aunt Keren says I may," assented Margery, after a glance at Happie, who nodded hard.

"Then I shall ask the first favor," Mrs. Stewart said. "That piano! I have another up-stairs which I use for classes. This is a particularly good one, and my young pianist has the true dancing school heaviness of touch. Would you find it in your way to let this piano stand here—for a while?"

Laura, whom nobody had consulted, and who, with Gretta, had played the rôle of listener to the discussion of taking the room, suddenly spoke.

"If I may play on it sometimes," she said. "I was just wishing it could be here so I might play to people taking tea in the shadow with lanterns lighting them."

Gretta looked distinctly shocked and Happie flushed, while Margery's mortification was easily seen. But Mrs. Stewart was evidently acquainted with the artistic temperament. She laughed and asked:

"Then you play, my dear?"

"I compose," said Laura. "I think soft music would add heaps to the tea room."

"Soft music with weak tea, loud music with strong tea. Do come along, Laura!" cried Happie, who, however proud she really was of her genuinely gifted junior, was perpetually wishing "she wouldn't!"

Then, fearing that she had seemed pert, Happie turned back to Mrs. Stewart. "Laura plays well enough for us to enjoy her music a great deal. She meant that she would like to play a little on that piano, if you weren't afraid of her hurting it, but she didn't mean that it couldn't stay down here if you were afraid, though what she said sounded like that. Of course it will not be in the way; it will make the tea room ever so much more like a livable room, even though the piano is locked."

"Which it certainly will never be," smiled Mrs. Stewart. "Perhaps your Laura will let me steal down sometimes to listen to her music."

"Perhaps she can help you sometimes, playing for your classes," said Margery, anxiously supplementing Happie's effort to cover Laura's conceit and the glum expression with which the latter silently recognized this effort.

"We shall have the nicest sort of times, in all sorts of ways, I am sure," said the girls' attractive little landlady. And Miss Bradbury led the new tenants away without their giving a thought to the fact that they did not know what their rent was to be, nor to the wholly unbusinesslike tone of the entire interview.

Miss Bradbury had taken the dimensions of the shop, a prevision which had not occurred to Margery or Happie, so while the party lunched animatedly in the big hotel nearest to the future tea room, and while Gretta lost herself completely in the music of the first good string orchestra she had ever heard, the plans for the arrangement of the tea room were decided.

After lunch Miss Bradbury departed in search of the carpenter who was to put up book-shelves and portière poles, and the girls went home to relieve trusty Polly of her housekeeping.

Margery found a letter waiting for her, a letter with the Baltimore postmark and addressed in the fine writing which Happie always regarded with aversion. Margery carried the letter with her to their room, whither she went to lay off hat and coat, and Happie groaned to Gretta, a careful groan, in a low key, so Margery should not hear.

"That Robert Gaston will be turning up in New York this winter, mark my words!" she darkly prophesied. "I don't believe in friends!"

Gretta laughed. "How about Ralph and Snigs?" she suggested.

"Boys, just boys!" said Happie. "But I don't believe in elegant young men friends who read aloud to you, the way Margery says this Baltimore creature did at Bar Harbor last summer, and are six years older than you! Of course you know as well as I do how such things always turn out, and Margery is so perfectly lovely that a blind-deaf-feeble-minded man would fall in love with her! It's no joke to see your dearest sister in danger, Gretta."

Happie's voice was so tremulous at the end of this speech that it took away from Gretta the desire to laugh, with which she had struggled as she listened. "We'll just have to hope he isn't blind, deaf and feeble-minded, then maybe he won't fall in love with her, and maybe if he is all these things she won't care about him," Gretta said comfortingly, with considerable show of probability. "And if worst comes to worst, why we'll know it won't be as bad a worst as it looks coming. Don't worry, Happie, it's not your way."

"No," Happie agreed dismally. "But I'm certain he is horrid, wears serious, too-well-fitting clothes, quotes poetry, talks elegantly, and only smiles as if he were trying to be kind. Ug-gh, but I do de-spise that sort of man!"

"I never saw one," said Gretta.

Happie stared at her thoughtfully for an instant, then she burst out laughing, her face all wrinkling into fun-lines, and dimpling with one of those sudden changes of mood that made Happie so lovable.

"Why, neither did I, Gretta, now you speak of it!" she cried. "I think I got him out of stories. I guess I'm a goose."

Margery reappeared, unchanged by this letter at least, so Happie put menacing Robert Gaston out of her mind, and the Scollarads talked tea room until their mother and Bob came home, when they talked it more than ever, and after dinner Ralph and Snigs came in, which multiplied the tea-room talk by two. [36]

There were exciting days, tiresome days too, included in the next two weeks. Miss Bradbury hurried the preparations of the room in order to let the girls have some of the benefit of the holiday shopping-time. They were delightful days of selection of materials for hangings, picking out teacups, spoons, dear little chunky Japanese teapots, sugar bowls and cream jugs and pretty plates. They were made by the artistic Japanese in such good designs and colors that only when one turned them over and saw the quality of the ware did one realize that they were picked up on one of the tables at Mardine's where tempting Japanese knickknacks play a sort of progressive game of their own, from the fifteen cent table up to the dollar one, after which they retire to the shelves as winners.

The Patty-Pans undeniably suffered from neglect on the part of its good housekeepers, and Mrs. Scollard and Bob patiently accepted what Bob called "imitation dinners." The girls took turns in seeing after the tea room arrangements, until Gretta volunteered to let Margery and Happie both go while she looked after the housekeeping, and then it went better.

The tea room was to be opened on Saturday, the fifteenth. Ralph and Snigs were not allowed to see it until it was in order, save for the finishing touches, and for these the Scollarads and the Gordons made a bee on Wednesday night. [37]

They went down in high feather, Mrs. Gordon and her two tall boys, all the Scollarads, including even Penny, while Miss Bradbury was to come down to meet them at the room.

Margery carried the key. She proudly put it into their own lock and opened the door. Happie sprang forward and touched the electric button, and light leaped joyously into each glass bulb, most of which were transformed by crêpe tissue paper into blossoms of unclassified varieties.

Cases stood around, which the bee party had come to open, but in spite of them the room was already beautiful.

"Miss Keren!" expostulated Mrs. Scollard, realizing at a glance what an outlay was represented by the tables, chairs, portières, and lanterns, not to mention the contents of the still unopened cases.

"Charlotte, be still!" warned Miss Keren. "Was I not your mother's closest friend, bound to her by ties of peculiar tenderness? And am I not spiritually kinless? I have told you before that you are not to remonstrate if it is my whim to play with my old friends' grandchildren, and, I won't have you spoiling 'we girls' fun by a look! Bless their hearts, they have no idea of money. Don't you hint of it!" [38]

Miss Keren's law was laid down rapidly in a low voice, covered by Ralph's salutation of the tea room.

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure," he said, doffing his hat with an air that suggested the plumed cap of a Romeo, as Bob introduced him: "R. Gordon, T. Room; T. Room, your servant, R. Gordon. Now get to work, ladies and gentlemen." He produced hammer and chisel from the pocket of his outer coat and set an example to accompany his exhortation, by valiantly attacking the boarded top of the nearest case.

There were not many books to begin with, but what there were proved to be in the case Bob was opening, and were quickly set up on their shelves.

"We're going to ask any one who borrows from us to deposit the value of the book taken, which will be returned later, and we shall charge five cents a reading," explained Margery, when Ralph expressed a doubt of the tea room maidens' keeping their stock of latest novels intact.

"And if this part of the business goes well we're going to buy lots of books," said Laura. Then, with her usual indifference to labor that needed doing, she went over to Mrs. Stewart's piano and began to improvise, while the others briskly hurried through the work of taking out and dusting dishes and all the other contents of the cases and setting them up on the shelves.

It did not take long—though it was long enough for Penny to get sleepy and to be put by Bob into one of the empty cases for a nap, well padded around with excelsior. [39]

When everything was done, and the boys had carried the cases out into the rear, and Penny had wakened as bright as a new penny from the mint, the tea room was a joy to look upon.

Softened lights, dull, warm draperies, pretty china, the bindings of the books, all contributed to an effect as homelike as it was artistic.

"She who comes once will come twice," said Mrs. Gordon looking around her.

"Sounds like a well-worn adage, mother," observed Ralph. "But it's as true as 'tis new. Old maids and tea has always been the combination. Let's put out a quaint sign: "Ye Yonge Maids' Tea Room."

"Yes, with all the letters higgledy-piggledy to prove we know what's true art," cried Happie. "I don't believe we want a sign out. Besides, it might keep away elderly people; they might think it meant they couldn't come in."

"Or else flatter them so that they'd come in hordes," added Miss Keren. "Light your gas stove, girls, and brew us your first tea. We'll christen the tea room."

Gretta sprang to obey, secretly proud of having overcome her fear of the first spurt of the gas when it leaped to the match. [40]

"We'll have to make hot lemonade for part of our guests, including me," said Happie, bustling about to set out cups and crackers, with a glance at the boys who liked tea as little as she did.

Margery put English breakfast and fragrant Formosa Oolong into two of the prettiest teapots, and they drank, standing, the toast to the success of the enterprise, which was proposed by Miss Keren.

"Good-night, pretty place," said Polly, peeping back into the room from under Margery's arm as she put the key in the door.

"Yes, good-night," said Ralph. "As I said when we came: 'We're pleased to meet you.'" [41]

---

## CHAPTER III THE CUP THAT CHEERS

FOR two days the Patty-Pans was hardly bereft of its young mistresses for an hour. It was fragrant with the odors of its sacrifices; cake-making and candy-making went on all Thursday and Friday in preparation for the opening of the tea room on Saturday.

Happie's strong point was fudge, and she made so much of it that it did not seem possible half of it would be sold, especially when Margery had contributed her three pans each of vanilla and chocolate caramels.

Bob and Ralph escorted the three oldest girls down to the tea room after dinner on Friday, laden with good things and to make sure that nothing was wanting for the morrow. Sleep was light and broken for half of the eight excited tenants of the crowded Patty-Pans after they had come back that last night, and morning came sooner than the subdued light of the small chambers indicated.

Laura was to have followed Margery and Happie on that opening day, after lunch when Gretta came down, but her discontent at this arrangement was so great that kind little Polly volunteered to wait, and Laura set out with Margery and Happie when Mrs. Scollard went forth with Bob to the work of the day. [42]

"Good luck, Three Sisters!" said Bob, shaking hands at parting. "So you are the Three Sisters—the Fates, you see! Isn't it great that all of us Scollards are business men?"

Mrs. Scollard looked as if she might dispute the desirability of the situation. It was not easy for her to reconcile herself to the misfortunes attendant on her husband's death, which had deprived her children of their birthright of ease and social position. For herself the heroic little woman was not tempted to complain, but for them! Even Happie's light-heartedness could not take the sting out of the remembrance of what she had lost. But all she said was:

"We will meet in the restaurant for dinner, girls, and Bob will fetch you. Take care that nothing happens to Penny after Gretta gets her to you this afternoon. And good-bye, dear little tea ladies! Good fortune, and don't be dismayed if you encounter customers who are less inclined to enjoy your tea room than you are."

They were inclined to enjoy it more than ever, the three girls, when Margery, the portress, admitted them. Happie drew back the soft green curtains on their brass-ringed rod and let in the sunshine she loved. Laura opened the piano and rearranged the fronds of the fern which she had pleaded might sit on it, on a safely large brass tray. Margery opened and delicately sniffed each tea caddy for the unnumbered time, to make perfectly certain that she had labeled aright Ceylon, English Breakfast and Oolong. [43]

The girls were all to wear gowns alike in style, differing in colors. Margery's was the dove color with a hint of lavender that so perfectly suited her dove-eyes and madonna face. Happie's was a beautiful green, Laura's a soft, faded pink, Gretta's—when she came—would blend with them in its golden tint that was not yellow, buff nor brown, but suggested all three. Polly's was blue—Polly was to help serve if need were—as they hoped it would be. They were gowns with a full, tucked skirt, simple tucked waists, and fluffy point d'esprit fichus that turned the little costumes into something between a suggestion of Marie Antoinette at the Petit Trianon, and of Priscilla, the Puritan maiden, when she had attired herself becomingly in the demure hope that John Alden might at last come to "speak for himself."

A card, not so bad as Bob's proposed sign, stood in the window stating that here was "A Tea Room and Library, Conducted by Six Girls."

"We may as well count in Penny for good measure, and to please her," Happie had said, so "Six Girls" they announced themselves to be.

"I wish we knew what to do next," said Laura. "Has it opened?"

"Yes, I think so," said Margery with a hasty glance around her. "People look as they go by, and some don't go right by; they stop to stare in and to read our card. They don't come inside."

[44]

"Too early," said Happy. "No one would want tea at this hour of the morning, unless it were a foreigner. There's some one now who certainly doesn't look American."

A man in a heavy caped cloak, with a broad brimmed soft felt hat drooping over his eyes, and with long moustaches and an imperial, was looking in at the window. He was tall and large of frame, yet the hand that pulled at the moustaches was supple, white and thin. He carried himself in soldierly fashion, yet had an air of uncertainty, an absent-minded effect that was at variance with the bearing. Altogether, as he lingered long, and then walked slowly past the door, looking in hard as he went, the three Scollards decided that they objected to him; he made them nervous. It was a relief when one of the many ladies who read their sign turned crisply, right about face, and descended their low steps.

"Our first customer!" exclaimed Margery.

"Our first visitor, at least," added Happie.

She was a resolute-looking personage, exceedingly well attired, with such an effect of having found the world her oyster,—already opened at that,—that it was surprising to discover she could hardly be an inch above five feet tall.

"What have you here?" she said by way of reply to Margery's faintly murmured, "Good-morning."

"A tea room and a circulating library," Margery said unnecessarily, for the card had told her as much as that.

[45]

"Why do you say: 'Conducted by six girls'?" demanded the little lady.

"There are six of us," said Happie, coming to Margery's aid at a glance from her. "But, to be truthful, the youngest is only a silent partner."

"Are you the proprietors?" cried this first visitor.

"We, with another girl my age and my little sister to help us," said Happie with pardonable pride.

"Ridiculous! I don't want tea now, but I shall want it later. I live near here. I will come in again at noon and see what absurd tea you have. Are you poor? You look like ladies," said this candid person.

"That is our only fortune," replied Happie demurely. Margery was too annoyed to speak, but Happie's sense of humor made this form of impertinence seem to her merely amusing.

A shadow darkened the doorway, and before the first visitor could carry on her catechising further Mrs. Scollard's old friend, Mrs. Charleford, the "Auntie Cam" who had taken Margery away with her to Bar Harbor the previous summer, came into the room, followed by her daughter Edith, Elsie Barker, and Eleanor Vernon, Happie's three best friends, whom she had not seen since April had taken her away from New York into the mountains.

The girls rushed upon Happie and nearly devoured her. "Oh, I am so glad!" "Oh, Happie, we have missed you so!" "Oh, you funny, darling old Happie, if this isn't the queerest scheme, and just like you!" they cried in a trio.

[46]

The first visitor stalked out. "I shall return for my tea," she said in going.

"Who's your friend?" asked Elsie Barker.

"We hoped that she was to be our first customer, but that's all we know," Margery answered.

"She is Mrs. Jones-Dexter," said Mrs. Charleford. "Eccentric, said to be a most determined person, very wealthy, and wrapped up in her grandchild, who is a little pupil of your Aunt Keren's friend up-stairs, Mrs. Stewart."

"Well, we shall never see her again," said Happie. "She doesn't matter. Oh, girls, tell me all about yourselves before any one comes."

There was not time for this, however. It lacked but a week of shopping days to Christmas, and the street was soon crowded. Happie did not get her talk. The tea room began to fill. In an hour there were more people than the girls could look after, and pretty Edith Charleford offered to attend to the library end of the business till Gretta and Polly arrived. Elsie and Eleanor departed with Mrs. Charleford, with only a whispered hint from Happie that she had a plan for a good time all together very soon, to content them.

It was not long before all the books, twenty-five, had been given out and Margery had their value deposited with her, neatly entered against the name of the person to whom each had gone.

[47]

"We haven't one book left!" she said to Happie. "And we thought twenty-five almost too many to buy! What shall we do?"

"Invest the deposits in as many more books," said Edith Charleford promptly. "Let me run over to the book department at Hauss'—it's so near!—and do the investing. I love to buy books. I'll get a messenger to carry them, so they'll be here as soon as I am."

"All right," said Happie. "You'd better put all the money into 'The Infusion of a Soul,' and the other two everybody asks for. Oh, dear, if Gretta would only hurry!" Edith ran off to buy the books, and when she came back Gretta had arrived. Polly was already serving tea in the steadiest, most capable manner, and Gretta was behind the screen, taking Margery's place at the gas stove, dismayed at the prospect of facing so many customers.

Edith went home at last, looking tired but bearing the blessings of the girls who had needed her help.

Happie looked up from the fudge she was weighing and saw Mrs. Jones-Dexter unexpectedly returning down the steps.

"She's a man of her word, whatever else she is," thought Happie, tying the gold and blue cord on which she prided herself, around the box of fudge. "I'd better wait on her; she would crush Margery."

She hastened to the table which the great little lady had appropriated.

[48]

"Formosa Oolong," she said severely. "I hope that you are sure there's no green tea in it!"

"Only green little tea-maidens," smiled Happie, and her customer said: "Humph!"

The tea proved to be too strong, the crackers too sweet, both of which errors Happie corrected philosophically.

"No lemon!" ejaculated the amiable Mrs. Jones-Dexter. "No sane person takes lemon in his tea. It is a Russian fad. I never read Russian novels. You don't expect to succeed here, do you?"

"We hope to," said Happie.

"You won't. However, your tea is passable. I shall come again. I want a book. Come and get me one. Your sister is prettier than you, but I like you better. What is that girl doing at the piano? If you are going to have music with your tea I shall never come again. How can one be expected to digest—even a liquid—to syncopated rag-time, or possibly a fugue? Ruinous to digestion, profanation to music, execrable bad taste, this music in all eating places."

"We shall not have music here, Mrs. Jones-Dexter. My sister Laura is so fond of it that she can hardly resist the piano. I wish she would help Margery with that party of four," said Happie involuntarily.

"Always so in every large family; one selfish one that does what she will—sometimes it's a he!—while the others do what they must. Show me your books," said Mrs. Jones-Dexter rising. "How did you know my name?"

[49]

"Aunt Camilla—Mrs. Charleford—told us after you went out," said Happie.

"Was that Mrs. Charleford? Are you her niece? What are you doing with a tea room then?" demanded Mrs. Jones-Dexter.

"She is mother's oldest friend, but not really my aunt," said Happie. "We have to have a tea room or something, Mrs. Jones-Dexter, to help mother now that we are old enough. We have only the newest novels; I'm sorry."

"I'm not. What right have you to think me a fossil?" But this time Mrs. Jones-Dexter had a glint in her eye that was not cross. She selected the very latest detective story, to Happie's amazement, and departed.

Happie turned back to her duties, and there, seated alone at the smallest and most distant of the tables, was the big man of the cloak and sombrero-like hat whom the girls had noticed with aversion as he looked in at the window that morning. Polly was standing beside him in a matter-of-fact way, trying to get his attention to ask his desires, but he was unconscious of her.

Laura was playing, playing well, as she always did. The mysterious stranger was watching and listening to her, and patient Polly was unnoticed.

Happie walked towards the table, passing before the piano, and thus diverted the man's eyes to Polly.

[50]

"Yes, if you please," she heard him say then. "English breakfast tea, as strong as possible. No cream, but lemon, yes. Who plays there?"

"My sister," said Polly proudly. "She sings, too, and she makes up lovely music to words she writes; poetry, you know. She's gifted."

"Poor child! What age has she?" asked the man.

"Thirteen, just," said Polly. "I'll get your tea."

"You have a queer little kindergarten tea room," remarked the singular man as Happie passed him. "I hear small feet and small voices above stairs."

"A dancing school, but that is not ours," replied Happie. But it seemed to her that her answer fell on ears that did not hear, for there was no response in the melancholy face that turned again towards Laura, as the long hand went up to the drooping moustaches and the man waited for his tea.

He sat there a long time. Laura played on, at first with an eye to applause, but after a while losing herself in her music, as she always did, and improvising, entirely forgetful of hearers. She was a puzzling mixture to downright Happie, with her posing, her affectations, her selfishness, and yet her genuine passion for music and her extraordinary talents.

The strange man lingering so long made Margery and Happie so uneasy that Margery at last called Laura from the piano, but still he sat there, drinking so much tea that Gretta became uneasy from another cause.

"I shouldn't leave him have it," she said with a rare relapse into her dialect, caused by extreme

[51]

earnestness. "He'll get down sick for us, right here. He acts behexed."

"Oh, Gretta, what is that?" laughed Happie. "*Hexe*, a witch, in German,—I see! I'm not afraid of his hurting himself, but I do wish he'd go."

After a while the man arose to his great height and slowly walked down the room. He paused at the piano, moved one hand over the keys as though he would have struck them, did not, put on his drooping hat, removed it instantly, turned and bowed to the young maids of the tea room and departed.

There was a lull in business in the middle of the afternoon; it revived between four and five, and at six, when Polly pulled close the curtains of the window and locked the door, it being the hour at which Mrs. Scollard had insisted the business of the day should end, there were five tired, but triumphant girls who drew five long breaths and looked at one another.

"What a day!" cried Happie. "Just as busy as we could be, and look at my fudge!"

"How can we, when it's all gone except those crumbly bits?" inquired Polly.

"And all the books out, only those four, and they had the prettiest bindings!" added Laura.

"We never could keep it up every day like this. If we could what would become of the flat?" asked Gretta. [52]

"Oh, well, of course it won't keep up like this! This is holiday time. If we succeed we shall have a quiet little business at other times. Let's count up!" Margery produced her cash box as she spoke, her face flushed and excited.

She piled bills, half dollars, quarters, dimes and nickels separately, and counted the cheering heaps. "Thirty-eight dollars and sixty cents!" she cried triumphantly. "And that does not include the rent of books, for that isn't paid till they are returned. There are forty-six books out—that makes two dollars and thirty cents more. Oh, I wonder how much of this is profit? My goodness, Happie, I wonder what rent we pay?"

Happie laughed. "Sure enough! Oh, it doesn't matter, not as much as forty dollars and ninety cents a day, and that's what we've taken in. To be sure there are crackers, sugar, tea, lemons, cream, candy materials— Well, at the worst we've made a lot."

"Polly, dear, what are you doing?" Gretta asked.

There was Polly, leaning almost into the middle of a table, pencil in hand,—wetting it often at her puckered lips,—while she set down figures on a piece of wrapping-paper.

"Trying to see how much money we'll have a year," said this practical little woman of ten. "See, Happie. I multiplied \$40.90 by six; that's right, isn't it? Because we won't come down Sundays. And—oh, don't laugh! See if it's right. Six times ought is ought, and six times nine is fifty-four? I never feel sure of the nines. Six times ought—no, set down the five, and six times four is twenty-four. Isn't that two hundred and forty-five dollars and forty cents a week? Then how many weeks in the year? Isn't this the way to get it?" [53]

"It's all right, Polly-pet. The only thing is that you're counting chickens where I see only a basketful of eggs!" cried Happie. "There's one thing certain; you've worked like a whole river bank of beavers, and done your full share in making this day a success. But what a success it is, Margery and Gretta! Laura, play just one little waltz to relieve our feelings while we're waiting for Bob; the door's locked!"

But even as she spoke Bob rattled the door knob and Penny stampeded to let him in, poor little Penny, who had been very good through a tediously long afternoon.

"We're rich, Robert!" cried Happie. "It's been wonderful."

"Good for the Teasers!" Bob shouted. "Take me around to the Waldorf and dine me!"

"Well, it's begun—well begun," said Happie with a long breath as "the Teasers" emerged with Bob on the street, locked their door, and set their faces dinnerward. But how much had begun, nor where it was to end, she little dreamed.

[54]

---

## CHAPTER IV CHRISTMAS, AND AN INVITATION

**I**N the week that intervened between the opening of the tea room and Christmas, the Patty-Pans girls found their new enterprise developing from a sort of glorified doll's house, in which they could fulfil their favorite childish play of "helping mother," into a stern reality. Even Happie came home at night silent and white, Laura openly bemoaned her fate, while Margery and Gretta palely and limply betrayed their indifference to everything but bed and sleep.

Of course it was delightful to be so successful as they were; that is, it was delightful to review the success of each day from the vantage ground of the following morning. But at night, when feet ached, head was tired, hands weary and patience tried by a succession of women, themselves too tired from shopping to be courteous, then the tea room lost all semblance of a frolic and became a stern fact.



Christmas eve came at last, just as the girls had had faith to believe it would come, on the twenty-fourth. Everybody seemed to be too busy to drink tea, so it was an easy day, and Happie, Laura and Polly came home early, in good spirits, when Bob called for them. Margery and Gretta had been at home all day, for it would never do for them all to desert the Patty-Pans on Christmas eve.

[55]



**"THE TEA ROOM ... BECAME A STERN  
FACT"**

"I have a Christmas present!" Bob announced jubilantly the moment the quartette got inside the little parlor. "I was bursting to tell Happie—and Laura and Polly, of course—on the way home, but I kept it to tell all of you together. It's from Mr. Felton. What do you guess, girls?"

"A nice dog," cried Penny, inspired by her secret desire.

"A gold watch," hazarded Polly.

"Money," said Laura.

"Oh, they've guessed everything!" Happie began, but Margery cried: "Promotion! Nothing that was for himself alone could make dear old Bob look so glad."

"Oh, say, Margery!" protested Bob. "But you guessed right. Mr. Felton said—well, he said I was useful to him, and he liked to have a fellow 'round whom he could trust, and he is going to give me charge of some of his inside business, rentals and things of that sort, in the office, you know, instead of sending me out. I'm to start in on ten dollars a week."

"Oh, Bob, dear!" cried Mrs. Scollard.

"Well, he'd better appreciate you!" declared Happie, rushing to prove her appreciation of Bob by choking him.

"I'm so glad, you best of brothers!" murmured Margery, with eyes alight.

"There's no one like Bob," said Gretta, to every one's surprise and her own consternation.

[56]

"Here's where having a family comes in. You all think it's my just dues, but I can tell you I'm as pleased as Punch over it," said Bob. "Mother, you may plume yourself on this promotion. If I weren't a good accountant Mr. Felton couldn't have given me my chance, and you are my teacher. You'll get twice as much income as you've been having out of your investment in me. That strikes me as the main point."

Fine Bob's eyes were moist. He was not quite seventeen, and it had been long weary waiting for the day when he could do a fraction of what he wanted to do for the brave mother who had struggled on alone while her children were small. Here was his foot placed on the lower rung of the ladder by his Christmas promotion, and he had always been sure that, given the first rung, he could climb.

Mrs. Scollard understood what was in Bob's heart. She slipped her hand through the boy's arm, going down the tiny hall to his room.

"It is not I who have done it, my Robert," she whispered. "It's your own upright, truthful honesty and industry; your sterling self. I know, my son, and I'm thankful that my one boy is what he is."

"The Scollards are getting rich!" cried Happie rapturously rumpling up her bronze hair, already sufficiently disordered by the wind. "Margery, shall we take a house on the Plaza or Fifth Avenue next year? I always liked North Washington Square best of all New York."

[57]

"Don't make your disobedient hair any worse, Hapsie!" protested Margery. "You look as if you were likely to take a padded cell." But she was not less delighted than Happie, and sang like a whole field of larks, as she helped get the dinner on the table.

The Scollards kept to the fashion of giving Christmas gifts on Christmas eve, and when the girls got the dinner out of the way and its consequent work done, they brought out the presents they had long been making and treasuring up for one another.

Gretta, who had learned the family custom during the summer, had prepared in Crestville for this night. She now brought forth bags and feather-stitched aprons, made of materials familiar to the girls from frequently seeing them in the all-sorts store to which black Don Dolor used to take them down the mountain road. And after these had been produced, Gretta brought forth sunbonnets made like her own in which Happie had found her lonely, painting the fence on her cousins' farm, where she had been tolerated almost intolerantly.

Gretta looked ashamed of her gifts, though they were the best she could find or afford to buy. Her cousins had allowed her no money; in the old days she had had none except what she could earn in small ways, and the stock of the Crestville shop was not varied. There was no mistaking the fact, however, that the Scollards liked Gretta's gifts. They brought back the summer days, the pleasant Ark, the glorious mountains and the funny, homelike little store.

[58]

Happie put on her pink sunbonnet at once, and the others followed her example. Thus Crestville crowned, they proceeded to open the New York packages with which each lap was filled. They were not costly presents, but there was nothing that did not represent time, thought, affection, and which did not fit the receiver's needs and tastes. Consequently much laughter and more pleasure accompanied the opening of every tightly tied package.

At one of the gifts Happie looked gloomy. Margery had received by mail a dear little soft leather book of sonnets, and it seemed to Happie that she stroked it as she handled it. Now, even an enthusiastic book-lover hardly pets his books, and so it seemed to Happie to argue—however, this was Christmas eve, and good will to man must include, by an effort, Robert Gaston.

A messenger brought a packet from Miss Bradbury. Mrs. Scollard signed for it, and came back with it to her children. "From Aunt Keren!" she said.

Margery opened it, being the eldest. It contained six mistletoe lace pins of green enamel and pearls, beautiful pins in design and workmanship. They held the holly-red ribbon around a long envelope addressed to "The Six Tea Maidens." When this envelope was torn open by Happie it proved to contain the receipt for six months' rent of the tea room! Kind Aunt Keren, who went about regardless of fashion, yet did so much for others in her abrupt way!

[59]

A scarf pin in its own white box, for Bob, was a slender circle of olivines, their green tint exquisite against the white satin.

"For my all-round man, gardener, coachman, farmer and guardian in last summer's green fields," the card said.

Mrs. Scollard silently held up a little book and a piece of yellow lace.

"My mother's little hymn book, and dear Miss Keren's own mother's lace," she said, as she read a brief note and laid it inside the book.

There were many small gifts from friends. Happie's three E's, Edith, Elsie and Eleanor, remembered her—Laura looked as though she found it hard to be the third girl, and not as rich in friends as the two older ones. But Gretta's face was a study as she handled first one and then another of her gifts. It was her first experience of a home Christmas, and it bewildered her with a sense of its sweetness.

"I wonder how Rosie likes her box?" she said, looking up. Rosie Gruber, left in charge of the Ark, had not been forgotten. Miss Bradbury and the Scollards had sent her up such a provision for the feast as would be the talk of the township for days.

"Think of Eunice and Reba sitting all alone to-night, after scolding each other all day it's likely! No wonder they are cross!" said Gretta, with a sudden pity for the two women who had embittered her childhood springing from the warmth of her present happiness.

[60]

"No, they're in bed, Gretta," laughed Happie, who found it harder to forgive Gretta's cousins than Gretta did.

"Yes, Gretta, pitying thoughts of the unloving ones to-night!" said Mrs. Scollard with a smile for Gretta. "It's so horrible to love nothing; worse than not to be loved, could the two conditions be separated. Now the Christmas hymns, Laura, and then to sleep, for Penny is drooping, and she must be up bright and early, because Santa Claus comes to her in the morning."

Laura went to the piano and all the others stood around her. They all sang, more or less; Margery's voice was an unflinching joy, and the harmony of the little family choir was rather

remarkable.

"Ralph and Snigs! Quick, Bob, fetch them!" cried Happie. And Laura improvised a medley of Christmas airs while they waited. It was not long; the Gordon boys came only too gladly, and their mother with them. They brought more thrilling little white packages tied with holly ribbon, and the hymns had to wait a while longer. Ralph handed Happie her gift with a funny bow and a bashful look unlike "Ralph the Ready," as the Scollards called him.

"Your mother will let you wear it because there isn't any etiquette about a gift from a boy; it's only young ladies who can't take presents from young men. And—and I'd like a great deal to have you wear it, Happiness," Ralph said. [61]

It was a delicate hoop of gold for her left wrist. Happie caught it up with a cry of pleasure. "I've been wanting a bangle; you need one with short sleeves, and this is so slender it's lovely. Of course I'll wear it, and of course mamma will let me! Thank you heaps, Ralph. Here, you wish it on!"

She held out her hand all folded up for Ralph to slip the bangle over it. He did so, scarlet even to his ears, as Bob watched him gravely and Snigs poked Laura in the most unmistakable manner.

"Now it's on and I won't take it off till you say the time for the wish is up. I hope it's a good wish, Ralph! Thank you and thank you!" said Happie wholly unembarrassed.

They sang hymns until the clock warned them of half-past ten and Penny was carried by Bob into her mother's room, fast asleep.

"A dear Christmas eve somehow; so quiet and nothing-special, only dear," said Happie, thoughtfully, brushing her hair preparatory to braiding it for the night. Gretta sighed contently. "It's my first one. I've seen fifteen twenty-fourth of Decembers, but never a Christmas eve before. I don't see how it could have been nicer."

"And six months rent of the tea room! Dear Auntie Keren. I don't like to take it; I'm sure she has to go without lots of things to give us that. It isn't as though she were rich," said Margery, slipping a kimono over her white gown and turning the pages of the little green leather book. [62]

"You aren't going to sit up to read that book, Margery!" protested Happie. "Just a book from almost a stranger, a boy you hardly know!"

Margery laughed. "I knew him rather well in those long weeks at Bar Harbor, Sister Keren," she said. "And he is twenty-four years old. Now your bangle is from a boy! Almost a stranger too! We didn't know the Gordons last Christmas."

"Mamma said she wouldn't have let you keep a bangle from any other boy, but it was almost like a present from a cousin, Ralph runs in and out so, and she thought it would be spoiling your nice friendship to object in his case," said Laura, who loved to slip in to share the three older girls' cozy talks in the intimacy of getting ready for the night. She quoted her mother with a primness of lip and manner of which Mrs. Scollard was incapable.

"Oh, of course, I knew that in a minute," said Happie easily. "It's a lovely little bangle. I do like ornaments that seem to say: 'She didn't put me on to have you notice me; she put me on because she liked me herself!' And that's what this bangle hints. Of course Ralph doesn't count." It sounded ungrateful, but it was pure sisterly affection.

Christmas morning's mail brought pleasant greetings and a few small gifts to the Patty-Pans. It also brought Happie an envelope that bore the word, "Invitation" as plain to be seen—though invisible—as was her name and address. [63]

"Elsie's going to have something!" exclaimed Happie as she recognized Elsie Barker's heraldic seal. It was over this seal that Happie and Elsie had had their one falling-out, when Happie had irreverently suggested that Elsie use a dog's head instead of a coat-of-arms, since that represented the oldest family of Barkers.

Happie tore open the envelope now, always ready to hail the chance of a party, and found the invitation for which she looked, an invitation to a "Noel Party" of old-time games and merrymaking on New Year's eve. With the invitation was an informal note. "Dear Hap," Elsie wrote. "I've asked you and Laura and Bob, and left Margery out because she's older than any of the guests, and I'm going to make this a young party. But I wish you'd tell Margery that I'd like to have her come if she doesn't scorn my sixteen years' old limit. I'd like to invite your friends, the Gordons, if I knew them. I'm hard up for nice boys our age. Couldn't you ask me down to meet them in a day or two? Then I'd invite them. I'm going to have a dandy party; just you wait till you see it! Merry Christmas! Yours in a rush, Elsie."

"Scrumptious!" cried Happie. "You're asked, Laura; so's Bob, and Elsie says she'd ask Margery, if she'd like to come, and——" Happie stopped suddenly, and began reading the invitation, then the note, then turned each sheet of paper over as if something might have escaped. "Well!" she exclaimed. [64]

"What's the matter?" asked Gretta. "How queer you look! And you were so pleased at first!"

"Yes; nothing's the matter. I'm going to tell Margery—and mother," Happie said hurrying out to the dining-room, catching up Jeunesse Dorée on the way to save herself from tripping over him.

"Just look here, mamma and Margery," she began in an excited whisper. "Here's an invitation from Elsie for all of us—not the little ones, of course, but Laura, and she's left out Gretta! And what makes it worse is that she wants to be asked down here to meet the Gordons, so she can

invite Ralph and Snigs! I didn't see at first that Gretta was left out, and I was crazy to go. But I wouldn't go if Elsie did that purposely. She knows Gretta is here; she must have meant it, don't you think so?"

"Yes, of course," said Margery.

"Well, dear Happie, Elsie probably feels that Gretta wouldn't quite fit in with all those girls, and that you'd understand it," said Mrs. Scollard. "I don't believe Gretta would care about it."

"She ought to have the invitation all the same," said decided Happie. "She can refuse it if she wants to. Of course I know she's a country girl, never has seen society—but, my goodness! I've told the girls all about her, how handsome and nice she is, and I should think Elsie might risk her getting on! I'm sure Elsie knows lots of girls that have bad enough manners! Gretta hasn't bad manners; she only isn't used to things. And talk about society! Elsie says it's to be a young party—it isn't the cotillion, or anything like that. I should think Gretta might get on among girls of fifteen, if Elsie means what she says about giving sort of an old-fashioned Christmas merrymaking. At any rate she's my friend, staying here with us, and I know enough of society customs to know Elsie has no business to slight my guest when she asks this family, and I won't have her slighted. I'm going up this afternoon to see Elsie and find out if she could have forgotten Gretta, and if she left her out purposely I won't go to her party; neither will Bob, and I don't imagine Elsie will care what Laura does, because she's only thirteen—anyhow, I don't see how she could go without us." [65]

Happie turned indignantly to walk away, but paused as her mother said:

"Dear Happie, you can't make the world over. People won't accept others on their merits. We love Gretta, and we see her precisely as she is, and we know that her little lacks come from the one lack of opportunity. But you can't alter social conditions, dear, and it is wise to take the world as you find it." [66]

"Mother, do you mean that you want me to accept an invitation that slights Gretta? It isn't as though we were women grown; we are only schoolgirls. And you hear stories all the time of the funny things women do when they have money that takes them into society—I mean vulgar, new-rich women, not used to nice people. Gretta would never make mistakes that came from vulgarity. Do we have to accept quite horrid people, because they've money, and let a refined young girl be slighted, because she has only a little bit of money, and is from the country? Do you think it would be nice in me to go to Elsie's party if she won't ask Gretta?" Happie poured out her eloquence with the passionate protest of a big nature in its first, youthful encounter with the inconsistencies and injustice of which hearts that feel and eyes that see find the world too full. She had yet to learn that customs have grown out of an average of experience, and that, on the whole, life would not be happier for any one concerned if social standards were different.

"Dear little Hapsie, no, I would not approve of your accepting an invitation that slighted your guest," said Mrs. Scollard laying her hand on Happie's shoulder. "You owe something to Gretta; you must defend her because she has come into our family as she has. But I am only trying to point out to you that Elsie feels as most people would, and does not consider herself called upon to investigate the merits of a particular case. Dear, you will learn to be patient with an absurd world as years go on. I love you for being loyal and for hating shams and injustice, but be just to the other side also. Social customs are no more consistent than are the human beings who made them. I don't want you to beat yourself too fiercely against the barriers; it would wound you, not them. Only in heaven, Hapsie, can real standards prevail. You must expect the world to worship the idols itself sets up." [67]

"There's no one like you, motherums, so gently firm, so patiently in earnest," said Happie. "I'll try to stand by Gretta without being fierce to Elsie."

"Run down to Elsie's now, dear, and remember she has a right to choose her guests," said Mrs. Scollard, kissing the flushed face turned up to hers.

Happie hurried on her coat and hat and flew down to the Barkers' for five minutes with Elsie in her room, as she prepared for a great family dinner at her grandmother's, who adhered to the older fashion of festival dinners at one o'clock, like the solemn Sunday of her generation.

"Yes, Happie, I did mean to leave out your Pennsylvania Dutch girl, or whatever she is," Elsie replied firmly to Happie's direct question. "It's all very well for you to have her in your flat, and very likely she is pretty, and not rough, but I can't ask her into my set—you ought to see that." [68]

"You are not obliged to ask her, Elsie. I don't see how you can tell whether you can ask her or not unless you meet her—as you wanted to meet the boys," said Happie with a quiet manner and a home thrust. It was evidently not dangerous to risk boys on Happie's guarantee! Elsie flushed as she recognized Happie's advantage. "But, on the other hand, we Scollards can't accept your invitation, Elsie. It's all right, only Bob and I won't come, thank you," Happie continued.

"If you want to be a goose," said Elsie much annoyed, "I can't help it. You are not in society yourself, Happie, so you don't understand."

The blood of Happie's ancestors, Signers and Puritans, involuntarily arose in her at this hint, forcing her to say, forgetful of the Christmas spirit: "Edith wouldn't have slighted Gretta, but the Charlefords can afford to ask whom they please."

She took her departure on the heels of this remark, which she repented before she had walked a block. For the Charlefords were genuine aristocrats, while the Barkers were "new people." But it was true that Edith would not have slighted Gretta.

## CHAPTER V

### "THE HANDSOME MISS ANGELA KEY-STONE"

ELSIE BARKER'S party was a source of discomfort all around.

Gretta found out the reason why none of the Scollards accepted the invitation which at first had given Happie so much pleasure, and was distressed. She would not have gone for anything, she protested, then why should Happie be a martyr to Elsie's refusal to invite the country girl?

Laura was sulky because she was kept from a party. She had opportunity for too few parties at best. Happie herself was uncomfortable because she had found one of her "three E's" behaving with what she considered unkind snobbishness, and also because her old friendly relations with Elsie were impaired.

The holiday week dragged. It rained and was warm, for one thing, and that unkeys people for the Christmas enjoyment. For another, attendance at the tea room was a daily necessity, but hardly any one visited it, and the days were long for the three on duty. They were not always the same three, for Margery, Gretta and Happie took turns in going and staying at home, and sometimes it was Laura and sometimes Polly who accompanied the older two whose day in the tea room it was. [70]

On New Year's afternoon Happie slipped down to the Charleford's for an hour or so, to hear about Elsie's party of the night before and to talk over her difference with Elsie. Edith Charleford was always a comfort, not to mention her mother, if "Auntie Cam" were available.

Happie ran up the wide, padded stairs to Edith's room when the maid admitted her. She found her beginning the New Year with a Christmas book, yet unread, in her hand, a box of candy open at her side, and her kimono-clad form stretched luxuriously across the foot of the bed, padded around with down pillows of all sizes and cover shades.

Edith hailed Happie joyously; the three E's had mourned over the rarity of their glimpses of Happie Scollard, and Edith pounced on her at once as if she were afraid of her escaping now that she had come.

"Happy New Year!" "Happy New Year," they cried together, and Edith tugged at Happie's coat buttons with one hand as she tried to take off her hat with the other.

"Now, Edith, wait! I came to stay a while," Happie protested, protecting her hair from being forcibly removed with the hat pins. "I want to hear all about the party, and talk to you when you're through."

"It was a nice party to begin with," said Edith, passing the candy box to Happie established in the low rocker. "Here, take some; no, take a lot, then I can lie down and talk, as I love to." [71]

"Yes, and have them melt all over my hands while I listen! Put some in the cover where I can reach them, if you must loaf," returned Happie. "Now! Many there?"

"Fifty, about," said Edith. "But Elsie was short of boys. It was a lucky thing it was a frolic, games and those things, not dancing, for then it would have mattered more. We did all sorts of pleasant tricks, most of them borrowed from Twelfth Night customs. I had a good time. We were grouped for a tableau when midnight struck. It was cleverly done. We had been marching to music, and fell into positions at the sound of chords. But there weren't enough boys to set off the girls' pretty gowns."

"Elsie wanted to meet the Gordons, so she could ask them, and there would have been Bob," observed Happie.

"Elsie told me about it," said Edith with a quiet smile. "I was dreadfully disappointed not to have you all there,—it's so long since we had anything with the Scollards in it, but you did right. I told Elsie I thought you were right. You couldn't possibly have accepted an invitation that slighted a guest, and we all understood that you had taken this Gretta for your friend, not as a charity girl. And it really seemed like that for Elsie to refuse to ask her. There are always plenty of ways of dropping an acquaintance, if you don't want to keep it up, but, as I told Elsie, we could trust you not to like a girl we wouldn't like." [72]

"Oh, Edith, you duck!" cried Happie. "I haven't been one bit a happy Happie this week. I know I acted right, but I'm not very sure I was perfectly amiable on Christmas afternoon to Elsie. She has a right to choose her acquaintances, as mother says, but I do hate, *hate* anything like airs! I knew you'd ask Gretta to your party, but the worst of it is I told Elsie the Charleford's could afford to ask any one."

"Oh, Happie!" Edith remonstrated. "But of course you wouldn't have said that if you hadn't been irritated. Still, do you know I think it is nice to be sure your finish won't rub off! It is such fun to see you with Elsie! She's so very rich, and you're so perfectly unconscious of loss of money, and being poor—it's lovely!" Edith paused to laugh. "That comes of having such a fine lady for a mother as Auntie Charlotte Scollard."

"Or Auntie Camilla Charleford!" added Happie. "Listen to me, Edith! Couldn't we get Elsie to meet Gretta without her knowing it is Gretta? She's the handsomest girl you ever saw; dress her in fine clothes and she'd be such a beauty as you read about—Beatrix Esmond, or some one like that."

"I'd love it!" cried Edith with a fervor that betrayed her own past encounters with Elsie's airiness. "But—forgive me, Happie—wouldn't Gretta talk differently? Being country bred, and not having had a chance, as you wrote us——?" Edith paused suggestively.

[73]

"She might, if she had to talk a lot, or got excited," said Happie honestly. "But Gretta is clever, and she has tried hard to catch ideas. I don't think you'd find her tripping. She can act wonderfully, if only she will let herself go. We dressed up ridiculously once in the country and visited the school, and even the girl who was teaching didn't discover Gretta, though she knew her well—perhaps I wrote you about it. Oh, Edith, do listen to me!" she instantly cried, arresting herself in the tale of the masquerade at the school. Edith was already listening, so Happie proceeded: "Mother said I might give a party, a theatre party or something to all of you girls some night in the tea room. We never had room to ask you all to the Patty-Pans. But suppose I do this: suppose I hire a three-seated sleigh, if this snow that is beginning to fall amounts to anything, and ask you and Eleanor and Elsie for a drive in the park. Maybe Auntie Cam would go as chaperon; mamma can't. Do you suppose she would? And suppose we get up Gretta in all the fine things we can borrow, beg or steal, and introduce her to Elsie as a friend of yours from—say, well, Baltimore. That sounds anciently settled and F. F. V-ified! And then we'll let Gretta drive! She can drive better than almost any one. And she would look too splendid for anything handling a pair of horses, with dark plumes and a big hat, and furs, and we wouldn't tell Elsie a word about it until a week afterwards. I know she'd be fearfully impressed with the swellness of your friend! You wouldn't be afraid, would you?"

[74]

"Of a pair of horses in long plumes, big hat and furs? Well, I might be," laughed Edith sitting up, her eyes sparkling with the fun of the thing in prospect. "But you'd better believe I'll do it! It would be more fun than all the theatres in New York! I'm sure mother will say yes, and go with us, too; you know she's a few years younger than I am! But, now you listen to me, Happie dear! All this is going to be very expensive——"

"Edith, I won't listen! We are rather rich, for us, and motherums says we girls have a right to use a little money for pleasure. This won't cost more than a theatre party, or a party in the tea room," cried Happie.

"Yes, but Happie! Take our horses, and hire the three-seated sleigh only," said Edith. "Don't you see it will seem much more like Gretta's being our guest, if we use our horses? And besides, it's safer. Yes, honest! Our horses are young and sprightly, but they're not tricky, and if Gretta were to drive it would be better to feel we knew the horses than to risk getting steady ones from a livery stable. It isn't only one's own horses that make trouble in the park; it may be some one else's quite as likely, and it's everything to know your own horses will behave if another cuts up. I'm sure mamma will want us to use our horses, so make up your mind to giving in on that point, Happie."

[75]

"Well," assented Happie reluctantly. "Is Auntie Cam at home? Could we find out about it now, Edith?"

"Yes, if you'll wait till I get into a gown. We have people staying here, and I don't want to trail around the hall in my kimono," said Edith, beginning to divest herself of her wrapper as she spoke.

Mrs. Charleford threw herself into the plan with all her heart. When Happie started for home it was settled that, with Mrs. Scollard's consent, and if the sleighing came, and above all if Gretta could be persuaded to regard the plan as a frolic and to do her best to carry it out, there was to be a sleighing party in the park to introduce Elsie to Edith's friend, "Miss Angela Key-Stone of Baltimore," who was such an accomplished horsewoman that she drove the party.

Gretta's to-be assumed name was an inspiration of Happie's: *Angela* from her own sur-name, Engel; *Key-Stone*, after her native state.

"And the hyphen gives it the last touch of magnificence!" cried Happie gleefully, looking back from the foot of the steps to wave another good-night to Edith at the top, and to wish her again: "A Happy New Year!"

At first Gretta rebelled against the plan, but gradually, seeing that Happie's heart was set on it, she yielded, and at last threw herself into it with as keen a sense of the fun of the thing as Happie and Edith felt. In the first place it would have been difficult not to enjoy the exceedingly fine feathers in which this young bird—"young jay-bird," Gretta called it—was to be arrayed.

[76]

Mrs. Charleford had much beautiful clothing and put it all at the girls' service. A long coat of finest broadcloth, a great hat with six heavy drooping ostrich plumes, the softest and richest of furs, turned Gretta into the beauty Happie had promised Edith, and not only into the beauty, but into the elegant young creature who is rarer. For Gretta's perfect muscles, free carriage and tall figure gave her an air that needed but the fine garments to emphasize it into positive style. Happie was in raptures to find Gretta making friends of the Charlefords, mother and daughter, both of whom liked her as well as Happie wanted them to.

There lacked but the snow, and this came, came abundantly, and all New York which could get on any sort of runners, seemed to turn out for gala-day to enjoy the sleighing which was not too common in the seaboard city.

When Elsie was invited—by Edith, to preserve the illusion of "Miss Key-Stone's" being her guest—she asked if she might ride with the party, instead of driving in the sleigh. She had a new saddle horse, given her that Christmas, and nothing could tempt her to forego his glossy back. It rather spoiled the plan to have Elsie ride instead of sitting up beside the competent "Miss Key-Stone," as

Happie and Edith had intended her to do, but on the other hand it allowed Margery to be of the party, which did away with Happie's one drawback to her pleasure. In any case there was no alternative, for Elsie insisted on riding her new "Trump." And in the end this choice of Elsie's gave Gretta the opportunity to do more than play at being the heroine of the occasion. [77]

At half past two the sleigh was driven up to the Charleford door, the Charleford perfectly matched young horses, gayly proud under their plumes, pawing before it.

Elsie dismissed the groom who had accompanied her, and took her place beside the big sleigh. Mrs. Charleford and Margery came down the steps, Edith, Eleanor and Happie, and behind them a tall girl in long coat, splendid furs, her dark, handsome face brilliantly lighted by the rich color in her cheeks, her dark hair swept and shaded by her many long plumes. She was drawing on her gauntlet gloves. She came slowly, with great dignity, and glanced at Elsie with an indifference that, coupled with her remarkable beauty, made that young lady long to know so wonderful a princess.

"Angela, dear, pardon the difficulties of a mounted introduction," said Edith. "This is my friend, Miss Elsie Barker; Miss Angela Key-Stone, Elsie. Now, Angela, if you are still quite sure it won't bore you to drive, we will start."

"There's no pleasure like driving," said "Miss Key-Stone," stepping into the front seat and taking the reins from the coachman, who relinquished them with a touch of his hat. "Yours is a good horse, Miss Barker." [78]

She said it so indifferently that it was scarcely praise of handsome Trump, and Elsie was deeply impressed by visions of the horses to which "Miss Key-Stone" must be accustomed if Trump did not arouse her to greater enthusiasm.

Mrs. Charleford and Margery in the back seat, Eleanor Vernon on the middle seat with Edith, Happie on the front with the handsome girl-driver, and the party was off, up the avenue to the park, slowly, provokingly pacing in the line of sleighs heading thither.

At Fifty-ninth Street their pace improved as they entered the gates and began the upward course of the park on the east side. Elsie rode well, and she loved horses; she was perfectly well able to appreciate the manner in which the haughty "Baltimore girl" handled the reins, and the cool clearness of judgment with which she saw her opportunity to put her horses through a gap in the line, to let them out, or how quick she was to pull them in, or to soothe them with a word when they grew impatient of their pace. She was not slow to see the admiring glances given the young driver of the Charleford sleigh by every one, and she felt quite sure that Mrs. Charleford would be besieged with requests for introductions to the girl who looked much older than she was, old enough to be in social demand. Elsie, who was born with the instincts of a society woman, resolved to use her advantage in meeting this desirable creature before any of the other girls except Eleanor and Happie Scollard. The latter did not count, for her misfortunes had put her out of this world of wire-pulling. While Elsie was thus planning Happie Scollard, quick to see, though she was a simple young girl, knew pretty well what was passing in Elsie's mind, and was chuckling over the success of her plot, as well as triumphing in Gretta's triumph. She laughed out several times, anticipating the fun of revealing to Elsie the identity of this impressive young lady, and an echoing giggle came from Eleanor and Edith behind her—it certainly *was* a delightful trick they had played on Elsie! [79]

Elsie rode up to "Miss Key-Stone's" side as she drove.

"Miss Key-Stone," she said in her very best manner, "I hope you won't mind if I speak of your driving! You drive as well as my father, and he is considered a fine horseman. You must have been used to driving from your very earliest years."

Happie glanced over her shoulder at Edith, a glance that had all the value of the wink forbidden a properly behaved girl. It was such unspeakable joy to hear Elsie trying to impress Gretta.

"Yes, I have always been among horses," replied the distinguished stranger briefly. [80]

"I wish you would tell me something about your horses. I imagine they were fine ones," said Elsie with a winning smile.

"I never talk when I'm driving in a crowd," said "Miss Key-Stone."

Elsie was more than ever awed. There are people who are won by a cordial manner, and there are others who are won by a snub. Elsie belonged to the people who feel a person must be well worth knowing who does not particularly care to know them.

But there was nothing for it except to defer closer acquaintance with this haughty beauty whose whole attention was given to her horses, and Elsie fell back a little to ride beside Edith and Eleanor.

"Mightn't we keep on up-town, mother?" suggested Edith as they reached the gate of the park at One Hundred and Tenth Street, and the horses obediently slackened for a decision.

"I am in no hurry to get home. It isn't often we get such sleighing as this. Yes, I'd like to keep on. Suppose we drive up to Albany for supper!" cried Mrs. Charleford.

The party turned up Seventh Avenue, and drove faster up the wide street. There were still many sleighs jingling in both directions but they made better time here than they could in the park.

A piece of paper fluttered across the road in the wind. The Charleford horses saw it, but they justified Edith's commendation of them by ignoring it. Not so Trump. It is the exceptional horse [81]



who has not his own particular mental weakness, his own private and pet aversion at which he considers himself warranted in shying, and many horses change this aversion according to the mood, or the weather. Trump objected to paper flying about, though at times he walked decorously over paper, and shied at a stone. A good horse, he was a nervous one, and to nerves nothing is certain always to look normal. To-day the fluttering paper took on some shape of menace, and Trump shied, and bolted.

Elsie kept a firm seat. She was a good rider, self-confident, well taught. She was not frightened, and as she did not lose control no one interfered to stop Trump. Gretta touched the Charleford horses and they followed her, keeping up.

Suddenly Elsie threw up her hands, and Gretta instantly knew what had happened; her saddle was slipping and Elsie, riding in the side saddle, could not free her foot. Already she was sliding down the horse's side, and Trump was quivering with fright, but his speed slackened, mercifully, as he made ready to bolt.

It was all so quick that no one noticed the girl's plight, but Gretta, with her eyes on her, pursuing her, saw and recognized the danger.

"Take the reins," she said to Happie. "Don't be afraid. Whoa!"

[82]

The obedient horses slackened, stopped. Gretta sprang out over the sleigh just ahead of Elsie's frightened horse, caught his bridle from the side, and putting out one strong hand wrenched free the girl's foot. Elsie fell, but she fell clear, and Trump stopped just as several men rushed to Gretta's aid.

"Are you hurt?" Gretta asked, helping Elsie to the sidewalk where Trump was led, and motioning Happie to drive up to them.

"No, not a bit," Elsie said, her voice shaking. "But it is only because you were so quick. I am shaken up, frightened, I suppose, but I'm all right. You saved my life probably, Miss Key-Stone."

"Don't! That was just for fun; I'm Gretta Engel," said Gretta. Somehow she could not keep up the innocent farce after she had been brought into such relations with Elsie as the past three minutes had held. "Of course I didn't do anything; no one else saw, that was all."

"Gretta Engel!" gasped Elsie. Then she realized that the quicker they all escaped from the gathering crowd the better it would be, and she walked over to the sleigh, meeting Mrs. Charleford and Edith coming towards her. Elsie was not a coward, nor was she hysterical. She proved that she had sense and courage.

"We must get away from here; don't bother about me, Mrs. Charleford," she said. "I'm perfectly safe. I'll ride Trump back. They'll tighten the saddle for me, and there's nothing to make a fuss about. Do jump into the sleigh, people, and don't look so scared! They'll have our pictures in the morning papers if we don't fly! Your Gretta saved my life, Happie."

[83]

"You're quite sure you can ride, Elsie dear?" Mrs. Charleford anxiously began, but Elsie had turned to Gretta. "Will you see if the saddle is safe now? Thank you. Yes, your hand, please, and help me up," she added to the policeman who offered his aid. She jumped into the saddle and took the reins in a band that no longer trembled.

Gretta got up into her seat and the party started back down the avenue, followed by a cheer from the crowd, which liked pluck, as all crowds do.

It was a silent party that hastened homeward down the west side of the park. The little trick had not ended humorously, but Gretta had far exceeded the rôle of fine lady assigned to her. Elsie rode confidently. No harm was done, but, ah, how differently they might have been returning home!

At Elsie's door the sleighing party left her. Elsie dismounted; her groom was waiting her. She turned to the sleigh to say good-night to her friends.

"Good-night. You played me a fine trick, girls, but I played you a better one," she said. "You showed me a swell girl, but I showed you a heroine. Gretta Engel, I can't thank you for what you did; it was too big. But I beg your pardon, and we're friends?"

Gretta was so embarrassed that she relapsed into her early speech. "Yes, I guess," she said.

[84]

[85]

---

## CHAPTER VI

### UP-STAIRS AND DOWN-STAIRS

POLLY, who demanded little of fate and who least of all the Scollard family asserted herself, received some things unsought. For instance, her tenth birthday came to her early in January, bringing a mild little celebration of Polly's passing into double numbers.

In its honor all the girls came down to the tea room in the afternoon, that Polly need not be separated from any of them, and they hoped it might prove a day cloudy enough to allow for playtime.

Instead it was a bright, crisp, ozoneful day and people dropped in in greater numbers than they had come since Christmas, so the girls were as busy as bees. They had not seen much of their

attractive landlady. Her chaperonage was rather in moral effect, knowing that she was above stairs ready in case of need, than in actual service. The tea maidens caught glimpses of her, and exchanged a few words with her occasionally, enough to make them, Margery especially, wish they might know her better. She was busy with her classes and there was scant opportunity.

To-day, however, Mrs. Stewart came in at one o'clock, and smiled her readiness to wait till Margery should be at leisure to speak to her. Mrs. Jones-Dexter had turned up again after an absence of ten days, and Margery was patiently trying to fit her out; physically, with tea that should be neither too strong nor too weak, too hot nor too cold, and mentally with a novel equally perfect.

[86]

Margery had not yet acquired Happie's faculty of bearing up with equanimity under this singular person's trying ways.

The moment Mrs. Jones-Dexter caught sight of Mrs. Stewart she deserted Margery and the book shelves, and crossed over to the little dancing teacher.

"What have you been doing to my little Serena Jones-Dexter?" she demanded.

"Teaching her to dance?" said Mrs. Stewart with an interrogation point in her voice, not knowing what the little Serena's grandmother might mean.

"Teaching her to do nothing but dance!" retorted Mrs. Jones-Dexter. "The mite puts chairs in a row, carefully spaced, and dances through and around them all day long, if no one interferes. What are you trying to make her do?"

Mrs. Stewart laughed. "Trying to make her do nothing of that sort," she said. "But I have suggested that practice for the older children, to help them learn the reverse. I suppose your little Serena is as imitative as are most tots. She has not reached the age when difficulties are demanded of little women."

"I hope not!" said Mrs. Jones-Dexter, and Margery saw that her question had not been put to Mrs. Stewart in a fault-finding way, but proudly, and she remembered that Mrs. Charleford had said she was wrapped up in her little grandchild. "Have you seen my little Serena?" Mrs. Jones-Dexter asked turning to Margery.

[87]

"I'm afraid not. I have never been up-stairs during the classes," Margery replied.

"She's worth seeing," said Mrs. Jones-Dexter crisply. "It's not a grandmother's doting that finds her a rare blossom of a child, is it?" she demanded of Serena's teacher.

Mrs. Stewart shook her head. "I have never seen a child as lovely," she said, and Margery saw that the praise was sincere.

"She is precisely like her name, sweet, exquisite, like a bit of old-time porcelain. You would appreciate her. Mrs. Stewart, please arrange for Miss Scollard and her sister to see my little girl," said Mrs. Jones-Dexter. Margery was amazed to discover in this speech proof that the difficult lady considered her and Happie fitted to appreciate the fineness of this rare child.

"I came to ask Miss Margery Scollard to come up-stairs this afternoon. I suppose both the elder girls cannot come together?" Mrs. Stewart paused for the negative that Margery murmured. "Well, then will one of you come and bring with you your two youngest sisters? And I will show you Mrs. Jones-Dexter's grandchild; you will find her all we say," Mrs. Stewart continued. "I wanted to ask a favor of you, if I may."

[88]

"I'll take myself out of earshot," said Mrs. Jones-Dexter promptly. "I see your sister has my tea. I'll come in to-morrow to hear your candid opinion of Serena. She is a shy child, not inclined to friendships, but I think you will win her regard. I wish you would try to. She is not strong, a sensitive creature, and I should like to have her play with your pretty little Penelope, who is as vigorous and normal as Serena is unearthly."

She walked across the room to the table at which Polly patiently waited her coming. Margery turned to Mrs. Stewart. "I can hardly believe my ears!" she cried. "I was thinking that I would never again try to please her, that I must leave her to Happie forevermore, and suddenly she turns brusquely cordial!"

"She's peculiar to herself," laughed Mrs. Stewart. "People say that Mrs. Jones-Dexter has been a martinet in her family, that she and her son, this little Serena's father, got on no better than she has got on with her nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters. But towards Serena she is pathetically tender and adoring. And it is all true about the little girl. She is six years old, and the most flower-like, angelic little being one could imagine. Now my favor: dear Miss Margery, I want to take your Polly and Penny into my class, just for the pleasure of having them,— that, and because I want to do something that would give Miss Bradbury pleasure. As there is nothing I can do for her directly, please let me teach the children. I know—better than you do, possibly—how much she cares for you all, and I know that I can gratify her in this way. She has done so much for me! Say yes, please, my dear!"

[89]

"I shouldn't know how to say no," said Margery. "It would be a great advantage to the children, not to speak of the delight of it—Penny's feet are set to dancing as naturally as other children are made to walk. You are more than good, Mrs. Stewart, but it doesn't seem quite fair."

"Don't you see that the class must be taught, and that two more little persons in it do not affect my work? Then it is settled. I heard you say the other day that your Polly would be ten years old to-day; will you send her up this afternoon? I should like her first lesson to be a birthday present—Penny too, of course." Mrs. Stewart looked as eagerly glad as if she had been ten years old that

day herself, and Margery kissed her in spite of dignified tea drinkers who might wonder. "I'll telephone up to Gretta to bring down their white frocks and slippers," she said. "I shall have to send mother down to thank you; I can't. What time must the children come up?"

"At half past two, please. It's I who thank you for giving me such a pleasure," said the little dancing teacher.

"Gretta and Laura will be down long before that," said Margery. And she watched Mrs. Stewart away, thinking, "I never saw any one with quite her combination of sadness and brightness of expression. She *is* a dear little woman, as Aunt Keren said." [90]

Mrs. Stewart had hardly disappeared before a shadow fell over the door-sill, a shadow that invariably struck the tea maidens as darker and more sinister than ordinary shadows. It was cast by the man in the cloak and sombrero, who instantly dispelled it by crossing the threshold in his own person, and dropping into the corner which the proprietors of the tea room reluctantly saw he was beginning to consider his own.

So regularly he came to occupy the chair and tiny table, just big enough for one, which stood here, that he had grown familiar to them all, but not more attractive than he was at first.

Happie came to bring him his tea. It was understood that she was to cope with the more difficult human problems, for she had a way with her that melted crankiness and might, perhaps, disarm unkindness, or convert wickedness—at least Margery believed so, though Happie, in turn, believed all things possible to Margery's loveliness.

"Where is your musician?" asked the mysterious man.

"She has not come yet; she will be here later," Happie replied. Then something in the man's face that she had not noticed in it before, nor stopped now to analyze, wistfulness that was not merely sadness, but emptiness, if one may so describe it, made her add the first voluntary remark she had ever addressed to this customer. "You are fond of music, aren't you?" she said. [91]

"Fond of it? Are you fond of air, food, the earth, your life, child? Music is my life," he exclaimed with a gaunt look of passionate earnestness.

"Yet you are ready to listen to a little girl's playing! Of course we think my sister plays wonderfully, for a girl of thirteen, but we are partial," said Happie.

"You may be partial, but you are quite right," said the man as if his dictum sufficed. "She has extraordinary talent. Her whole life ought to be consecrated to music."

"Oh, I'm very glad she didn't hear you say that!" cried Happie. "Please don't say it to her. She can't consecrate her life to music, and it's bad enough as it is to have her so wrapped up in it." Happie stopped, wondering to find herself half confiding in the person she feared.

The man shook his head impatiently, and made that unspellable sound of protest, tongue against teeth: "T-t-t-t!" He looked at Happie, drawing together his brows, but she did not mistake it for a scowl directed at herself, but at annoying circumstances. "Ach!" he exclaimed with a German accent that gave Happie the first clue to his nationality that she had caught. "Talent should be first of all considerations. That little sister of yours should be educated in music at any sacrifice." [92]

"Oh, no, not that," said Happie, surprised at her own boldness in differing from such a heavy frown. "There are other things more important than talent—even if Laura were more than thirteen. But she isn't, so there may be a chance for talents too. We think it is more important that she should do her duty and be a splendid woman—like her mother—and make people happy who love her, than that she should be the greatest musician in the world."

"Yes, you're right," said the mysterious man heartily and unexpectedly. "It's a black thing to feel that one's art broke a heart." He sighed, and looked so gloomy that Happie characteristically felt instant longing to comfort him. Before she had made up her mind how to meet this revelation, the guest stirred his tea and asked: "Only thirteen, you say? She looks more. She is really a wonderful child."

"Here she comes," said Happie as Gretta appeared in the doorway with Laura, and with Penny in dancing school array. "Please, please, if ever you talk to her don't let her know you think she is wonderful. Mother tries so hard to keep her from thinking so herself."

"Well, Happie!" exclaimed Gretta as Happie came towards her.

"So say we all of us: 'Well, Happie!' How did you dare? And you looked positively friendly; Gretta and I were watching you," said Margery. [93]

"He's very unhappy, I believe," said Happie, thus fully explaining her conversation with the Mystery. "I will get Polly ready if you will go over there and smile at those two fluffy girls with hair and fox boas just alike."

Usually Laura went to the piano when the Mystery was taking his tea. A girl less sensitive to admiration than she was, would have discovered that the man in the cloak was interested in her music, and Laura was perfectly aware of the fact. But to-day her skies were leaden because Polly and Penny had an opportunity to go to dancing school which was denied her, and it was scant comfort that they got it because they were so much younger than she. Laura's genius could not buoy her over childish trials, though, for that matter, every one knows that genius is childish.

The man in the cloak watched Laura as she gloomily served tea to two women, one evidently giving economical entertainment to the other, her country guest. When she had finished her task, as she passed his little table in the corner, the mysterious man stopped her. "Won't you play for

me, little Clara Schumann?" he said.

Laura brightened visibly. "If you like," she answered, and played.

Her mood was not favorable to music that afternoon, and the man in the cloak was quick to perceive it. He arose from the table and went over to the piano. [94]

"It goes badly to-day, little musician, does it not?" he said gently. "This little instrument is out of tune. Something has made discords for you, is it not so? Well, it will pass—and come again, till at last you will reach the time of a horrible lasting discord, or a beautiful, permanent harmony, according to what you make of your life. Shall I play to you to-day? You have so often given me pleasure."

Laura stared at the mysterious man dumb-founded, but without waiting for an answer he twirled the piano stool down to a suitable height and began to play.

At the first touch of his hands on the keys Happie instantly became reconciled to the fact that Margery and not she had taken the children up to the dancing class, and the few people who were then in the tea room forgot everything else to listen. For there was no mistaking the fact that here was a wizard of music.

The mysterious man played for a long time. People went and came, but still he played on, passing from Beethoven's sublime conceptions to Hungarian dances that were half earthy, half witch music, into Chopin's heart-breaking nocturnes, into Schumann's noble thoughts, Mendelssohn's courageous hope, Grieg's innocent imaginings.

Laura listened enraptured, swept beyond remembrance of Laura Scollard, her vanities, her little disappointments and desires. [95]

She drew a long breath as the mysterious man ceased playing at last, and turned on the stool to face her. "Oh!" she said with a long-drawn sigh, forgetting to thank him.

"Good-bye," said this singular person abruptly, and hastened towards the door.

Happie intercepted him. "You have been very kind to us," she said. "We would like to thank you, but it seems rather silly to thank any one for such music as that. I wish we might know what to call you."

The man looked down on her, stroking his drooping moustache with the end of his thumb and the side of his forefinger, holding his hollowed hand over his mouth.

"You can call me *Lieder*, Hans *Lieder*," he said, and was gone.

"*Lieder*! Songs!" murmured Happie gazing after him. "I'm perfectly sure that isn't his name."

While this feast of music had been spread for the three lucky girls down-stairs, Polly and Penny were rapturously being introduced to another art up-stairs, and Margery was enjoying watching the children with all her might.

Little Serena Jones-Dexter had arrived under the care of her nurse, and when she came out of the dressing-room with every ribbon falling into its proper fold of finest mull, Mrs. Stewart took her hand and led her over to Margery.

"This is Margery Scollard, Serena," she said. "Here is our little girl, Margery. No, don't make Margery a dancing-school curtsy, dear; you are to be good friends, so you need not begin with a stiff curtsy." [96]

Margery leaned forward, smiling, but did not speak. The soft color in her cheeks, the warm light in her eyes, her youth and loveliness begged little Serena not to be shy, but to trust her. The child looked up at Margery with great gray eyes, and her pale face flushed. She was so ethereal, so dainty, so altogether fine and frail that Margery felt as though she were hardly a child of common clay.

"Grandma said we were to be friends; will you, Serena? Will you like me a little bit?" said Margery softly.

Serena hesitated, and then smiled. "I'll be friends," she said, and clambered up on the chair beside Margery to prove her sincerity.

When the time came for the child to dance she danced more beautifully than any other child there. Penny lost her heart to her at once, and went around after her like a happy, healthy little mortal following a stray visitor from fairyland. Serena shrank from Penny at first, but she had quite lost her heart to pretty Margery, and when she found the two were sisters she vouchsafed to tolerate Penny, to that merry little soul's humble delight.

A voice in Margery's ear said: "Well, isn't she all that I told you?" [97]

She looked up to see Mrs. Jones-Dexter unexpectedly at her elbow.

"She is much more than any one could describe," said Margery, so fervently that the doting grandmother was satisfied.

"Shall we give the butterfly dance for Miss Margery to see, Mrs. Jones-Dexter?" asked Mrs. Stewart.

"Not to-night; it takes too long. Let Serena dance alone, her bird dance, if you like, and then I must take her home," said Mrs. Jones-Dexter, to whom no other child but her darling was worth exhibiting.

So Serena danced a pretty little allegory of the bird new-come in the spring, greeting the flowers, singing to its mate, sunning itself in the warmth, flying from the shower, at last preening its soft feathers, and cuddling down to sleep safely, wind-rocked in the tree.

Margery came away not less delighted with her afternoon than were Polly and Penny, though these young ladies were more vociferous, and Polly could not recover from the wonder that all this had happened on her birthday, and that dancing lessons for the winter were her birthday gift.

Ralph came to escort the girls up town, explaining that Bob had telephoned a request to him to do so, as he was detained by Mr. Felton beyond his usual hour. Polly took possession of Ralph's left hand by the right of favoritism which was hers with this big boy. She poured out the tale of her birthday gift, of the steps she had already learned, and imparted to Ralph certain fundamental principles of carriage and motion, proud to show her knowledge.

[98]

"And Serena!" she added. "You ought to see Serena!"

"Now what is Serena?" demanded Ralph. "Who is there with such an old-time name? It was my great-grandmother's name, mother's grandmother, but I never knew any one living that bore it."

"This little owner of it is living," said Margery taking up the theme, and joining Ralph and Polly. "She is very much alive, but more with the life of a fairy than a mortal. She is a little creature six years old, the loveliest child imaginable. And the strange part of it is that she is the grandchild of an elderly lady who uses the tea room, and whom we have thought until to-day, was a dragon: Mrs. Jones-Dexter."

"Jones-Dexter!" cried Ralph, stopping so short that Happie and Gretta, immediately behind, almost tumbled over him. "Why, she's mother's aunt! The child is my cousin then. She must be named after that very great-grandmother! Indeed Mrs. Jones-Dexter is a dragon!"

[99]

---

## CHAPTER VII AN OPEN DOOR

THE Scollard girls of all sizes, and Gretta too, closed up around Ralph under the light of a street light to gaze at him after his amazing announcement.

"Mrs. Jones-Dexter your great-aunt!" cried Happie.

"That fault-finding, snappish person!" gasped Laura.

"That lovely little child your cousin!" exclaimed Margery.

"There's nothing flattering in your remark, Margery. What kind of a cousin would I be likely to have except a lovely little child? You'd expect a family resemblance, wouldn't you?" demanded Ralph. "If you girls get wonder-struck and stand bunched up on this corner long, we'll all be run in by a policeman, under the law that forbids push-carts and things blocking the sidewalks."

Happie laughed and set an example to the others by moving on at once. "You can't expect us to hear such a surprising piece of news as this unmoved," she said.

"No, but you were hearing it unmoved; that's what I was talking about," retorted Ralph. "There's no use in getting stirred up. Mrs. Jones-Dexter was my mother's aunt before I was born—there's nothing new about it."

[100]

"Well, but Ralph, we should like to hear how it happened," said Laura eagerly.

"By her being my grandmother's sister, Laura," Ralph kindly explained.

"Oh, no!" cried Laura impatiently. "I mean how she came to be so cross, and you not know her—you don't know her, do you?"

"Never saw the lady, never knew she had a granddaughter until this very night as now is," affirmed Ralph. "There isn't an interesting story; I'm sorry, for your sake, Laura, because you might write music for it. My great-aunt Lucinda seems to be a person troubled with chronic, all-round incompatibility. She quarreled with everybody belonging to her if they dared to have a mind of their own. Mother always said she had a grievance against the world because it revolved on its own axis. She never had a fuss with mother directly, but she fell out with her sister, mother's mother, when my mother was a little girl, and she wouldn't make up, not if the skies fell—or grandmother fell on her knees. Grandmother wasn't a bit like her—dear soul, grandmother was, and it worried her to be on the outs with her sister, but she could never coax her on the ins. And the gentle Lucinda included mother in her scrap, because mother was grandmother's daughter, and that's why we never knew her. Aunt Lucinda married this immensely wealthy Mr. Jones-Dexter, and after that, when grandmother was dead and mother a widow without much money, why she didn't like to try to patch up the row for fear Mrs. Jones-Dexter would misunderstand her motives. We knew Mr. Jones-Dexter died—he was too rich to die privately, so to speak—and we heard that Aunt Lucinda quarreled bitterly with her only son—couldn't make him marry the girl she had picked out—and he died 'way off somewhere. This little Serena must be his child. I wonder where the mother is? Aunt Lucinda must have taken her grandchild into favor."

[101]

"Into favor doesn't express it," said Margery. The girls had listened to this outline sketch of

family history so intently as to endanger their feet and passers-by, in their oblivion to all else. "She is perfectly wrapped up in her, and her love for her is evidently her absorbing passion. She is so proud of her, so tender of her, looks so adoringly at her that you never saw anything like it! Really, I wish you could see your little cousin, Ralph, I can't do her justice."

"I'm not likely to see her," said Ralph. "Very likely Aunt Lucinda was sorry for driving her son off, especially as people say the girl he cared for was nice in every way, only she wasn't the one his mother had picked out. Probably she is conscience-stricken, as unjust, bad-tempered people are at the end, in story books, and she is making up to this little Serena for all her life-long injustice. Old age ought to count for a good deal, too; that seems to be something that makes the strongest will knuckle under."

[102]

"Mrs. Jones-Dexter must be dreadful," said Polly with conviction.

"She must have led a dreadful life," said Ralph kindly. "It must be pretty bad to have your shoulder bruised your whole life long from keeping chips on it all the time! I'd hate to spend seventy years on the home plate with my bat up, ready to hit any old ball, foul or fair. Look out, Happie! These are the elevated road stairs. You want to pick up your feet, my child!"

Happie laughed. Ralph had just saved her from falling, face downward, up the stairs. She was so interested in what he was saying that she had tripped on her own skirt and Laura's trailing umbrella.

"You needn't fumble for your pocket book, Margery. Bob gave me a strip of L tickets to bring you home. He's a terror on insisting on strict justice," said Ralph, producing a dark-pink jointed strip of pasteboard and dropping it whole into the ticket chopper's box. "I had precisely the right number for the crowd."

"And we always settle with Bob. Our car fares are part of the expenses of the tea room," said Margery. "We all believe in not being slovenly about such little items."

"I never thought the people in the next flat were lacking in squareness," observed Ralph, steadying Penny who lurched wildly as the train started. "Hold me around the knee, Pfennig; there's no use tumbling about until you've grown tall enough to reach the strap!"

[103]

"You know you might see little Serena Jones-Dexter," said Happie suddenly. She had evidently been following her own line of thought from a remark of Ralph's which had long been left behind in the course of the talk.

"Easy to see through you, Happie!" said Ralph. "You've been carrying on the story through several chapters, and you haven't decided whether you will let me—the hero—dash into the burning Jones-Dexter mansion and bear out the flower-like darling through the flames, or whether you'll inveigle me on the steam-boat from which Serena is to tumble overboard for me to rescue, or whether you will just get me down to the tea room when the old lady is expected, take me by my lily white hand and lead me up to that great aunt of mine—say, she is a great old aunt, isn't she?—and say: 'Mrs. Jones-Dexter, look on your long-lost, your beautiful boy!' That's the best way, Happie. None know me but to love me, you know, so it's all that's necessary, and it will save the wear and tear on little Serena."

"Ralph, you perfect goose!" exclaimed Happie, half laughing, half teased. For though she had not been entertaining such melodramatic schemes as Ralph attributed to her, she had been plotting how to work good to all concerned by bringing together Mrs. Jones-Dexter and her niece's family.

[104]

"I think the tea room is wonderful," said Gretta suddenly. "It is so interesting, as well as bringing in so much money. We had such music to-day, Ralph! You haven't told Ralph about that queer man and how he played."

"Hans Lieder," said Happie. "No, but we never could tell any one how he played! Ralph, it was wonderful. He is a man in a cloak and sombrero and he comes so much that we wish—or we did wish—he wouldn't. We were half afraid of him; we called him the Mystery, and we thought he looked like Mephistopheles. But to-day I talked to him a little while, and I thought he looked sad. He has always seemed interested in Laura's playing, and to-day he played for us. Ralph, you don't know how he plays! He's a great musician. I wish you could hear him."

Laura looked at Ralph very seriously. "I am going to write a song for him, words and all. It is going to be very beautiful,—sad, maybe, but beautiful," she said. "I am going to show how he came cloaked and shadowy, like the dawn, and how he burst forth, like the morning, with all the beauty, the music of the world. It will probably be my best song, for I would do anything to pay him for the way he played. I'm not afraid of him, like the girls, because I'm a musician too. Musicians and poets are never understood."

Laura looked at Ralph with a seriously uplifted expression on her pale little face, and Ralph looked down on her perplexed. She was such a funny contrast to the crowded aisle, the jarring car, even to her own thirteen years. Ralph never could manage to like Laura, nor be patient with her. He rightly thought that she shirked her share of the family burdens, yet, like Happie, who understood her better, he was sometimes impressed with the queer child's cleverness shining out through her conceit.

[105]

"Well, I think I'd go slow on writing songs to mysterious musicians in dramatic cloaks," Ralph advised Laura now. "What did you say the man's name was?"

"He said when I asked him that we might call him Hans Lieder, but I'm certain that's not a real name," said Happie.

"Do you know what I believe?" asked Laura standing on tiptoe to whisper so that Happie and Ralph, but not the crowd around them might hear her. "I believe he is the spirit of Chopin come back in another body."

She fell back triumphantly to observe the effect of her words, but it was not what she had intended it to be. Happie and Ralph shouted out in girl and boy fashion. Laura lost her balance as she dropped back and down from her toe tips, the car stopping, lurched forward, and she took an unsentimental header straight into a big man who was reading stock market reports, and whose face turned as angry as the maddest of the Wall Street bulls, while his coat felt to Laura as shaggy and rough as the coat of the grizzliest bear. [106]

"Don't stop to apologize; this is our station," said Ralph, taking the bewildered and mortified Laura by the arm and pushing her towards the door through the crowd that blocked their way.

It was the rule in the Patty-Pans that after dinner there were to be lessons every night except Sunday and on festivals. It was an undecided question as to whether family birthdays were to be reckoned festivals or not. The trouble was there were so many that celebrating all of them cut off a good many nights from study for children who were limited to night for their lessons. Mrs. Scollard was her children's teacher. The eldest three had been to school very little, Laura less, and Polly and Penny not at all. Mrs. Scollard hoped by another year to send Laura for the beginning of a musical education, that should include general study, and to launch Polly on the sea of school life.

There had never been a choice as to methods of education in Margery and Happie's case; the loss of fortune that had made the mother the support of the family, had forced the two elder girls early to take up the office of housekeepers who could not be at school.

Mrs. Scollard felt safer to have the younger ones at home with their sisters while she was away than to let them go to school. So the Scollards were homeeducated by the teaching of a mother qualified beyond most women for her task. [107]

When a birthday came around it was always a question whether it warranted the omission of lessons or not. Happie looked imploringly at her mother after dinner and said insinuatingly: "Polly was never ten years old until to-night, motherums! Don't you think we might mark the occasion by dropping all other lessons and taking up chemistry, demonstrating how heat changes butter, chocolate, milk and sugar into fudge?"

Mrs. Scollard hesitated and was lost. Penny leaped on her lap to hug her for a consent which she read in her mother's eyes, and Polly cried in a staid sort of rapture: "This will make my birthday perfect—dancing school and fudge!"

Flats are an invention for which to be grateful. Without them how would homes be possible to people with little strength, less income and no space? But they have their drawbacks, like everything else in an imperfect world, and not least of these is the way sounds and odors wander from one end of them to the other, owing to the arrangement which Happie had called "the Patty-Pan style of architecture." No one can safely talk secrets in a flat, and no one can brew secret potions, for good intent or ill, in the most distant end of their elongated connections.

Happie had her specialty well under way in the little kitchen, and Laura, who was still under the spell of the wizard playing of the afternoon, found it impossible to keep to her seat at the piano, or the composition of her song, in the fudge-burdened atmosphere of the little parlor. She gave it up, and was coming out to join the less gifted young folk in the kitchen when the bell rang through the little flat; the upper bell, so that whoever had come was already at the threshold, having entered the outer door without ringing below. Laura opened the door, and there stood Mrs. Barker and Elsie beautifully attired. [108]

"Oh!" ejaculated Laura, and it was perfectly evident that her first feeling was dismay, not welcome, her consciousness of the odor of fudge overwhelming hospitality. "Yes, mamma is in. And Happie and Gretta, yes, Elsie," Laura said, rallying. "If you will please wait a moment, I will call them."

"I wish I could go out where Happie is. She's making fudge, I smell it, and we all know Happie's fudge of old," said Elsie.

"Just one minute, Elsie, and Happie will come. I've no doubt you can go out to see her make the fudge then." Laura's dignity was impressive. She carried it with her around the corner of the parlor, into the little hall, but she ran down the latter to the kitchen, shedding the dignity on the way.

"The Barkers, of all people!" she announced in a stage whisper. But Mrs. Scollard did not seem dismayed, and Happie said without looking up from the pan which claimed all her attention, "Send Elsie out here; this is at the point when it can't be left." [109]

Mrs. Scollard went in at once with Laura, who came back to say that Mrs. Barker would like to see Margery, Happie and Gretta Engel, if she might.

"Oh, dear, Laura, I truly can't leave this fudge now without spoiling it! Tell Elsie to come out here, and ask Mrs. Barker if she will be kind enough to give me a quarter of an hour? Then we'll all come in. What can the mystery be?" Happie asked the question of Margery; Laura had already departed.

"I think it has something to do with Gretta's saving Elsie the day of the sleigh ride," whispered Margery. "I've been wondering that she didn't hear from the Barkers."



"My goodness! They've probably brought her the Victoria cross, or the Legion of honor, or a Carnegie medal, or whatever they give for saving fair maidens! Oh, Margery, will you go and see that Gretta makes herself look her prettiest? If I beat this fudge like mad I'll be ready to go in there by the time you are—she is—ready."

Margery willingly departed to see that Gretta was a credit to herself and to Happie, whose care for the big girl, no younger than she was, amused the Patty-Pan family. Happie was as good as her word, and came into the room where Margery was superintending Gretta's toilette two minutes before she had finished.

"I do not see why I must go," Gretta was protesting for the fifth time. She had not recovered from her shyness, and dreaded strangers nearly as much as she dreaded a dentist. [110]

"Because they have asked for us, all three of us," said Happie. "Did you ever see such a red face as mine is? Please button the middle button of my waist, Margery; it's undone. Now, courage, Gretta! You have already met Elsie, to put it mildly, and you needn't mind Mrs. Barker. You weren't afraid of Auntie Cam."

It always seemed to Margery and Happie that Gretta looked far better out of doors. There was something dwarfing to her beauty in the Patty-Pans. Still, it was a handsome creature that followed the two Scollards into the parlor and rather stiffly laid her hand in Mrs. Barker's as that lady arose to greet her. Elsie kissed her with genuine cordiality. Mrs. Barker eyed her keenly, and then said:

"They have not exaggerated your good looks, my dear; they positively could not do so. I have never seen you, and now that I do see you how can I thank you for what you did for my little girl?"

Happie expected to see Gretta sink under the embarrassment of this speech, beginning with the most unlimited flattery and ending in an allusion to her courage. But keen-witted Gretta perceived the bad taste of the opening, and her sense of humor put her at her ease.

"I should not like to have you thank me," she said pleasantly. [111]

"Ah, but I came here expressly to do so!" returned Mrs. Barker. "This is the first opportunity I have had, but you may imagine how I have burned to see the brave girl to whom Elsie owes, if not her life, undoubtedly the fact that she is not a cripple." Mrs. Barker prided herself on her eloquence; she addressed meetings of all sorts on every occasion, but this sentence had not turned out as well as she had expected it to. She began again: "For one thing, Mr. Barker and I have consulted each other, and thought long on what form our thanks should take. I have come here to beg a favor of you, my dear Gretta—you will let me call you Gretta?"

"Oh, please," said Gretta.

"Yes. Mrs. Scollard, Margery and Happie, I beg that you will plead with your friend for me that I may have my way. I understand, Gretta, that you have a little property somewhere in the country, but not enough to enable you to seize the advantages of a desirable education. I desire to give you six years at an excellent school, a boarding school. I desire you to be placed where you will have every advantage, not only of education of the mind, but of refined association, so that at the end of the six years, when you are twenty-one years old, you will be prepared to take your place among young women of your own age, their equal in cultivation, manners, accomplishments, as you will be their superior in beauty. Mrs. Scollard, please add your voice to mine. Gretta probably does not realize what this would do for her." [112]

"Gretta, dear, you do realize it, I know," said Mrs. Scollard softly. She laid her hand on Gretta's. "You will not refuse, will you? It will change all your life."

Gretta shook her head. "Thank you, thank you very much, but I couldn't go, Mrs. Barker," she said.

"Not because you want to stay with me, Gretta!" cried Happie, rising to throw her arms around Gretta. "You would come to us in every vacation, and it wouldn't separate us, not really. You will take this chance, Gretta?"

"No," said Gretta quietly, "I can't."

"You will ruin your life, child!" protested Mrs. Barker.

Again Gretta shook her head. "I study at night, and I read a great deal with Happie. And I learn how to be part of what you said—I think I couldn't have a better teacher of manners." She put her other hand over Mrs. Scollard's resting on her left one. "It's very good of you, but I think I can't accept your offer."

"I hope it isn't pride," said Mrs. Barker.

"I hope not," said Gretta with a smile. "It would be very silly, sillier than it would be wrong, for why should I be proud? It's just that I can't, thank you."

"Won't you leave the offer open a few days? Let us talk to Gretta. I think she ought to accept the chance to get all that she always desired, Mrs. Barker," said Mrs. Scollard. [113]

"Certainly," said Mrs. Barker rising. "Consider it for a week, two weeks, and let me know your decision. No, I really must not stay another moment. The carriage is waiting, and it is cold for the horses. Gretta, whatever you decide I am very grateful to you. Come and see Elsie. Margery and Happie, your tea room makes it harder than ever to catch a glimpse of you! Do come to see us! Good-night, dear Mrs. Scollard; it is a pleasure to find you so much stronger than last winter."

Change your mind, Gretta, I beg of you! Good-night, dear people."

Mrs. Scollard summoned Bob to attend their guests to their carriage, and as soon as the door was well closed behind them Happie flew at Gretta.

"I couldn't imagine why you were so sure right away that you wouldn't let her send you to school," she cried. "But the minute she said 'tea room' it flashed upon me! Gretta, we can get on without you! Do you think it would be right to refuse an education for that tea room?"

Gretta looked as guilty as if she had been caught dynamiting a safe. "We all have as much as we can do," she said. "I think this winter I'd better help you. Besides, I'm getting all the education I need—a better one than in school, in lots of ways. If you want to get rid of me, Happie—" She paused, laughing out of her dark eyes, and Happie promptly choked her. "You goose!" she said. [114]

Bob came up two steps at a time. He had heard of the offer from Mrs. Barker. "Good for you, Gretta; we can't spare you!" he cried. "Besides, you're educated now! No one can drive, make butter, do heaps of things like you. Bother education!"

"Yes, it is a bother," assented Gretta. [115]

---

## CHAPTER VIII HARD TRAVELING

MISS BRADBURY came in the next day, which was Sunday, to dine with the Scollards on her way home from church. At least she said it was on her way home, although she lived not far from the Washington Arch and had been to church near Fiftieth Street, and the Patty-Pans was in the belt of lower rents above the upper entrance to Central Park. But the Scollards were used to her whimsical statements and were too glad to get hold of her on any terms to dispute her topography.

Aunt Keren-happuch struck them all as looking pale and tired. They had not seen her in two weeks and Mrs. Scollard was troubled by the weary look which, to her eyes, energetic Miss Keren wore. She indignantly denied feeling less well than usual, and told Gretta that if her looks were changed it must be by her descent from the mountains to the soiled damp air of the seaboard city.

Miss Keren found the Scollards, or at least the mother and her two eldest daughters, urging Gretta to let Mrs. Barker send her to school. Mrs. Scollard was disturbed by Gretta's firmness; it frightened her lest the girl should blight her entire life when she was too young to realize the full effect of her refusal. Most of all she was troubled because Happie believed that Gretta was refusing in order to help her friends through that busy winter. [116]

"Oh, Miss Keren, help me convert Gretta!" cried Mrs. Scollard. "I have said everything that I can think of, but she won't listen to reason."

"That means she won't see things as you do; 'reason' is always my opinion, and 'unreason' the other person's, just as 'orthodoxy is my doxy, and heterodoxy is the other man's doxy,'" commented Miss Keren. "What am I to convert Gretta to? Has she been turning heathen?"

"You know the Dutch are always obstinate," said Gretta quietly.

"Heathen? No," said Bob quickly. "They are worrying for fear Gretta is turning too Christian, and loving her neighbor better than herself; they want you to convert her to paganism."

"I'm fresh from church," remarked Miss Keren. "Suppose you tell me the case."

They told it to her in a trio of Mrs. Scollard, Margery and Happie, while Gretta sat by listening and smiling in a most detached, impersonal way.

The Scollards felt quite sure of an ally in Miss Keren, who was always anxious to help people on in the world and who would fully realize what six years in a good school would mean to Gretta. To their unbounded surprise, when they were through with their story Miss Keren said decidedly: "Gretta is perfectly right. She is getting all the training—mental training—here that she needs, and a great deal else that no school could give her. Then I think you need her this winter. Wait! I wouldn't advise letting that stand in the way of larger interests. If Gretta were losing by staying I couldn't say that it would be just, but she isn't. And she is very essential to you, dividing forces as you are between here and the tea room. And last, but not least, of reasons: I don't care for your Barker acquaintances, Charlotte, and I think an education received from Mrs. Barker would be a burden, a sort of mortgage on Gretta. You'd see that Mrs. Barker would forget about the gratitude which prompted her gift, and remember only Gretta's debt to her. It has been my experience that it required the nicest sort of people at whose hands to receive a favor that should not be most burdensome. The Barkers are shoddy. On all accounts I think Gretta is in the right to refuse. And I think the future may hold something quite as good for her, which need not be refused." [117]

Gretta fairly beamed. "You dear Miss Bradbury," she said. "I felt so dreadfully sure you would be on the other side! I couldn't express my own meaning as you have done it for me, but you think just as I do. I'm ever so much obliged to you."

"You're entirely welcome. But I don't think they would have had their way with you, even if I had

been on their side, would they?" laughed Miss Keren.

Gretta laughed too, but shook her head decidedly. "You know Madison County is all rocks, and I was born and brought up there. I guess I caught the rockiness when I was growing. I'm as obstinate as the rest of the Dutch!" she said. [118]

When Miss Keren departed, early after dinner, Margery, Happie, Gretta and Bob went with her down town for the sake of the walk home again at sunset. It was a walk of over six miles, but not too far coming up through the park in the wintry wind, sharp and dry, with the down-dropping sun lighting the skeleton of the trees into a beauty not inferior to that of the summer verdure.

"No, she certainly does not look well," Gretta agreed with Margery as they turned their faces up town when the door had closed behind Miss Bradbury in the large apartment house where she lived alone with her two maids.

"But Aunt Keren couldn't be ill," Happie declared optimistically. "I don't believe she would know how to be, and sickness would have to leave her for lack of a proper reception."

"We'll go down and see her in a few days," said Margery, looking unconvinced.

"We will if we can get there," amended Happie. "You and I in the tea room, Laura helping us half the day and helping Gretta at home the other half of it, there isn't much chance of our doing anything but our work before another Sunday."

"You're not wearying of well-doing, Happie?" hinted Bob. [119]

"Now, Robert, who said anything that sounded like that?" demanded Happie reproachfully. "I was merely stating facts. Do you think that I could weary of doing as well as we do there? Do you realize that with your promotion and your five dollars more a week, and our tea room, we are making up the other half of dearest motherum's salary which she wasn't strong enough to earn this winter? We clear twenty dollars a week at the worst, and Margery and I are laying by money to give—or to offer to give—Aunt Keren for rent, besides. We don't feel comfortable knowing we aren't paying our own rent, especially as she can't afford to do it."

"Rather a ticklish matter to pay back a Christmas present," remarked Bob.

"Not to Aunt Keren," said Happie. "She will know just how we mean it, and she'll see a business ought to pay its own expenses, if it can."

"That's one of the nicest things about Auntie Keren," said Margery. "She never misunderstands one, always takes everything precisely as one says it, and construes it by her experience of what one is likely to mean. She may be brusque, and I suppose people who don't know her think she is too much so, but I think there's more real amiability under her even-tempered bluntness than there is in sweetness that doesn't hold out."

"A good deal," agreed Happie emphatically. "I think people who get hurt and offended easily have the worst of hard dispositions, for they always pride themselves on their sensitiveness, and blame everybody else." [120]

"And I think," said Gretta quietly, "that this day is one of those pleasant things you are talking about, that can't be depended upon to hold out."

"Going to be a change?" drawled Bob, imitating the accent of Jake Shale, who had worked for the Scollards the previous summer on the farm.

"I guess," retorted Gretta in like accent. "There's such an east wind blowing. What fur a ring is that round the sun? Storm, say not?"

The three Scollards laughed aloud with such enjoyment that two or three passers-by smiled in sympathy. The dialect of Madison County sounded odd and pleasant, bringing the picture of the Ark in its green fields into handsome Fifth Avenue.

They got home to the Patty-Pans cold and hungry, wholesomely tired for a good night's sleep. When they awakened weather-wise Gretta was proved a competent prophet, and the beautiful Sunday but what old people call "a weather breeder." A cold rain was falling, mingled with hail. It froze as it fell, and the stone paved sidewalks were as great a menace to human beings as was the asphalt upon which the poor horses were slipping and straining in a manner painful to see.

"Margery, you let me go down with Happie to-day," said Gretta. "I am surer-footed and stronger than you are. And we can get on without either Laura or Polly. Nobody will be out to-day who can stay in. It's fearful walking. Happiness and I will go down to the tea room; the rest of you stay here. Oh, there goes a horse!" [121]

Gretta covered her eyes, shuddering. Her love for horses was a passion with her, and it was almost more than she could bear to see their suffering as they strove for a foothold on the wet or sleeted asphalt, falling to their death from the bullet that would end the pain of a broken leg, or, worse, when they strained into an injury not immediately fatal, but incurable.

"I don't see how you can live in New York!" she gasped, turning away from the window with a white face, as the latest victim was helped to his feet by feed bags placed under them.

"Are you ever homesick, Gretta?" asked Happie with a sudden suspicion.

"No, because you are all here, but, oh, wouldn't you rather be up in the mountains where the air is dry and clear than here, crowded up, in this wet wind, with horses ruined before your eyes?" cried Gretta.

"Poor Gretta! I believe you do miss your mountains!" said Margery gently.

"Home is home," said Gretta. "But not without you all," she added hastily.

Margery found the day long. From its beginning to its close walking was not less dangerous, and she had visions of her mother, Happie, even sure-footed Gretta, coming home in an ambulance, with broken bones. Laura played dismal music all the gray day till Margery almost screamed, but if it made Laura happy to be miserable gentle Margery did not like to thwart her, so bore the minor strains uncomplainingly. [122]

It was a great relief when her mother came back safe and sound, a little earlier than usual, for Margery had been more anxious about her than about the girls. They, too, arrived with every bone intact, having triumphed over the pitfalls set that day by nature, but they came alone and late.

"Where's Bob?" asked Mrs. Scollard. The boy of the family never failed in escort duty to his sisters, unless he sent a substitute.

"That's what we are wondering," said Happie. "We waited fifteen minutes for him, then we locked the door and waited more than five minutes outside, then we came on without him. Isn't it strange?"

"He would have telephoned if he couldn't come, unless——" Gretta stopped herself.

"Unless he couldn't telephone," Mrs. Scollard finished the sentence for her. "Polly, run down-stairs, dear, and see if any message has been neglected by the boy."

Polly started to obey, but a rap on the door as she neared it checked her, and Happie opened it to Snigs, Snigs with a queer, excited face and a suppressed manner. [123]

"Oh, hallo, Happie!" he said with forced jauntiness. "I came to tell you that Bob sort of slipped—tumbled down, like a chump, and he thinks he hurt his ankle, and he was afraid you mightn't like it—I mean he was afraid you'd be afraid it was worse than it is, so he sent me ahead to tell you it was nothing bad."

"Where is Bob?" cried Mrs. Scollard hastening forward.

"He telephoned Ralph to meet him. He's down-stairs at the door. I guess he's got to wait for the janitor to help him up—he came home in a cab," said Snigs.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Laura always ready to meet a sensation sensationally, and Margery looked aghast, remembering how her mother had come home in a carriage, completely broken down, less than a year before.

"Let's go see, motherums!" said Happie cheerfully, though she was badly frightened.

They had not got down one flight of the three between them and the lower hall, when they heard slow steps and many of them, and saw Bob trying to smile at them above the shoulders of Ralph, the stout German janitor, the colored fireman and the hall boy as they carried him up-stairs.

"Lo! we bring with us the hero—  
Lo! we bring the conquering Graeme,  
Crowned as best beseems a victor  
From the altar of his fame," [124]

Bob declaimed, setting Ralph's skating cap, which he imperatively borrowed, rakishly on one eye to give point to his quotation.

"Bob, my dear Bob, what has happened?" cried his mother.

"I'm like Tennyson's Brook, mother; 'I slip, I slide'—I don't 'gleam,' though. It wasn't a long plan of mine. I just sat down on the icy sidewalk to mature it, and when I got up—well, I didn't get up,—to make a bull—I was pulled up." Bob cheerfully called this information up the stairs to his anxious mother, smiling into her down-bent face, and entirely indifferent to what the other tenants might think of his nonsense.

"It's a sprain or a strain, Mrs. Scollard; it isn't anything serious," Ralph corroborated. "But Bob can't join one of Mrs. Stewart's classes this week."

The doctor came and bandaged Bob, pronouncing his hurt one that would recover in a reasonable time if he did not try to force it.

Bob took his supper on the sofa that night, and the girls waited on him so devotedly that it was rather pleasant to be incapacitated.

But beneath his enjoyment of the hour, and of Ralph and Snigs' nonsense, which they brought over with them from the next flat and kept on tap all the evening, was an anxiety for the morrow and for the succeeding morrows. Bob was more than desirous to do his duty at the office, yet here he was, laid up! [125]

Happie saw the worry and so did Margery, but where the loving elder girl could only grieve over it, the younger set about curing it.

After a confab with Margery, Gretta and Laura that night when the Gordon boys had gone, Happie came into Bob's room and seated herself on the edge of his narrow white bed.

"I have something to announce to you, Robert, my wounded hero," she said, smoothing the sheet comfortably under his chin. "I've been talking it over with the girls, and we can manage it. Gretta is to keep house here, Margery is to take charge of the tea room, Laura is to go there with her,

and so is Polly, and Penny is to stay at home every day, except dancing school days. And I am going down to Mr. Felton's office every morning, and I'm going to do your work if I can, and if I can't I shall find some way to be useful."

"Well, I guess you won't!" cried Bob, his voice bristling with exclamation points.

"Well, I guess I will!" Happie mocked him. "Bob, I'd love to do it! I'm not afraid. And I know as much arithmetic as you do."

"You know enough, Happie, but you would have to learn the office work, and by the time you had learned it I should be back. And you, a girl, can't do errands. But it would be fine if you could keep my place for me," added Bob, seeing how crestfallen Happie looked. He had such unbounded faith in his sister's ability that he half wondered if she could not do what she wanted to do, after all.

[126]

"Then I may try!" cried Happie, brightening under Bob's hint of relenting.

"No use, Hapsie, but I wish there were," said Bob vaguely.

Happie talked her mother over, and in the morning had her way. The entire household, save Gretta, Bob and Penny, sallied forth in the dampness of the thawing ice of the day before, but with the sun climbing up to dry it off into a perfect day.

Happie presented herself with unexpected timidity in the office where Bob had served his apprenticeship to the world of business, and where the hope of the future smiled at him. Three young clerks looked at her speculatively, wondering at the youth of this very early client, and whether she had come to buy, sell, lease, or hire.

"Is Mr. Felton here?" asked Happie, and with her question her courage rose.

"He's inside," said the youngest of the clerks. "Want to see him? I'll take your message."

"Just tell him, please, that Robert Scollard's sister would like to see him. He has sprained his ankle and can't come down to-day," Happie said.



**"MR. FELTON CAME OUT OF HIS  
SANCTUM"**

"Oh, that's a pity!" exclaimed one of the other clerks. "Yes, it's a shame!" chimed in the second. "Awful sorry," murmured the one who had risen to go to Mr. Felton.

[127]

Happie felt better; these lads evidently liked Bob.

Mr. Felton came out of his sanctum and smiled kindly at Bob's emissary.

"Sorry to hear that Scollard is laid up. Nothing serious, I hope?" he said.

"No, sir," said Happie. "But he can't use his foot, and won't be able to use it for at least a week. I

came down because I want to take his place here until he is able to be about. I am quite good at accounts—we studied together—and I think I can be useful. Please let me try."

Mr. Felton laughed. "So you are made of the same cloth as your brother. It is exactly like him not to forget his duties here when he is hurt, but he needn't have sent you as a substitute; I can get along."

"He didn't send me, I came—but of course he was glad when I said I thought I could come. What shall I do first?" asked Happie, looking around in a businesslike way.

"Open those letters on your brother's desk, sort them into their classes; bills, paid and unpaid, applications for houses, offices, apartments, etc., and general correspondence. Then add up that rent roll there," said Mr. Felton indicating papers on Bob's desk. He went back into his inner office and Happie hung up her coat and hat on the hook pointed out to her by one of "the other boys," as she told herself, climbed on Bob's stool and went to work. [128]

The three young men in the office were ready with suggestions and information and Happie accomplished her tasks fairly well through a day that was not as long as it would have been in an office further down in town. It was long enough, however, to her unaccustomed muscles, perched for so many hours on a stool that strained her knees, with her back bent over a desk.

"Shall I come back, Mr. Felton? To-morrow, I mean, and until Bob can come himself?" she asked when Mr. Felton bade his little force good-night.

"Why, if you like," he replied, smiling into Happie's eager face.

"I like it, if it helps," she said.

"Yes, it helps," said Mr. Felton. "You have done your brother's work to-day. Of course I don't know how much help you had." He glanced at the three young men, but they stood by Happie to a man.

"Oh, she only needed a hint or two," said the oldest. "Just a little showing with some things she had never run up against," added the one whom Happie liked best.

"She hasn't been any bother," said the youngest one, with a patronizing air that made Happie long to box his ears.

"Very well, I shall appreciate your not allowing my work to suffer through your brother's absence," said Mr. Felton with a polite bow. And so it was settled that until Bob was out again Happie was to be in the real estate business. [129]

It was a tired but triumphant Happie, therefore, that came into the tea room to go home with her sisters under substitute Ralph's escort. The tea room was not far distant from Mr. Felton's office.

Bob listened to her account of the day with explosions of laughter that were inspired by admiration fully as much as by mirth.

"Hapsie, you're all kinds of a good fellow!" he said at the end of the recital. "I won't forget this in a hurry! But Gretta has been a trump too! She has looked after my bandages, and fed Penny and me well, and entertained me into the bargain. I think I've six pretty nice sisters!"

Bob beamed on the group of big and little girls, with a pat on Happie's arm and a special smile for Gretta, who blushed with pleasure and looked amply repaid for that day's work.

"Now wouldn't it be nice if I had gone to that school, as Mrs. Barker wanted me to, and there had been no one but Penny to stay at home?" she asked.

"Well, really, Gretta, you have the best of the argument to-day," said Mrs. Scollard smoothing the girl's hair as she brought a cushion for Bob's foot, and set the biggest orange before Happie. [130]

---

## CHAPTER IX

### AN UNPREJUDICED VIEW

HAPPIE could not help feeling a little bit important and very much grown up as she brushed her gleaming hair before the mirror in her shady Patty-Pan chamber, preparing to go to business to take her brother's place.

The next room was Bob's, and, in spite of the portière over the connecting door, it was easy to hear Mrs. Scollard's voice as she anxiously consulted the man of the house and he replied.

"Do you think it is necessary, Bob? Can she really be useful? I so strongly dislike her going," Mrs. Scollard was saying.

"Well, I'll tell you, mother," Bob began. "Would you just hand my old coat out of the wardrobe, like the angel mother you are? There's no use lolling about in my business suit. Thanks. I'll tell you: it isn't precisely necessary, but I think—I know—it will please Mr. Felton to have Happie down. You see it shows a desire on our part to serve him, and he has been mighty nice to me. All the other three fellows there think he's inclined to favor me. And of course she can be useful, even if she can't go ahead as I could."

"She's so young, Bob,—only fifteen! And she's such a frank, friendly creature that she's sure to expect to find friends in an office as she finds them everywhere. And I am troubled lest she [131]

encounter something unpleasant." Mrs. Scollard's soft voice was not enough stifled by the door and portière to disguise its anxiety.

"Not down there, motherums. Those are three nice young chaps in the office; they'll be all right to Happie. One might be fresh—Dan Lipton—but I guess he'll be civil. It isn't like going to business, to go down to Felton's in my place. I know just what she'll be up against, you know, or I wouldn't let her do it. Maybe the little experience will be good for her; you can see she's delighted to try to help me out." Bob dropped his voice, but still Happie heard him, with a sensation of having been reduced in age some five years by the conversation.

How manly Bob was, and how businesslike in tone without trying to be so! Happie felt like a little girl who had suddenly discovered that the grown people did not enjoy playing house with her just as she enjoyed having them. But how fortunate she was in her brother who would not let her face anything untried except he first knew what she "would be up against!"

She came out to the savory breakfast which Margery and Gretta had prepared, somewhat subdued, but still ready to do her best to be useful in Mr. Felton's office, if not to be a thoroughly competent substitute for Bob.

For the next two days everything went smoothly and Happie secretly cherished the conviction that she was attaining her ambition and was really useful. The three young men, or "the two young men and that boy," as Happie mentally classified Mr. Felton's clerks, for she cordially disliked pert Dan Lipton, were most polite, ready to serve her, plainly desirous of being friendly, but treating "Scollard's nice little sister," as they called her among themselves, with a respect that convinced Happie of her success in playing her rôle with dignity. [132]

The fourth day of her business career was Friday. It was also to be her last day, for Bob thought he should be able to resume his desk on Saturday, if one of the girls came with him to the door to give him a supporting shoulder in case of need.

Happie announced the joyful tidings on her arrival, and somehow it seemed to change the atmosphere around her. The two elder clerks became assiduous in their desire to serve her, and openly expressed their regret at the prospect of losing what one of them, inclined to sentiment and poetry, styled "the daily inspiration of her sunny face." But Dan Lipton was affected differently. Apparently he felt that there was no time to be lost if he wished to try his hand at teasing the vanishing little substitute, and he revealed, not only that teasing was his preferred amusement, but that his idea of teasing was that of the practical joker.

The livelong morning he made himself a nuisance to Happie, who bore good-naturedly jarrings of her stool which cost her blots; the loss of pen, paper, pencils, blotters; a low whistling close by her side that made addition next to impossible, and the copying of letters very difficult. [133]

At noon there came into the office a man who went up to the eldest clerk's table and asked if he had on his list any desirable apartment for a young man—himself, he added—who had just arrived in New York and hoped to stay for many weeks. "I want good rooms with bath, in a thoroughly well-kept house," he said. "I don't care to turn in anywhere; I want the place recommended. A friend of mine told me I could rely on the house to which I might be sent by Mr. Felton's office."

Happie looked up, her attention attracted by the beautiful voice in which the stranger made known his wants, the pleasant accent, with the r's elided or softened, and the slight drawl, which, without being lazy, was most attractive in its leisurely effect. She saw a man much younger than she had looked for. She had been conscious of his unusual height as he entered, and expected to see him burdened with years proportioned to his inches. Instead she saw a man under thirty, lightly but strongly built, the grace of repose in his motions, which were, at the same time, lithe and alert. His face was handsome, rather from its expression and refinement than from regular beauty. His eyes, hair and mustache were uniformly brown, and the eyes were so filled with spirit and intelligence that they would have redeemed a face lacking the many charms possessed by this one. [134]

"How nice he is!" thought Happie, surveying the newcomer from the vantage ground of his oblivion to her. "He looks as though he had been made just to illustrate the word gentleman. Even his clothes," this sharp-eyed young critic added in her thoughts.

"We don't carry men's apartments on our books," the clerk was saying, in the meantime. "But I can give you the addresses of two or three,—more if you like,—first-class places, where you will find what you want, if you find a vacancy at all."

"Thank you very much. I should like it exceedingly, if it isn't too much trouble," said the stranger. "It hardly seems fair to let you bother with it if the houses are not in your hands."

"It isn't very much trouble to jot down a few addresses," returned the clerk with a smile. "Dan, suppose you do it. Copy the numbers and names marked on this list." He tossed a paper over on Dan's desk as he spoke, then pushed a chair forward for the tall young man, with a gesture inviting him to take it, and returned to his own work.

Dan Lipton was sharpening a pencil. He shifted the knife into his left hand holding the pencil, and with his right reached across and laid the list of bachelor apartments on Happie's desk. "Here, junior clerk," he said. "That's about your size job. You do it."

Happie flushed. She was entirely ready to do anything any one asked of her, but she did not like the manner of the asking, and the fact that neither of Mr. Felton's older assistants had heard the saucy transfer, while the stranger had and was regarding her with surprise, and for the first time, [135]

made it particularly trying.

"If you don't care to do what you are told, Dan Lipton, you must speak to me properly if you hope to get me to help you," she said softly.

The boy laughed insolently. "Come, puss, don't get your back up," he said, leaning so far over the desk at which Happie sat that she almost fell off the other side of her stool, retreating from him. "You know you'll do anything I ask you. Don't pretend you're mad, just to get me to notice you. You're a nice little puss, if you're not stroked the wrong way."

Happie flushed scarlet. "Get off this desk," she said. "And if you dare to speak one more impertinent word I'll box your ears, and tell Mr. Felton why I did it."

She looked perfectly capable of carrying out her threat, but her anger delighted Dan's impish mood. He lolled forward a little further instead of obeying Happie's order to get back from her desk. He was evidently rolling up some sweet morsel of impertinence under his tongue, and there is no telling what form it might have taken but that a strong, nervous hand took him by the shoulder, while another stole up and seized him somewhere under his coat with a refreshing twist. Master Dan was straightened up vigorously, lifted from his stool, set down on it again with emphasis, and a sound cuff was administered first to his right and then to his left ear by the hand that relinquished his waistband. [136]

"Now, then, sir," said the stranger in his delicious English, all labials, aspirates and vowels, apparently, "now, then, sir, you're only a cub but you need licking into shape, and I should be delighted to help in the task if I ever heard you speaking again to a young girl as I just heard you speak to this one." He turned to the amazed other two who had seen or heard nothing that preceded Dan's elevation and punishment, and smiled as he settled his cuffs. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure, if I've interfered in the discipline of this office, but this little girl was being annoyed by that stupid boy of yours, and I took it on myself to cuff him. I hope you don't mind."

The two clerks glanced at each other, at Happie, crimson, half laughing, half crying, at Dan, furious, but cowed, and they beamed appreciatively. "Not a bit!" they cried together.

"This young lady has been good enough to help us out here for the past four days, because her brother was laid up and she took his place. Dan has not been disagreeable till now. If we had caught him making a nuisance of himself—to her especially—we should have pounded him to pulp," said the elder.

"Certainly," agreed the visitor. "Fun is all right, but a boy must never forget what is due a lady. The trouble with you, Master Cub, is a wrong sense of humor. You'll have to learn that rudeness is never funny, much less clever. If you've copied the list I'll take it now, please." [137]

"Copy your own lists," growled Dan. "I'll never touch a pen for you."

"A pencil would do as well," returned the stranger unperturbed, while Happie cried, "Let me copy the addresses, please. I am ever and ever so much obliged to you."

The tall young man laid the papers from Dan's desk on hers, bowing and laughing. "It wasn't the copying you minded then? And you're entirely welcome. We do enjoy a little muscle play once in a while, don't we?"

"Sometimes we do, when they're needed, and our own aren't strong enough," returned Happie, copying away for dear life, with her flushed cheek bent low over her paper. She finished the few lines of addresses quickly, and handed them to her defender with a grateful smile, slipping from her stool as she did so.

The young man took them, thanking her, and noting how youthful she was with her reddish brown hair standing out around her dimpled cheeks, and her skirt at ankle length. Then he took his departure, with renewed thanks to the senior clerk and a nod to Dan, who glared at him with a soul far from forgivingly at peace.

He left the office to a perturbed atmosphere. Happie was glad that this was her last day, though when it ended the two elder clerks bade her good-bye with unmistakable regret, and Mr. Felton thanked her solemnly for her great kindness in filling her brother's place and for her fidelity and cleverness in his interests. [138]

At the tea room, when Happie arrived to go home with Margery and Laura, they were half shocked, half amused, and wholly impressed by her adventure of that day. Happie described her rescuer in enthusiastic terms and Margery was greatly interested.

"I should really think, from what you say, that it was some one I know!" she cried, as they started homeward and Happie paused for breath.

Happie caught the note in her voice as she made the discovery, and tossed her head. "No, indeed, Margery!" she declared positively. "This man was not a bit like any one you ever described. He is simple, has lovely manners, is not the least speck solemn nor affected. And handsome, and as manly!"

"Yes," said Margery quietly. "All that is precisely like some one I know, but of course I don't know your knight. How funny the boy must have looked, getting set down and his ears boxed! And how thoroughly he deserved it! But it was rather horrid, Happie dear. I'm glad that to-morrow Bob can resume his desk."

In the morning there was a little stir of excitement in the Patty-Pans, for Bob was going out, and it takes no more than that to agitate a family wrapped up in one another, as was this family of [139]



boy and girls, "and one dear mother," Polly added.

Gretta was to go with Bob to the office door, her strong shoulder, strengthened by hay-making and gardening, was the most reliable in case Bob's foot proved weak and played him false. The girls all hovered around seeing them start, till Bob laughed at their anxious faces. "You'd think I was valuable bric-à-brac!" he cried, bursting in on Margery's grandmotherly injunctions to watch for stray bits of ice on the sidewalk, and to be sure the car was stopped before he left it.

"The man of the house is more than bric-à-brac," said Happie.

"Man! He isn't seventeen!" cried Laura.

"Just as much a man as this is a house," retorted Happie. And they all laughed, for the beloved little Patty-Pans flat was small, and nobody could deny it was crowded.

Happie was glad to get back to the tea room. It was a busy day, but she flew to and fro enjoying the rush. She was tempted to sing as she poured tea like a rosy American goddess of plenty. Mrs. Jones-Dexter came in and vouchsafed a smile of cordial welcome to Happie, though Margery had been her favorite since her increased acquaintance with the girls. Hans Lieder came too, and Happie was surprised to find herself rather glad to see the mysterious man who had once made her pity him. [140]

"We missed you, little Miss Sonnenschein," he said. "You are such different young sisters that each leaves her own place vacant when she goes. You are the one to do and to be, the warmth and dependence; the oldest one is the sweetness, the soul of you, and the third, ah, she is gifted; she is little Clara Schumann! I wish that I could spirit her to Germany, there to be made what she was meant to be."

Happy felt alarmed. There was something about the great cloak and drooping hat of this mysterious Herr Lieder which gave her the feeling that he might bewitch Laura into Germany, and she more than half disliked his interest in their sentimental girl.

"Oh, that is kind, of course," she said hastily. "But Laura could never go away from mother; she needs mother most of all of us."

"*Natürlich*, being the genius," said Hans Lieder, with a laugh. "How funny it is to see your dislike to her genius! My good little Sonnenschein, your sister is not made for the safe homelife, and whether it is better or worse for her you cannot help it. She will find her way to her place in the world, mark me."

"Well," sighed Happie with a resigned philosophy, "if it is her place truly, it must be the best place for her."

Gretta came in at that moment; she had left Bob undamaged at Mr. Felton's door, had done a few errands, and came in bright and shining from the cold wind, and with pride in her new ability to thread the bewildering streets and shops of New York alone. Margery was staying at home until afternoon, when she would bring Polly and Penny to Mrs. Stewart. [141]

"A little music, Clara Schumann?" hinted Herr Lieder to Laura, passing him. Laura shook her head.

"Not mine," she said. "I've got to help the girls. If you would——" She stopped, hesitating to ask for his wonderful playing during the hour when his audience would surely be large.

But to-day the mood for music was upon this strange man, and he nodded to Laura and went to the piano. Mrs. Jones-Dexter, who had lingered, forgot her original objection to music with her tea, and sat listening with tears streaming down her face, a face lined by her seventy years of hard battling with everything and everybody in her world; which came to mean, after all, but one thing: perpetual strife with herself.

Gradually the tea room filled. Those who came did not go away, and more and more kept coming, and still Herr Lieder played, forgetful of time, place, human beings, everything but his music. It seemed to Happie that he had not played before, when they had thought he played perfectly, as he played this day. Laura was entirely useless; the music made her hopeless as an assistant, and Happie and Gretta were at their wits' ends. There was an hour lacking to the time when Margery was due, the room was crowded, and they were hardly better fitted than Laura to look after their guests, with Herr Lieder playing as Orpheus must have played to call back the soul of Eurydice. [142]

Happie looked about her wildly, and there in the doorway stood the tall young man, the hero of her adventure in Mr. Felton's office the day before.

He bowed and smiled as they recognized each other, looking much less surprised than she as he made his way forward and said: "Very glad to see you again. You seem to be an all around genius. Are you one of the six maidens of the card in the window?"

"Yes, I am the second of the six, I suppose," said Happie. "I hope you are well?"

The young man laughed. Plainly she had not meant to say that, and was quite demoralized by her responsibilities.

"Perfectly well, thank you, Miss Happie Scollard," he said, and Happy was too confused to wonder at his knowledge of her name. "You have marvelous music for your tea room."

"It doesn't belong to it," said Happie. "That is a mysterious German gentleman who comes here a great deal and has played for us once before. I never heard such playing. But I don't know what to do. Nobody goes, Laura—my sister—is delirious from it, and can't help us, and people keep on coming——" Happie broke off with a gesture that came near ignoring the little tray with its [143]

burden of teacups which she held.

The tall young man took it from her. "Allow me," he said as coolly as if they had been at a party and he was offering to bring her cream. "Now if you will tell me where you want these I will get them there. And you may as well let me help you. I am sure I can serve tea quite as well as you girls do. I have often served harder things than tea—tennis balls, for instance."

His brown eyes laughed into Happie's lighter brown ones so merrily and with such friendly confidence that she would accept his offer, that she yielded up her tray involuntarily with but a feeble protest.

"Oh, how can I? I don't even——"

"Know me," the stranger finished for her. "Let me help you, nevertheless. I assure you, upon my word and honor, that it is all right. If you will let me help you, before the afternoon is over you will know me well, and I hope you will know me all your life."

"That sounds more mysterious than Herr Lieder," said Happie with a frank laugh. There was something about this young man that carried conviction with whatever he said or did. He was so unmistakably well-bred, so simple, frank and honest that no one could doubt him. [144]

Laura aroused herself from her musical delirium to stare open-eyed and open-mouthed at the spectacle, which at the same time nearly cost a pale woman a bath of hot tea at the hands of Gretta, who also saw it suddenly to her total undoing. It was that of a tall and very elegant young man gravely making his way through the crowded room, bearing tea, in Happie's wake, to the various little tables, while Happie supplemented him with more tea and little cakes, looking immensely relieved and quite as though there were nothing unusual in the situation.

"My goodness! Who is he? What can it mean?" whispered Laura to Gretta, who shook her head so hard that the end of her braid of hair slipped out of its confining bow, as she offered to an indignant customer a slice of lemon that had already been used. Margery came in at the door and stopped short, amazed to find the room so full. As she stood there, flushed and lovely, Polly and Penny in either hand, her eyes fell on Happie's assistant, and the color rushed up to her hair, while eyes and lips smiled radiantly. "Why, Mr. Gaston, what are you doing, and how did you find us?" she said, to Happie's consternation, as the tall young man dashed towards her. [145]

---

## CHAPTER X "SEEING IS BELIEVING"

"WELL!" gasped Happie. "My mercy me! It's that Robert Gaston!"

She said it aloud entirely forgetful of where she was, even of what she was, in the amazing discovery of the identity of her rescuer. She told her mother afterwards that it was nothing but good fortune and her size that kept her from falling into a teapot, a little like the Dormouse, and only the lack of space that kept her from dropping to the floor.

She stood near Mrs. Jones-Dexter as the amazing conviction rushed over her that Robert Gaston did not resemble her mental portrait of him in any particular, and that he was actually there and had been helping her serve tea for an hour. Mrs. Jones-Dexter looked up disapprovingly. "Do you mean to say that you have been allowing a young man whom you did not know to help you, Miss Secunda?" she demanded sternly. She had fallen into the habit of calling Margery and Happie and Laura "Prima, Secunda and Tertia."

Happie gazed at her blankly. "That isn't the worst of it," she said. "The worst of it is that Margery does know him, and that he is really very, very nice. I thought he'd be perfectly unbearable, but anybody could bear him easily. Oh, dear, oh, dear! Margery will like him—I do myself!" [146]

Mrs. Jones-Dexter stared at Happie for an instant, then she laughed. "I think I see!" she observed. "My dear, be consoled. There might be a degree of badness beyond this. Prima might see his charm and you not see it. That would be far worse. And take an old woman's advice; don't grudge your sisters happiness of their own selection. It's better to float with currents than to beat yourself to tatters trying to stem them. If Prima is drifting away, drift after her, don't hold back."

Happie did not heed this excellent advice, based on Mrs. Jones-Dexter's personal experiences. She was watching Margery as she replied to Robert's questions, and understood his laughing glances towards herself, surmising that he was relating to Margery the story of his latest hour of usefulness.

Herr Lieder stopped playing, disturbed, perhaps, with the quick telepathic instinct of a musician, by Laura's perturbation, which was nearly as great as Happie's, when she saw Margery greet the stranger and guessed his identity.

Herr Lieder went away quickly without a word, as he had preferred doing at the end of his first playing. After he had gone the people who had been lingering in the tea room stirred sighingly, and there was a rustle of general departure, leaving space and opportunity for Margery to come down the room with Robert Gaston to where Happie and Gretta exchanged rapid whispers till the approaching pair were at hand, when Gretta hastily slipped away to safety in the rear. [147]

"Happie, dear," Margery began, "I must introduce to you my friend, Mr. Gaston, but he already knows you. This is my Happiness-sister, Mr. Gaston, of whom I used to speak so often—who let

me go away to be idle and happy all summer, while she stayed in the Ark, and bore the brunt of a great deal that was hard."

"And who did such great kindness thereby to a young man from Baltimore and his sister Mary, of whom she had never heard," added Robert Gaston, taking Happie's hand with that mixture of old-fashioned formality and boyish simplicity which was his charm. "I hope Miss Happie is going to give me her friendship, quite independent of Miss Margery,—the way it was begun!" he added with a twinkle.

Happie looked painfully embarrassed. "It won't matter about my friendship, I am three years younger than Margery," she said awkwardly and not too relevantly.

"Do you regard the affections of your family through the wrong end of a telescope, Miss Happie? I want the friendship of all the Scollards, down to the dancing-school pupils there, who are devoutly wishing I'd take myself off and let their sisters lead them to class," said Robert Gaston, passing over Happie's awkwardness so lightly that she was grateful. "I must carry out their desires." [148]

"You didn't know me the other day, in Mr. Felton's office?" asked Happie.

"Not a bit," declared Robert. "Wasn't it a jolly chance that let me box that impertinent stripling's ears for you? Not knowing you were you, I mean! But you see I knew whom to expect when I came here; I mean, that I should find the unknown Scollards here. I came intending to surprise you all,—I flatter myself I succeeded! When I came down the steps I saw you, Miss Happie, flying about, and I said to myself: 'By all that's wonderful! My little Lady Disdain of the office is Miss Margery's sister Happie!' And so you are," he ended with a satisfied laugh that made Happie smile up at him reluctantly.

"Yes," she admitted grudgingly. "I am Keren-happuch Scollard. And you certainly were very nice, both in boxing ears and serving tea." This time she smiled cordially, and Margery said as she put her arm over Happie's shoulder: "This is the dearest of the Scollards. You are coming to see mother, and the Patty-Pans?"

"As soon as you will let me," returned Robert Gaston. "To-night? Thank you. Perhaps your mother will let me borrow her two eldest daughters to show me the way to the Charlefords' to-morrow night? I am anxious to recall myself to Mrs. Charleford as soon as possible."

"Auntie Cam does not forget old friends, Mr. Gaston," said Margery. "I am sure you have lots of messages to deliver to her from your mother. I thought Auntie Cam and Mrs. Gaston were very fond of each other." [149]

"To be sure I have, so many messages that I can't carry them alone. You and Miss Happie will have to help me. And I have messages from mother to you, 'the dove-eyed little girl'—you remember mother's name for you? And from Mary! Dear me, I can't remember half of Mary's, but my consolation is that she will write you all that she told me to say and no end more!" Robert glanced at Margery, and Happie saw the look of satisfaction with which he noted her fluttering, delighted embarrassment as he hinted his mother's and sister's admiration for her. Happie's heart sank. He was nice, very nice. Nothing but actually seeing him could have convinced her of how charming he was. But that was just the trouble; here he was already charming Margery, her own Margery, away into an atmosphere which rebellious fifteen-years-old Happie could not breathe.

Robert saw Happie's face cloud, as she turned away. "Please introduce me to the lesser Scollards, the musical child, and your two Sweet P's, and then I must leave the tea room and its maidens. Where is the owner of the Ark? Miss Margery wrote me the wonderful story of finding the will in the little worn-off horsehair trunk, up in the garret that snowy day. Is your Miss Gretta here? Please let me know you all, and then when I come to-night I shall be among old friends. Remember I'm an exile from the hospitable South and take me into your kindness, Miss Happie," he pleaded, with such a funny assumption of pathos that Happie dimpled again. She took him in charge for presentations to Gretta, Laura and the two little girls, with whom Margery immediately afterwards departed up-stairs, giving a pleasant little informal nod to the menacing friend, that somewhat reassured Happie for the moment. [150]

Robert Gaston did not linger longer than was required to win the hearty liking of Gretta and Laura. He had an instinctive sense of the right thing to say to put every one at ease. Gretta found herself replying to him without fear, though she was still the shyest of the shy. Laura was instantly won by the suggestion that she sing and play some of her own compositions to her sister's friend that night.

"I think I will make a song of your coming, unknown, among us, defending Happie, and bearing tea to the thirsty and fainting in our hour of need," said queer Laura in all sincerity.

The tea room was deserted, save for a woman who sipped her tea with a novel propped up before her, and a man who took immense swallows, scalded himself, wiped away the tears and fell to figuring frantically; forgot the tea was hot, scalded himself with another hasty mouthful, repeating the performance thrice over to the fascinated marvel of the girls, who watched him with ill-suppressed giggles. [151]

With only two, and two such absorbed customers, Happie, Gretta and Laura had no hesitation in discussing Robert Gaston, the one subject in the world just then, and they gave themselves up to it unreservedly, elbows on table, chins in hands, over in a corner that suggested privacy. From comparing notes on his personal appearance—regarded by Happie differently, more analytically, since she knew him for himself—and agreeing that in face, air and manner there could hardly be

a finer gentleman, they went on to praise his kindness and universal good qualities till Happie dropped her arms on the table and her face on them, and groaned dismally.

"What's the matter?" demanded Laura, rather frightened.

"Never mind, Happie, he may be rude and disagreeable to Margery," suggested Gretta with an amused twist of the lips, understanding Happie's groan better than Laura did.

"Oh, yes, it's likely!" said Happie from the muffling bend of her elbow. "Of course a blind man could see the end of this."

"You mean it's going to be a romance?" inquired Laura. "Of course any one would care for Margery—I should think they would love her madly, she is so very calm herself. I'm sure I don't see what you're groaning about, Happie. Only think how perfectly beautiful Margery would look under a bridal veil, walking slowly to the strains of heavenly music! I'll write the music. I guess I'll have it a chanted march, something like the Lohengrin one. I'll write the words, too. Do you suppose the tea room will make enough money for us by that time so we can afford to hire a lot of boys in white surplices to walk ahead, chanting? No, I'd rather have them in velvet knee breeches, with buckles——"

[152]

"Like Bobby Shafto," interrupted Happie, but she laughed.

"And girls in—silver and pink!" cried Laura triumphantly, having hesitated for an instant. "All chanting my lovely epitaphium."

"Your what? Oh, Laura, what are you talking about? Epitaphs are for graves!" protested Happie.

"Maybe that isn't the right word," said Laura with heightened color. "I believe it's epithalami—something, now I think of it. I was looking over the poets in our bookcase, and I saw they used to write epithalami-things for weddings. I thought I'd remember it in case any of you girls were married some day. Only I should write music too. I believe I'll go now and compose something impertinent for Mr. Gaston's coming."

"Oh, Laura Scollard, you are enough to make Jeunesse Dorée laugh! Wouldn't you rather be sensible than clever? What can you mean by *impertinent* music? Are you trying to say *pertinent*?" cried Happie, forgetting her forebodings in a peal of such merry laughter that it won a glance from the lady of the propped-up-novel.

[153]

"It doesn't matter," said Laura, walking away towards the piano with sufficient dignity to have compensated for Mrs. Malaprop's crooked tongue.

Laura sat thoughtful before the key board for a while, then began to strike chords reminiscent of the Lohengrin Wedding March, at the same time singing below her breath words that were so satisfactory to herself that her color mounted in the pride of conscious poesy.

Margery came down from Mrs. Stewart's just when this composition, of which she was innocently unsuspecting, was well under way.

"Laura, dear," she said pausing at the piano. "Mrs. Stewart's pianist has not come; she has no music for her class this afternoon. Won't you come up and play for her? I told her I was sure that we could spare you here."

"Oh, Margery, no, I don't want to! I should despise playing dance music the whole afternoon. I am doing something important, too," Laura protested, instantly clouding.

"Laura, my dear! How can you say you don't want to help Mrs. Stewart, when she is taking Polly and Penny into her class so kindly!" rebuked Margery.

"But not me!" cried Laura, betraying the feeling of some days' standing. "Besides, she told you she took our children for Aunt Keren's sake. I should think that let us off from caring about it."

[154]

"Laura! Nothing would let us off, as you put it, from our share of the obligation. It is Polly and Penny, not Aunt Keren, who are benefited by the dancing class. In any case, if there were no Polly and Penny, wouldn't you be glad to do a kindness for sweet little Mrs. Stewart? Dear Laura, you positively must fight hard against selfishness; be at least as ready to give as to receive. And, however you feel about playing for Mrs. Stewart this afternoon, I must insist on your doing so."

Margery rarely put forth her claim of obedience as the elder sister whom circumstances had given a large share of the mother's headship over the family, but when she did assert herself there was something in gentle Margery that got the obedience she asked.

Laura arose somewhat sulkily, quite unwillingly, but she arose at once, and went towards the door. "If you only knew what I was composing!" she grumbled.

"Something that I shall care a great deal about, I'm sure, and something that will be all the better for my little sister's sacrifice, as all art gains from the artist's gain in character," said Margery, putting her arm around Laura affectionately. Laura's brow cleared. If there were a person in the world whom she loved better than her important little self, that person was Margery.

[155]

"Oh, Margery, I don't mean to be unkind to people, but I don't seem to care one bit about them. I don't see how you can care for everybody's bothers, the way you do," said Laura candidly.

"And I'm afraid you think that comes from your being wholly taken up with your little talents, my Laura, and are a wee bit proud of it," said Margery wisely, "when the truth is that the greatest artist, like the highest art, has a sympathy for sorrow, and a knowledge of human hearts far beyond that of ordinary mortals. Wait. I must tell Happie that I have carried you off, and that I will come back soon myself."

It was a listless Laura that began to play the two-step which Mrs. Stewart placed before her on the piano rack, a Laura not converted to zeal in her service by the little lady's warm thanks for her coming. But after a few minutes, as the rhythm of many feet chimed with the music, Laura began to play with more spirit, and when the first dance was ended, and she had got Mrs. Stewart's consent to turning the piano a very little so that she might see the dancers, Laura forgot that she was a genius—with a big G—wrested from her task of composing an epithalamium, and became only a little girl of thirteen who played remarkably well, and dearly loved dancing.

Even the half hour in which the children were arranged in line to practice the waltz step up to a certain crack in the floor and back again to their starting point, did not dismay Laura. She played her waltz over and over, but her eyes were dreamy, with the far-away look that Margery, had she been there, would have understood, as a signal of inspiration, and her cheeks were red with excitement. [156]

Laura was watching little Serena Jones-Dexter, filled with the thought of Ralph and Snigs, the unknown cousins, and fired with enthusiasm for the child's loveliness.

"Now, partners, if you please, children, and waltz!" Mrs. Stewart announced, looking at her watch, and giving the longed-for signal for her little pupils to test their practice in proper waltzing. She stepped over and placed another waltz before Laura, to give the children the incentive of new music, unassociated with drill. But Laura did not see the notes before her. She began to play something so pretty, so dreamy, so full of the spirit of the waltz that Mrs. Stewart forgot her duty to listen, wondering where the little girl had found it.

She looked at Laura. With her usually pale face aflame, her eyes fastened on Serena as she floated around like a bit of milkweed silk, Laura was playing, not looking at the keys, her fingers guided by instinct. And when the waltz was ended at the clapping of the little dancing mistress's hands, Laura's face bowed suddenly forward, dropped into her hands, and she burst out crying tempestuously. [157]

"My dear, what is it?" cried Mrs. Stewart, frightened, as she hastened to her. Serena ran over to the piano also. "I must take care of her, because she is lovely Miss Margery's sister," she said. And she gravely put one of her tiny hands over Laura's clasped ones and stroked it.

"There isn't anything the mat-matter," sobbed Laura, struggling to control herself. "Only that was so beautiful."

"Yes, dear; that was a charming waltz," said poor little Mrs. Stewart trying to meet the occasion. "I don't remember hearing it before."

"You never did," grieved Laura. "That is just it. I made it up. And now nobody can ever hear it again, because I played it and played it, in a dream. And it was so beautiful! It was your waltz, Serena, it was the Waltz of the Lost Cousins."

Mrs. Stewart looked dismayed, as well she might, lacking the clue to Laura's idea. "Did you really improvise that pretty waltz, Laura?" she asked.

"Yes, thinking of Serena, and what she doesn't know," returned mysterious Laura. "I am all right now. Shall I play another dance?"

"If you please, dear, the lanciers. We always end with a square dance, and a lively chassé which I call 'good-night,'" replied Mrs. Stewart. "There is your sister Happie, come up for you."

"I should like to invent a dance for you—Serena alone, and then with all the other children, like a song and its chorus. I think I should call it the Dance-of-the-Thistle-Down," said Laura. "Serena is so little, and so light, and so white. Please let me have the lanciers music, Mrs. Stewart." [158]

"My dear Laura, your young head is filled with nothing but your dreams of music, I am afraid," said Mrs. Stewart, pulling out the sheet Laura asked for, and feeling inadequate to dealing with this strange little girl.

"I don't think I care much for anything else," said Laura, and Happie, who had joined them, frowned.

Mrs. Stewart shook her head. "There are other things, nevertheless. I knew some one once who was an extraordinary musician; I never heard any one else play as he played. Yet for the sake of his music he wrecked not only his life, but another life, and his one little child died for want of his care. Don't ever put your skill, not even your art, above love that makes the music of the world, Laura. It is a fearful thing to have made another suffer as this poor man made one suffer—and suffered himself, suffered himself, I am sure!" Mrs. Stewart said these words very low, as if she had forgotten her surroundings, the girls, even that she was speaking.

Then she aroused herself, and announced the lanciers, of which Laura played the opening bars.

Gretta had reversed the usual order of things by going to fetch Bob from the office to the tea room, whence they would all go home together. [159]

Bob took Happie's arm as they started out and told her, with many chuckles, the compliments paid her by Mr. Felton's two elder clerks and how much they regretted that she had been but a substitute among them.

"For Hapsie is not harmed by taffy as Laura is," Bob thought admiringly.

Happie laughed, then she looked very sober. "I have real news for you," she said holding him back from the rest of the little band, though Margery and Penny were separated from them by

Gretta, Laura and Polly. "Whom do you suppose the young man who boxed Dan Lipton's ears for me is?"

"The spirit of Perseus, or Launcelot, or some of those maiden rescuers," hazarded Bob.

"Not one bit!" cried Happie instantly. "He's a dragon that wants to devour the sweetest girl in the world, instead of being Perseus to save her. He is Robert Gaston." She nodded hard towards Margery to point her allusion to dragons.

"My soles and uppers!" ejaculated Bob.

Happie told the story of his coming, and how he had helped in the crowded hour of Herr Lieder's playing. "And he is coming this very night to see us all in the Patty-Pans. And mark my words, Robert Scollard: when we let him in to-night we shall never be able to drive him out again."

Whatever the future held to fulfil or to disprove Happie's prophecy, Robert Gaston was admitted that night. He went away leaving a critical group won over to his favor. Even Mrs. Scollard, keenly observant of Margery's friend, liked him greatly. [160]

Happie wound up her vociferous little one-day clock in her mother's room, whither she had strolled at bedtime.

"Well, Happie?" hinted Mrs. Scollard, smiling at Happie's grave face.

"Well, mother," echoed Happie. "I could never have believed he would be so nice if I had not seen it."

[161]

---

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ELASTIC PATTY-PANS

"EVERYTHING looks like gray wadding, Margery, but I believe we've over-slept," remarked Happie on Sunday morning to her bedfellow, whose reply was a moan of sleepy protest. But Happie, who when she did wake up woke thoroughly and at once, tumbled out of bed and taking her small clock to the spot where the universal grayness was lightest, fell to shaking it energetically.

"It's stopped!" she announced. "It's wearing out. The only way it will go now is to lay it over on its face or tip it up on one side, somewhat upsidedownish. I set it up straight last night, and it has stopped. There's hardly any light in the airshaft here, but I think we've slept until near the day after to-morrow."

"But it still feels just like to-day," protested Margery. "I can't wake up, Hapsie, and we're not the only ones—the whole flat is still."

"I'm going to get dressed and find out what day it is. Oh, Margery! There's the whistle! The janitor has come for the ashes. It must be nine o'clock, at least. I'll pop on slippers and something above them, and go attend to him. I think it is storming," said Happie, ready to leave the room almost as soon as she had spoken.

It was not storming in the sense most people use the word, that is, neither snow nor rain was falling, but the wind was blowing a gale, as Happie discovered when she got out into the kitchen where she could see the leaden sky which looked as though the whole world were under a great tank. [162]

The rattling of the dumb waiter, Happie calling to Gretta in her tiny rear room and Margery conscientiously bestirring herself after her sister had arisen, woke the rest of the family and it was not long before the entire eight Scollards—counting Gretta a Scollard for the convenience of the census—were up and out of the various little Patty-Pan chambers tardily to begin the dark day.

It was a formidable day to begin. Blinding dust clouds gathered and eddied down the wide avenue of this newer part of New York. People fought for foothold around corners, shrinking from the penetrating cold of a wind sharper in its chilling powers than any recording instrument could register.

"I'm glad that we are on the fourth floor to-day," remarked Margery after breakfast, as she alternated face and back to the steam radiator. "Heat ascends, and this is the sort of day when one wants all the heat there is."

"Unless it comes in the shape of a conflagration," suggested Bob, smoothing the ear and the ruffled feelings of Jeunesse Dorée tickled by the morning paper as he sat on the boy's lap. "Wouldn't this be a great old day for a fire, though?" [163]

"Oh, Bob, don't suggest it!" begged his mother. "It's my abiding horror. I think the new janitor is careful."

"The newest janitor, mother," amended Happie. "He's only this January's janitor. That was the new one who departed after the Christmas harvest. Don't you remember?"

Bob groaned. "Are we likely to forget it, Happie?" he demanded. "When I denied myself ties and books I wanted in order to pay him tribute in a good-sized Christmas gift? And I'm sure he scorned it, because he told me what fine, rich, generous people all the other tenants were. And

then he went off, and as an investment to secure us comfort my rare five dollar bill yielded nothing."

Mrs. Scollard laughed. "Janitors are sadly demoralizing to the spirit of generosity," she said. "Margery and Happie, you are letting Gretta wash the breakfast dishes with only Polly to help. Laura, you agreed to make beds if you might be excused from dishwashing."

The girls scattered at this hint. Even Laura, the reluctant, never needed a second bidding from her mother.

After a little while the bell rang, somewhat to the consternation of the belated Scollard family. But when Penny opened the door her gurgle of laughter brought her seniors, confident that no very formidable visitors had arrived. Bob took by the coat collar one of the two who had come, crying, "Come in here, you Peary, you! What do you mean by ringing the bell and giving me nervous prostration?" [164]

The callers were Ralph and Snigs, each in a heavy overcoat with the collar turned up, a hat pulled far over his face, a scarf wound time and again around his head, gloves on, boots with trousers tucked into them, and a thick veil protecting his complexion from the winds roaring outside of the narrow hall which the boys had to cross to reach the opposite flat. Snigs bore Whoop-la, their tiger cat, and Ralph was the spokesman for this arctic-looking trio.

"Please, kind ladies, our mother is gone to see a sick friend—we think she may come home sicker than the friend was, owing to the weather! We thought we would blow in on you for shelter—the wind's on our side, and we feel tremulous-spined. Will you please let us sit by your gilt radiator, if you haven't a hearthstone?" he pleaded.

"You shall share the warmth of our gilt radiators and have a gilt-edged welcome, you raving lunatics!" Bob replied for his family. "Get out of these trappings of woe, and tell us if you ever saw a windier, grayer, meaner day in all your lives."

"I had thought so," returned Ralph, letting Bob hold his great-coat while he dropped out of it, "but now I am not sure." He bowed low to Happie, just coming in, the depth of the bow increased by the sudden removal of the weighty coat. "Across the hall we are not Happie—we have not—we need to be Happie— Say, what do you mean by having a name that leads a fellow into the dandiest kind of a compliment, and then goes back on him?" he demanded. "I thought that was coming out a regular top-notch of a poetical speech, and look at it!" [165]

Happie laughed. "I didn't choose my name, Ralph, and you can't blame me for its failing you. It was bright of you to come over here on this dreary day, even if you can't make bright and flattering speeches. When the wind blows like this I'm always frightened and lonesome feeling. Look at Dorée and Whoop-la! For the first time they touched noses," cried Happie.

"Dorée always wanted to touch one nose—Whoop-la's nose, but with his claw," observed Snigs. "Polly, please take out my veil pin; it's caught in my curls."

As Snigs stooped, Polly loosened his veil, quite convulsed over this remark, for Snigs' hair was as short and straight as hair well could be. Polly considered Ralph and Snigs the funniest boys in the world, and approaching to Bob as the best boy.

"Your mother has gone away, you said? For the day?" asked Mrs. Scollard. And as the Gordon boys assented, she cried: "Then we will have a long, cozy shut-in day! You are both to dine with us—roast beef, Gretta's prize mashed potatoes, and any other vegetables you choose from our fertile garden of tins in the pantry. And salad—that is Happie's specialty! I will make tomato soup since it is so cold and blustering, and perhaps, if you are all very, very good, a spicy, plummy steamed pudding, if we can coax Margery to give us one of her foamy sauces! I think we can defy the weather, even the wind and the weather. I have a volume of stories that no one can resist for the afternoon. Why, we shall have the best kind of a cozy, uneventful home day!" [166]

"We always have the best kind of home days with you, dear Mrs. Scollard," said Ralph, dropping his nonsense to beam gratefully at this dear woman.

"It's nice sometimes to know no one can come," remarked Laura with her back to the others as she looked out of the window at the dreary street. And as she spoke the bell rang.

"Who can it be! It's the lower bell. Polly, go touch the button, like the duck you are!" cried Happie. "I don't see how it can be company, on such a morning and Sunday besides." She went towards the door to be ready to open it when the bold adventurer should have come up the three flights of stairs which intervened between the street and the Patty-Pans.

It was so long before the person appeared that the Scollards began to think their bell had been rung by mistake, and Happie went out to see if there were any one on the way up. She put her head in at the door again.

"Yes, some one is coming," she said. "A woman all wrapped up so that I can't tell whether or not it is some one we know. And she comes as slow as she can move." [167]

It sounded mysterious, and the Scollards within the flat listened eagerly for the first word from their representative at the door which should give them a clue to this arrival.

"Why, Auntie Keren! It isn't you! I didn't know you the least bit in the world!" they heard Happie cry at last.

Happie came back with her hand slipped through Miss Bradbury's arm. Mrs. Scollard came swiftly forward to greet her guest, whose advent from the lower dwelling-part of the city in such

severe weather was at least unexpected.

Miss Bradbury, always eccentric or indifferent in matters of dress, looked remarkable, even for her. A heavy coat, an automobiling coat as the Scollards saw on a second glance, very much too large for her, enveloped her shapelessly. A small black hat—Miss Bradbury always wore a bonnet of obsolete elderly style—did not reveal its inappropriateness until the long veil enshrouding it was removed. Beneath these Miss Bradbury presented the sober propriety of the plain black silk gown in which, in fair or foul weather, she invariably went to church.

She could not have been to church, for not only was it too early and she was enveloped in the automobiling coat, but she carried in her arms leather boxes which looked like silver cases and seemed heavy, and in one hand was an open basket containing photographs, old fashioned daguerreotypes, and a small black book.

[168]

Miss Bradbury's face was very pale, she looked exhausted, and yielded up her burdens to the boys as though they had been burdens indeed.

"Dear Miss Keren, it did not need proof that you were not a fair weather friend, but it is very good of you to brave the exposure of coming up town in such a wind as this," said Mrs. Scollard, gently divesting Miss Keren of her extraordinary garments. She felt instantly sure that something was seriously wrong with her.

"You don't look well, dear Auntie Keren," said Margery. "Have you been ill? Happie and I thought you looked less strong than usual when you were here a week ago."

"I have had a cold. It had grippish characteristics, among others that of being uncommonly weakening," said Miss Keren. "Charlotte, I shall have to ask you for a cup of hot tea at once."

"Coffee would be better, and just as easily made," said Mrs. Scollard. "That's right, Polly, you are going to ask Gretta to attend to it." For Polly had started towards the kitchen at the first hint of her Aunt Keren's desire, ready as usual to be helpful.

Miss Keren sank into the chair which Happie pulled up to the radiator. She put her feet on the hot pipes with a grateful sigh. Happie stooped to them.

[169]

"Let me take off your rubbers, Auntie Keren," she said.

"I haven't any," said Miss Keren briefly.

"Oh, Auntie Keren! On such a day as this, and after being ill with a cold!" said Happie reproachfully.

"I never thought to ask for them, child, and they forgot to lend me any," said Miss Keren.

Margery, Happie and their mother involuntarily glanced at one another. All three had the same thought: that Miss Keren was still ill and feverish, and that her mind was affected.

"I can go to a hotel," said Miss Keren, so irrelevantly that there seemed to be no doubt of the correctness of this surmise.

"A hotel, dear Miss Keren?" echoed Mrs. Scollard. Bob and the Gordon boys looked at her with an expression that plainly told her all three were ready to go for a doctor on the spot.

"To tell the truth I don't feel equal to it, neither in mind nor in body," said Miss Keren. "But I don't want to impose upon you. I know this tiny nest of Patty-Pans is hardly big enough for your large family, Charlotte. I am sorry to say—sorry for your sake, because I know you will not have the heart to refuse me—that there isn't another place on the face of the earth where I feel that I could bear to be to-day, and I want you all. Will you take me in, until I have time and strength to face the situation?"

[170]

Again the Scollards exchanged glances, but this time with a different meaning. This did not sound like delirium. Miss Keren was not usually incoherent, but there was something other than mental derangement behind these remarks.

"Miss Keren, I don't quite understand," began Mrs. Scollard. "I think you mean that you want to stay here with us to-night? You know that we are always delighted to have you with us, at any time, anywhere, and the elastic Patty-Pans can always take in another. Don't you remember how long you stayed here—so blessedly good to us when I was ill, not a year ago? And now there is only Gretta added to our family. She uses that little room at the end of the flat which we used to keep for a storeroom—she preferred it to crowding Margery and Happie. Bob can take that, Gretta can come into the older girls' room, and you can take Bob's room. You did mean that you didn't want to go home to-night, didn't you?"

"No, I meant nothing of the kind," said Miss Keren in her old manner. "I should be particularly glad to go home to-night. What I meant is that I have no home to go to. I was burned out early this morning."

The Scollards drew a gasping breath and exclaimed, "Oh!" in concert. Gretta, coming in with Miss Keren's coffee just in time to hear her announcement, nearly dropped the tray, and Polly, following behind her with the sugar-bowl, did drop that, and squares of cut sugar scattered in all directions.

[171]

"Aunt Keren, how dreadful!" cried Margery. "Have you saved anything?"

"Don't tell us about it yet. Drink your coffee," said Mrs. Scollard.

"I saved what I have on, and what I brought with me in my arms," said Miss Keren. "The outer garments that I wore were loaned me by people I do not know. I have their address to return the



clothing," she added with her whimsical twist of the lips. "Ah! That is good coffee, Gretta child. Will you take me into the Ark again? My furniture is there still. You and I might 'go back to our mountains,' as the gypsy Azucena begs to do in Trovatore, and spend the winter in that refuge."

"I will go with you, Miss Bradbury, certainly," said Gretta gravely.

"Oh, well, perhaps it won't be necessary. We shall all go there in the spring," said Miss Keren. "That hot coffee will enable me to face the calamity, Charlotte. Thank you, and Gretta. Now, dear annexed family, listen to my tale of woe! This morning, just after breakfast, I made myself ready for church as I always do, and then sat down to my paper for the interval between my preparations and time to start. I don't think I can tell you precisely what happened, but there arose a great hue and cry throughout the house that it was on fire. My children, it is incredible how rapidly the fire spread and burned! I could save nothing, except the smaller pieces of silver that had been in the family for several generations, a few likenesses, and my mother's little worn Bible. I helped my maids get out their belongings first, of course, and then there was no time left. I came out into the street precisely as you see me now, with the boxes and the basket I carried when I came—and how I carried them I do not see, for they are heavy and what with the grippe and the shock my strength seemed melted away. People in the neighborhood were kind and muffled me in the extraordinary garment you saw—an automobile coat! I am sure the people in the subway thought me an uncertain number in the Rogues' Gallery, for they stared all the way up town at this singular old person in a sporting coat that did not fit her, burdened with unmistakable cases of silver. However, I was allowed to go unmolested! That is all my story, my dears. I am burned out. The dignified apartment house to which I clung, is a skeleton only—needless to say it was supposed to be fireproof!—and here am I, begging your hospitality."

[172]

Happie flew at her with streaming eyes. "Dearest Auntie Keren, it is perfectly, horribly awful!" she cried. "But nothing matters as long as you are safe."

"Were you well insured, Aunt Keren?" inquired Bob, just as his mother asked, "How did the fire originate?"

"Do hear the man of business!" cried Miss Keren. "I carried a good insurance, Bob, but money can never compensate me for what is gone. The dear inanimate friends of my lifetime, that seemed so animated with good will to me, and with which I had been so long glad and sorry! My chairs, my couches, and above all my pictures, my books. Most of my household goods were handed down to me by those who consecrated them to me—ah, no, money does not do anything for one in such a case except buy merely useful articles to replace the others; it gives one things with bodies only, where the old ones had heart and soul! I am quite ashamed to mind so much, I who am old enough to understand that transitory things cannot long affect me."

[173]

No one spoke. Happie stroked Miss Keren's hand, bundled up at her feet, a figure of tearful and loving sympathy. Bob, Ralph and Snigs avoided one another's eyes; each knew what he should see if he looked at the other two.

"You asked what caused the fire, Charlotte," said Miss Keren, breaking the silence. "A tenant on a lower floor—the one below mine—was washing gloves in gasoline in her bath-room. The gas was lighted, but the door was open, so there was no danger. However, some one called her, and when she went out of the bath-room she closed the door behind her. The fumes of the gasoline ignited from the gas in the heated, close little room—and the whole house went. Such a pity! I liked the house; it was more distinctive than newer apartments."

[174]

"Words cannot say how sorry I am, dear Miss Keren," said Mrs. Scollard. "But I am sure you know how we all feel. It has been; there is no curing it, and we must do our best to help you in enduring it. I am so glad that you came straight here! It is a greater happiness to me than you can gauge, to know that my mother's beloved friend comes to me as if I were her daughter."

"Yes, Charlotte, you are my nearest of kin, although I have blood relatives," said Miss Keren. "Happie, stop crying. Tears won't put out a fire that has done its work, my dear. And I shall have to go to the hotel after all if you prove an Unhappie. Don't you know that after a nervous shock the patient must be cheered?"

"Yes, and I think we'll have a jolly time, between the Patty-Pans and the Next Flat!" cried Ralph, speaking for the first time since Miss Keren arrived. "Now Snigs and I can try to show you how gratefully we remember the good times we had, thanks to you, up in Crestville last summer! We'll entertain you till you won't know there ever was a fire, and you'll lose your grippe! And, see here, Mrs. Scollard, please ma'am! Bob is coming over to sleep in our camp. You know how much room we have, our flat being the same size as this one, and our family three, instead of eight. So let Bob sleep over there, and Miss Bradbury can take his room and we'll all be as merry as a marriage bell. I wonder why people say that? Every wedding I ever saw was the dreariest thing I ever struck."

[175]

"Thank you, Ralph," smiled Mrs. Scollard. "I will accept that offer on the spot. Come now, girls, let us begin to get dinner. We were going to have a particularly nice dinner, Miss Keren, so you came on precisely the right day. Come, Margery and Gretta! And Happie, you may attend to the dining-room."

"Let Laura look after the dining room, Charlotte. I want Happie. I am not sure that I feel quite well," said Miss Keren unexpectedly.

Happie flushed with pleasure, and forgot her grief over Auntie Keren's losses in the joy of knowing that she was a comfort, knowledge that is a keen joy to almost any one, but was especially so to loving Happie.

"Oh, I am so glad that you like to have me by you!" she said, laying her cheek on Miss Keren's hand.

The fingers of the hand moved upward, trying to pat the cheek pressed too closely to allow them to do so, but Miss Keren did not speak.

Ralph spoke for her. "Queer, but Happie is like some of those patent medicines—good for what ails you, and for what ails everybody, eh, Bob?"

"Right you are, neighbor mine!" said Bob emphatically.

[176]

---

## CHAPTER XII

### THE TWO KEREN-HAPPUCHS

MISS KEREN said that she "did not know how to be ill." It was owing to this ignorance—which some people might have called pluck—that she did not succumb to the effect of the shock she had undergone.

As it was, she was able to get up every day and sit in the warmest corner of the Patty-Pans parlor, trying not to be any trouble to Happie.

For Happie found her hands full in the month that followed Aunt Keren's arrival. The tea-room saw her no more. If she had allowed herself to think about it she would have been sorry for this. She enjoyed what Bob called for short "The Six Maidens," more and more, got on better with all sorts and conditions of women than Margery did, and had the cheerful conviction that she was, of all the girls, the one most essential to the tea-room's success. But she did not allow herself to recognize her uneasiness in being so long away, for Aunt Keren wanted her, and there was little enough that any of the Scollards could do to show their sense of loving gratitude to Aunt Keren.

Happie was established as housekeeper and attendant, also as amanuensis to their guest, and there were not many minutes in the short February days in which she found time to regret anything. Every morning she saw depart her mother and Bob, together as always, and later Margery, Gretta and Laura, sometimes with one, sometimes with both of the younger children. Then, left alone, Happie flew from one task to another till nightfall brought back the family to an orderly and prepared Patty-Pans and a tired Happie who tried to keep the latter item out of sight. [177]

Aunt Keren began to have visitors when people found out where she had taken refuge, elderly and impressive ladies who toiled up the three flights that led to the Patty-Pans, their furs hanging, their breath short, to present themselves at the door, pantingly reproachful in their tone as they asked for Miss Bradbury. Miss Bradbury's lawyer came, the insurance adjuster came, several times, and Aunt Keren had such heavy mails that Happie daily sat down to the task of replying to her letters with dismay. Most of these letters were appeals for help; for money for every imaginable charity, individual and collective, and for the weight of Miss Bradbury's name on boards and committees and lists of "patronesses." Happie began to realize that Aunt Keren, for all her eccentricities of plain garments, must be known widely as a fountain of beneficence. As Happie drew checks, under Aunt Keren's instruction, for her to sign, she began to see that Miss Keren could not be an elderly lady of straightened means, in which light the young Scollards had always looked on her, for her donations in this month alone were mounting up amazingly. [178]

One afternoon the two Keren-happuchs were at work on the elder's correspondence by two o'clock, lunch having been over and out of the way early because it was the day for Polly and Penny to go to dancing school, to which Laura had taken them, remaining at home that morning for the purpose.

Miss Keren watched Happie's absorbed face as she sealed the note in which she had gently refused the request of a young woman for help to go abroad and cultivate her genius for art, and drew up Miss Keren's check book to make out a check of ten dollars for coal and groceries to a family which was, it seemed, among her constant dependents.

"Happie," said Miss Keren, so suddenly out of a silence of several minutes that the end of Happie's figure nine, as she wrote the year date, went far below the line in the jump she gave, "Happie, if you had an income, what would you do?"

Happie looked at her adopted aunt unseeing, as she considered. Then she dimpled and laughed. "I should live on it, Aunt Keren," she said.

"Live *within* it, if you wanted to be happy in reality, and not in name only," said Miss Keren. "What do you think you would do first if money, a fairly large income, fell into your hands?"

"First of all I should give motherums warning that she had to stop foreign corresponding for that firm down in town. Then I should hunt up a house and set her in it, and not let her do one thing but be dear and sweet and idle for an endless time. Then I should buy Margery lots of lovely things—she is so pretty! Maybe I wouldn't, though, for I can see that she looks altogether too pretty in Robert Gaston's eyes now! But maybe I would, and then take her abroad where he couldn't see her. Then I'd begin Laura's musical education—that really is important. And get a splendid, life-size doll for Penny, and lots of things for good little Polly, and send them to a fine school—and for my dearest old Bob—oh, I don't know! Buy him a partnership in a great business, or something. Why, Aunt Keren?" [179]

Miss Keren had listened to Happie's list of benefactions with a smile in her eyes. "For no reason, Keren-happuch, my dear, except that your doing these things for me made me wonder how you would use money if you had it," she said. "And nothing for Happie?"

"Oh, I suppose I should buy her lots of things between times; every time I went out, probably. And I know I should buy her cases and cases of books," said Happie, resuming her task. "But I'm sure I shall always have to grub along, because I don't mind doing it as much as most girls. I believe I've a contented mind, Aunt Keren."

"There is no doubt of that, my namesake, and you have no idea what a blessing it is. Cultivate it all your life. It can be cultivated or lost, Happie. Dear me, the bell! Just when we were so comfortably settled for a long afternoon! It is some one for me, almost certainly. I must fly, Happie, and you will ask the visitor to wait for me a few moments." Aunt Keren went through to her room, which had been Bob's before her coming, and Happie opened the door after she had hastily gathered up the scattered papers on which she had been at work. But she dropped Aunt Keren's check book in her hurry, and it lay in long black evidence on the lightest figure of the rug. [180]

Two ladies confronted Happie as she obeyed the summons of the upper bell. They were handsomely clad, and there was something familiar in both faces, which, nevertheless, Happie was sure that she had not seen before. With this haunting familiarity there was a certain hardness in the visitors' expression which was repellent. They were about the same age—well into their thirties—and carried their years with the jauntiness of intentional youth.

Happie ushered them into the small parlor, which they seemed to fill in every corner, and asked whom she should say had come to see Miss Bradbury.

"Say her nieces, Miss Helen and Miss Irene Bradbury," said one of the two. "Wait a moment, what is your name?"

"I am one of the daughters of Miss Bradbury's friend, Mrs. Scollard; the second one, Happie," said Happie. Something antagonistic in this very different Miss Bradbury's manner kept her from saying that she was Keren-happuch, named after the strangers' aunt. [181]

"Happie! Then you are the one whom they called after Aunt Keren? Is Happie your abbreviation of Keren-happuch?" asked Miss Irene Bradbury.

"Yes," said Happie. "Shall I call Miss Bradbury?"

"Wait one moment," said Miss Irene Bradbury very low. "I see that you are very young, but you are not a child, and there is something that I wish to say to you. Miss Bradbury's family are greatly annoyed by her taking refuge in this little Harlem flat, after having already carried your entire family with her into the country for a summer that stretched out into half the year. It is extraordinary, the fancy that a woman of her usual sense and strength of mind has taken to people of this sort—"

"What sort, Miss Bradbury?" Happie quietly interrupted her. "My grandmother was Miss Bradbury's dearest friend."

"People who are not her kindred," said Miss Irene Bradbury, somewhat confused. "We understand your part of it—perhaps not your part since you are so young—but your mother's. We wish you to know, and to repeat to your mother, that we shall not allow her plans to succeed. If Aunt Keren should will away her fortune to you, to any of your family, we shall break the will, and we shall leave no means untried to prevent her continuing under your mother's influence. That is all. Repeat what I have said to your mother, but you will not gain anything by repeating it to Miss Bradbury." [182]

Happie had turned white under these remarks, but she looked Miss Irene Bradbury over from head to foot with a scorn she richly deserved.

"I shall certainly spare Aunt Keren the annoyance of knowing that one of her own nieces could insult her namesake in the home she has chosen to come to in her trouble," said Happie. Her naturally quick temper did not flare up, but in its stead burned a righteous indignation that made her young eyes rather awful, and Miss Bradbury quailed before them. "My mother—well, you do not know my mother, so there may be some excuse for you, though I can't imagine any. We have all thought Miss Bradbury poor, until now." Happie's eye fell upon the check book, and Miss Helen's following it, she started to pick it up, but Happie forestalled her. "Pardon me, that is not for any one to see," she said. "There is nothing for me to reply to the insults you have heaped upon my mother and upon us all. If you have anything more to say, you will please tell your aunt your plan is to prevent her doing as she likes. And I don't envy you if you do tell her. I will send her in to see you, since you are here, and I don't want her to guess how badly you have behaved. She is not at all well. But while she is visiting us you will please not come here again to see her. If you come I shall not let you in."

Happie walked out of the little room, head up, and with an air that was little less than regal. Inwardly she was in a tumult. It was inconceivable that these two women could have stayed her in her own Patty-Pans parlor to subject her to such treatment! That they did not know her beautiful mother, to whom they imputed such baseness, hardly bettered it. What right had they so to suspect the daughter of Miss Bradbury's dearest friend? [183]

"Aunt Keren, it is your two nieces, Miss Helen and Miss Irene Bradbury. If you don't need my help I won't wait; I am in a wee hurry." Happie steadied her voice to say this at Miss Keren's door, and scuttled away. She dared not risk letting Miss Keren see her tell-tale face, nor hear her

voice in one avoidable word.

As soon as she heard Miss Keren go through the hall to the parlor Happie flew to her own room and threw herself face downward on the bed. She pulled the pillows down over her head and burrowed further in under them. The tears that she had been holding back burst forth in a tropical tempest; wounded affection, pride, a cruel sense of injustice against which she was helpless, righteous wrath that her mother could be so misjudged, so outraged, combined to make the tears the bitterest that sunny Happie had ever shed. She cried and cried, and, because she was suffocating herself to keep the sound of her crying down, she kicked her feet and dove further under the pillows till the chance of sweet sleep that night in that particular bed seemed very slender.

[184]

Miss Bradbury's nieces did not make a long call. If Happie had not been in such violent contradiction to her nickname she might have discovered from the tones carried out through the little flat by its telescopic construction, that the call was not a particularly pleasant one. As the rustle of skirts and the fall of feet announced the fact that Aunt Keren was conducting her guests to the door, Happie restrained her sobs and lay still, under the fear of being heard, in spite of her upheaval of the pillows.

"You have known me quite long enough, Irene Bradbury," Aunt Keren was saying in her clear-cut accent, and with a vigor of which she had not seemed capable since coming to the Patty-Pans, "to know that if you had set about defeating your own ends you could not have taken a surer method than the one you have employed this afternoon."

"I hope, Aunt Keren," retorted her niece with unmistakable temper, "that your physician is competent. A shock such as you have had requires more than ordinary skill. I should be glad to have him consult with my physician."

"I think mine is quite competent to pronounce on the effect of the shock," said Miss Keren. "It will be made perfectly clear to every one interested that I have sustained no real harm; I will see to that. Don't trouble to come to see me again, Irene. When I need you, I will send for you."

[185]



**"SHE JUMPED UP, STRAIGHTENED HER TWISTED GARMENTS...."**

Happie triumphed as she heard this valedictory, and, throwing off her pillows, she sat up feeling better. Then, as the door shut, and she heard Aunt Keren turn, she suddenly realized that she would be obliged to appear with the marks of her recent tempest upon her, and that Aunt Keren would ask an explanation of her unmistakable tears.

She jumped up, straightened her twisted garments with rapid pulls down, and shrugs up, wrenched her collar around from under her ear, crossed to the bowl, turned on the hot water and was wildly bathing her eyes when Miss Keren came to the door, and called: "Happie, Happie, child, what are you doing? I am ready to resume our pleasant duet, and, if you will, I should be

glad to have you bring me a glass of hot milk, for I am tired."

"Yes, Auntie Keren. Go and sit down in the most restful place you can find, and the milk and I will be there in a few minutes," called Happie, catching at anything that prolonged her time.

She could not delay longer than it took to heat the milk to the point when it was just ready to boil, and as she handed it to Miss Keren she saw that her keen eyes espied other cause than the gas range for Happie's crimson cheeks and inflamed eyelids.

"Sit down, Keren-happuch," said the elder of that name, motioning to the footstool at her feet. Happie obeyed, rather dreading what might be coming. Miss Bradbury touched her eyelids lightly, and tipped up her chin with her fingers. [186]

"What did they say to you, my Unhappie?" she asked without an echo of her usual brisk and brusque manner. Then, as Happie hesitated for an answer at once truthful and not unpleasant, she added: "Don't fence, my dear, and don't try to spare me. This is by no means the first time that I have encountered the unlovable qualities of my brother's daughters. Did they suggest to you their doubt of singleness of motive in your mother's love for me?"

"They said horrible things!" declared Happie, throwing away all reserve in letting herself speak. "Horrible, brutal, false things, Aunt Keren! At first I was stunned, then I was furious, sort of deadly, still, white furious, Aunt Keren! And I told them—I don't know WHAT I told them. Only I know I told them not to come here to see you again, because I shouldn't let them in. I hope you don't mind! I suppose I should let them in if you wanted them."

"I certainly do not mind; you did quite right. It would be undignified to allow people under your roof who spoke ill of your mother," said Aunt Keren quietly. "Happie——"

"Aunt Keren!" Happie interrupted her passionately. "We never knew you had any money. As far as we thought about it at all, we thought you were rather poor. We have been setting aside part of the tea room money to pay our own rent, because we thought you ought not to have given us that rent at Christmas. You were just Aunt Keren to us; no one ever thinks about money, whether people that belong to them have it or not. But they said——" [187]

"Yes, my dear," Aunt Keren interrupted in her turn. "On the whole, don't tell me what they said. You are not quite right in saying that *no one* thinks of money in connection with his affections, but it is a pitiable creature that does. And those two nieces of mine are decidedly pitiable creatures. They had a sordid, vulgar mother, Happie. My brother married most unfortunately. Those two daughters of his have made an open onslaught upon my possessions, and they are wildly afraid that I shall will all that I have elsewhere. They have good reason for their fears. They would never use money kindly, wisely, properly. They have quite enough now for all purposes, which frees me from scruples as to my justice in doing what I please with what is my own, but their greed for more would never be satisfied while anything was beyond their reach. These are hideous truths, dear Happie, but you will have to learn that there are people in the world different from your mother, and that plenty of unfortunate beings make for themselves an atmosphere that is far from the unworldly, simple and loving atmosphere of your little Harlem Patty-Pans. You must be unceasingly thankful that when your mother was left almost destitute at your father's death, she had for you children something far more valuable than money could have given." [188]

"Ah, yes, we know that!" cried Happie. "But as well as we know it now, Margery and I often say we shall appreciate it better when we are older and see more of the unpleasant side of life, at which we only peep while we are young."

"Truer than you guess!" agreed Miss Keren briefly. "Now, Happie, listen to a story, a true story about one Keren-happuch, with a second Keren-happuch coming into the tale at the end. I am going to tell it to you because of what happened this afternoon. It will satisfy you forever as to my reasons for doing what I intend to do. Don't interrupt me. For the first time in my life it tires me to talk, and it spoils a story to interrupt it. Nearly fifty years ago the first of the two Keren-happuchs was young, a girl of definite opinions, considerable will, of few and strong attachments; the kind of girl that can be superlatively happy or altogether miserable, and who is likely to make a bad matter of her life if things go contrary with her. This girl had a friend, the most beautiful, best girl that the sun ever shone upon, with every grace of mind and character, and with the crowning grace of all,—entire unselfishness and unconsciousness of self. Her name was Elizabeth Vaughan, and she was your grandmother. One hears a good deal said of men's friendships and how no women are capable of equal love for each other, but I am certain David and Jonathan were not more truly devoted than were these two girls of a half century ago. Keren-happuch worshiped Elizabeth, and the tie was peculiarly tender on both sides. There came into Keren-happuch's life a new interest after a while. It was when Elizabeth was away, and there was nothing to divert this girl of natural strength of feeling from going with all her might with the tide that seemed to her the flood-tide of happiness. Of course you can guess what the new interest was, for the girls were not quite twenty, and romance loves the second decade. It looked as though this foolish Keren-happuch were going to sail into the port of bliss, but Elizabeth came home. And then—why, no one could remember Keren-happuch when Elizabeth was about, and Keren awoke from her dream to find it not hers, but Elizabeth's. It is good to know that Keren-happuch loved her friend no less than the love she had hoped was her own had turned to Elizabeth. Keren-happuch had common sense, I am glad to say, and she saw that only a blind man could have preferred herself. So she wept her little tear in private, as she hoped, but Elizabeth saw its stain, and she tried to turn back to Keren-happuch the love she had innocently diverted. That part of the story does not matter. Each girl tried to bring about the happiness of the other, [189]

but Elizabeth could not give to another what belonged to herself and she married Roland Spencer. Keren-happuch rejoiced in their happiness, because she loved them both best of all the world, yet—well, one can rejoice through a heartache, Happie, and it is a matter for gratitude when heartache takes the form which allows such rejoicing. The best of this story is that there was no break in the triangle of an affection beyond ordinary human attachment. No change came to it through the marriage of Elizabeth and the man she loved and who loved her, and whom Keren-happuch loved but who did not love Keren-happuch, not in that sense of the word love. To the end Elizabeth Spencer and her husband were the solitary Keren-happuch's loyal friends. But Keren-happuch knew at the beginning as well as she knows to-day that she was to be the solitary Keren-happuch all her life. She never cared for life in just the same, glad, youthful way again, and she saw clearly that her happiness must be found in peace, and in conferring happiness, if she were able. So she grew into the crotchety, eccentric maiden lady whom you know, and it has been her whim to live much within her means in order to afford the luxury of giving what, after all, she did not need. By and by Elizabeth and her husband both died. Keren-happuch likes to believe that they know how faithfully she loves them still, and that in their daughter Charlotte and their grandchildren, the little Scollards, she recognizes her nearest of kin—indeed her only kin, for she has never been kin to her kindred. So you see, Happie, why you are more than merely my namesake. You are the legacy to me of my more than sister, and the man I loved, and whom she married. I am a rich woman, my dear. By and by, when I cannot use my money any longer I shall give it to you to use it for me, feeling sure that you will do with it as I would have done. For you are my heir; my child by the tie of my lifelong loneliness and by your blood. I have told you this to prove to you how ridiculous it is for my nieces to fancy that anything could divert me from my intention in regard to you, and to satisfy you that whatever I do for you, or for your mother or the other children, is done as if you were my own children. [190]

"I have a plan to propose to you soon, but not now. And that is the end of my story! Jump up, Happie, and run away, for I'm tired of your chatter! What makes you such a little magpie? Don't you know that an invalid should be kept quiet? Yet you talk and talk! Isn't it time to 'put the potatoes over,' as they say in our Crestville?" [191]

Happie arose, understanding that her Aunt Keren wanted no comment from her on what she had just heard.

"I think it must be, Auntie Keren, dearest," she said. "You can rest while I take their jackets off. Here is Jeunesse Dorée. He will keep you company and not talk as fast as I have done."

She lifted the yellow bit of purring affection into Miss Keren's lap, kissed her hard on the cheek and went quietly away. There was much to think of in the story she had just heard, much to move her as a young girl is always moved by an unhappy love story, but there was nothing to say to the revelation of the reason why the Scollard family was the nearest of kin to this strong-hearted woman, nor any words in which to thank her for the intentions she had announced. [192]

[193]

---

## CHAPTER XIII

### A HINT OF SPRING

"WHAT do you think we've decided to do?" cried Bob, the instant he got inside the Patty-Pans door.

"Break the umbrella stand," guessed Happie, springing forward to catch it as it staggered under too violent impact with Bob's foot.

"Not a bit of it; that was the inspiration of the moment," he retorted. "We decided on the way up to have a birthday party in the tea room—a Washington's Birthday party. It's going to be great. We shall have it in the afternoon so all the children can come to it, down to Penny. We think it's more suitable to include the young ones, because it occurred to me that George Washington was very young when he was born."

"Bob, you foolish boy, come back here and tell me about it!" Happie called after her brother as he started down the hall.

"Can't stop, have to hunt for a clean collar in my bureau under mother's bed, now Aunt Keren has my other bureau," Bob shouted back. "Margery'll tell you."

It was Bob's delight to pretend to suffer from the invasion of Aunt Keren, and never to be able to find anything that he wanted because he had bundled his possessions into boxes and slid them under his mother's bed—the latter part of the statement being true. However, Bob said that he didn't mind "making his room a burnt offering. Aunt Keren had done more than that for him," he added, "before she was fired." Aunt Keren enjoyed Bob's fooling. The Scollards saw her shoulders shake while she regarded the boy severely through her glasses. It was the cheerful nonsense of the Patty-Pans crowd that was warding off nervous prostration, Mrs. Scollard decided. [194]

"Margery, what does he mean?" Happie demanded, turning to her sister. "Perhaps you'd better tell me at dinner, though, for it's all ready, and quite capable of burning itself up while I listen."

"Yes, let us get our hats and coats off," said Mrs. Scollard, who had come home with what Happie called "the tea party," that night. So Happie ran back to her little kitchen, deferring for a time the satisfaction of her curiosity.

"Will you help me off with my coat, Auntie Keren? And ask mamma to let me keep on my dancing slippers, they're so lovely," sighed Penny, who never hesitated to make everybody within her orbit useful. Miss Keren laughed as she complied with the first part of the request. Happie, coming in with a steaming dishful of spaghetti, beautifully white striping its groundwork of tomato sauce, thought that Aunt Keren did not look cast-down by the call of the afternoon, nor saddened by her confidence. She looked brighter and better. Aunt Keren was one of those persons to whom arousing of any sort is beneficial.

[195]

"Now tell me about the party," Happie implored as they gathered around the table.

"I'm afraid I have to confess to its being part of a plot," said Margery. "I want to ask young people of all ages and sizes to a Washington's Birthday party in the tea room—so much Bob told in his first—"

"Inbursting outburst," Bob said for her, as she hesitated.

"Thanks, little Robin Redbreast," said Margery sweetly. "I thought we'd play games, make candy—or you would, Happie,—on our gas stove there, and have a genuine childish frolic. The feature of the afternoon is to be cutting down the cherry tree. I want a little tree set up in a box—not a real tree, but an artificial one—and everybody is to be blindfolded and given a little hatchet. Then they are to be swung around three times, and left to march up to the tree and cut it—or cut at it—once. The hatchet must be left just where it strikes till the person taking charge of the woodmen pins a numbered bit of cloth on the spot. There are to be prizes for the cut nearest a certain mark on the tree, and consolation prizes for the furthest from it—you see it is just the old game of pinning the tail on the donkey, only made what magazine editors call 'a timely article.' Do you suppose it will be any fun?"

[196]

"Of course!" cried Happie. "Anything is fun when there are enough of the right sort to play it. Whom would you ask?"

"Your E's," began Margery. "I don't know that I'll ask any of the older girls, my friends, but still we might ask one or two. Anyone you like—"

"Mr. Gaston? He's too old," said Happie hastily.

"Oh, as to too old, I thought we'd ask Auntie Cam to come down with Edith, and Aunt Keren and mother are asked this moment," said Margery blushing. "Mr. Gaston is fond of simple, jolly times. I suppose we'd better ask him. But—oh, Happie, do pay attention, and don't tease! I have a deep—not a dark, but a deep—plot in planning this party. I want little Serena to come, and I want her to fancy Ralph and Snigs. Now how can we manage that?"

"Ralph is so good to children, and all the little ones like him so much that it would be easy enough, if he didn't know it was Serena. But I don't think either of those boys would notice her much if they knew who she was. They'd be afraid of being misunderstood," Happie replied promptly.

"That's what I think," sighed Margery. "Well, all we can do is to try to bring the cousins together. Serena is such a lovely little creature that Ralph would lose his heart to her in a minute if he didn't keep his hand on it, so to speak."

"Like a pocketbook in the Brooklyn bridge crush," suggested Bob. "Your party's all right, Margery, my dear, but your reuniting families and healing feuds isn't going to work."

[197]

"I suppose not," agreed Margery with another sigh, "but I'd like to set the ball rolling. Maybe something would come of it later."

"I think I'll compose something for the party," murmured Laura.

"It's a praiseworthy attempt, at least, Margery," said Aunt Keren as they arose from dinner. "Happie, just a moment, please."

Happie followed Miss Keren into the hall, wondering. "I didn't want to speak of it before your mother, because she would strain every nerve to do what I desired, or feel grieved if she could not do it," began Miss Keren. "I am thinking of going up to Crestville for a little while. I feel that there is strength for me up there in those mountains, in the bright winter air. Do you think they could get on here, if I took you with me?"

"You want me to answer, 'honest true, black and blue,' like the children, Aunt Keren?" Happie asked. "Then I'm afraid I can't say yes. Because if I were away it would take Gretta out of the tea room to look after the Patty-Pans, and Margery could not get on alone down there."

"And Laura could not be depended upon?" suggested Miss Keren.

"Oh, Aunt Keren, you know Laura!" said Happie regretfully. "She is so musically undependable! I'm afraid depending on Laura would be a good deal like taking the sign of the treble clef and the sign of the bass clef and putting them under one's arms for crutches hoping to walk with them. I wish I could say that I thought they could spare me, for I'd love to go—for the sake of both the Keren-happuchs!"

[198]

"Never mind the elder one, and the younger will have a long summer up there," said Miss Keren. "I think that I shall go in a few days. Rosie Gruber is quite able to look after me. Run along, child. Don't look regretful. I shall be perfectly safe, and shall quite enjoy solitude up there. You know I never had a chance to be in my country house alone, while it was mine. Gretta is calling you."

Happie ran down the hall, and soon she and Gretta were whisking dish cloth and dish towels, Happie doing her part in comparative silence while the once reticent Gretta gave her the history

of the day in the tea room.

Margery did not appear. They caught a glimpse of her in another gown, all soft pearl-gray and white, as she went singing into the parlor, and they heard her moving chairs about and giving small touches of added arrangement to the orderly room, which symptoms made Happie groan forebodingly.

"Yes, there he is!" she exclaimed as the bell rang. "I don't see why he calls here so often. You would suppose that he would think her family might want Margery to themselves occasionally!" [199]

"Oh, come, Happie! Mr. Gaston isn't here quite so often as that seems to mean. We do have Margery to ourselves a good many nights," said Gretta fairly. "I think he's very nice not to mind all of us. Up home when a young man calls on a girl the family let her have the room—I mean the parlor"—Gretta joined in Happie's laughter over this slip of hers into the Crestville name for the one significant best room in the farmhouses. "Well, up there if a girl has a friend he doesn't expect to call on any one but her. Mr. Gaston sees almost as much of you and Bob and Laura as he does of Margery. I think he's very nice not to mind, and you ought not to grudge him his small fraction of her—for he likes her very much, Miss Happie!"

"Of course he does. I'm not blind, and I'd shake him if he didn't, though I want to pound him because he does!" said inconsistent Happie.

"Happie," called Margery, as Happie tried to slip into her own room unheard, "do come here for a moment and let Mr. Gaston tell you something delightful!"

"I wonder if he is going away!" thought Happie. She was a little bit ashamed, later, to remember her ungraciousness. It was not pleasant to feel one's mind going backward and forward like a shuttlecock between the conviction that for the first time in her life she was unjust and the pang that made justice impossible when she realized afresh that this fine young Baltimorean would steal away her sister. [200]

"Good-evening, Andromeda," said Robert Gaston, rising to greet her by his nickname for her that recalled the dragon-office boy from whom he had rescued her. "Faithful little Andromeda! Housekeeping and nursing all alone these many days! I hope your patient is better?"

"Yes, thank you," said Happie. "She is going up to the Ark for a little while. Margery, you didn't know Aunt Keren told me after dinner that she meant to go up to Crestville in a few days to stay there, with Rosie to look after her. She thinks she will gain strength, even though it is winter."

"Oh, dear me!" shivered Margery. Then she added: "I'm sure it will do her good. I wish we could all go for a few days. Think of those mountains snowclad, and think of sleighing in that bracing air! Oh, I wonder— You don't suppose we could have a party over Sunday in the Ark while she is there? All of us—and Mr. Gaston—and close the tea room for a day or two? Oh, if we could!"

"It would be good fun," admitted Happie. "Aunt Keren will never think of it, and we couldn't suggest it. I shall be able to help down there again, if Aunt Keren goes to the country."

"Ah, but you haven't heard my plan for a little jollification!" said Robert. "Andromeda, will you countenance a theatre party? I want to ask Mrs. Charleford and Edith, your mother, her two elder daughters, Bob, the elder of the Gordon boys, and—who else? Oh, Robert Gaston,—to see the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I want to take two boxes, and get Mrs. Charleford and Mrs. Scollard each to chaperon one half our party, and have as good a time as we can. Why, let me see—Mrs. Charleford, Edith, two; your mother, you two girls, three; Bob, Ralph, and myself—eight. Why, we can easily take Laura and Snigs Gordon. Dear me, I forgot Gretta, though she is one of my first thoughts, because in the matter of play-going age counts before musical talent, so Gretta has prior claim over Laura. But even with her we can ask Laura and Snigs, for that is only eleven altogether, and we boys can stand up at the back. I want the two lower boxes on the left, if I can get them—but you haven't said whether or not you approve," Robert interrupted himself, amusedly watching the rapture in Happie's dimpling, tell-tale face which needed no speech to reveal her mind. [201]

"It's a perfectly blissful plan!" she cried. "I never sat in a box in my life, and I always wanted to dreadfully. And I've been crazy to see the *Midsummer Night's Dream*; I know lots of it by heart. I love that play and the *Tempest* so very much. And we haven't had time—because of the tea room and all, to take Gretta about as I meant to. It is a beautiful plan. I'm ever and ever so grateful for my part of it. You really are very kind, Mr. Gaston." [202]

Robert Gaston smiled, well pleased. Not being in the least dull he had read plainly Happie's mental attitude towards him, and he was sincerely sorry for her, thinking that he should not have liked an interloper to come to steal Margery away had he been Happie, and fully compassionating her foreboding pangs—which showed that Margery was not wrong in believing him fine and tender beyond the ordinary.

"It is not kind to be good to oneself, Miss Andromeda-Happie," he said. "Will you ask your mother about it? Or ask her to let me ask her?"

"Yes, I'll tell her that you want to see her," said Happie, slipping away. Gretta's suggestion that Robert Gaston might want to read and talk to Margery alone oppressed her, in spite of her pleasure in the box party.

When Robert Gaston left the Patty-Pans that night he left "three perfected plans promising pleasure," Bob said as he shook hands. The tea room party for Washington's birthday was decided upon. This came first, as the holiday fell in the ensuing week. Then the party for the *Midsummer Night's Dream* early in the following week! Robert confessed that his own birthday



followed Washington's in four days, and that he should like to keep it by having his party on the 26th, which was Tuesday, if he could. As far as the Scollards were concerned there was no objection to any date, unless it were to be a distant one, for which Laura would have been wholly unable to survive her impatience, and Happie was not less eager. [203]

The third party was the crowning joy of that planful evening. Whether Aunt Keren had heard what Margery had said about the house party in the Ark there was no way of knowing—in Patty-Pans anything is more likely to be heard than not—but she came into the little parlor in her odd abrupt way just as Robert Gaston arose to go, saying: "Good-evening, Mr. Gaston. Sit down again and help me conspire."

"Certainly, with pleasure," said Robert amiably. "Against whom? I am ready to help you with bomb, plain dynamite, deadly potion, or powder and shot. Whomever you want removed, whatever your conspiracy may be, I'm your man, Miss Bradbury."

"Nice boy! I dislike hesitation above most things," said Miss Bradbury approvingly. "A ready ruffian is such a comfort! I want the entire Scollard family removed, also Gretta and the Gordon boys, and you, too. I have selected steam as the instrument."

"Appropriate to flat-dwellers, who are so accustomed to the pounding steam in the radiators that it must have lost much of its terrors," Robert replied. "Please command me, Miss Bradbury, and elucidate."

"I am going up to Crestville to recuperate—also to sleigh ride—this week. Saturday I have decided to go. That will give Rosie a chance to clean the house from top to bottom. It would be downright cruelty to deprive Rosie of an excuse to clean. I shall stay till I am tired of solitude and feel stronger. By that time my friends here will be ready to welcome me again. I'm afraid Happie will get tired of me, if I don't run away, and it would be like losing our hyphen to have one of the Keren-happuchs weary of the other! Now, I want a party while I am there. I have talked to the owner of the Ark, Miss Gretta, and she is rather more than willing to let me have my way. The tea room is to be closed from Thursday night until Tuesday morning. I am sure it will not bankrupt the six maidens, nor divert the business. You are all to go up to Crestville on the eight o'clock train on Friday morning, March first, and you are to come down again on Monday afternoon, on the 1:47. We are to sleigh, skate, build wood fires on our hearth, sing, tell stories, crack nuts, and be generally jolly. We are going to see whether or not Gretta is right when she says her country is more beautiful in winter than in summer. And we are going to offer libations to Jack Frost to send us crackling cold weather, without much wind—even Gretta admits the wind up there is formidable—and with plenty of snow. Contrary minded?" [204]

Miss Keren paused for an expression of opinion as to her proposal, and it came without a sign of there being a contrary-minded mind among her hearers.

Margery's face lighted up with delight, although she already looked as happy as a girl can be. "Auntie Keren! You veritable fairy godmother! Just what I was saying a while ago that I wished we might do!" she cried. [205]

Miss Keren checked a tiny smile, and Happie looked at her suspiciously. She was quicker than Margery to catch clues, and she remembered the excellent acoustics of their little connected rooms.

"Sometimes I wonder if fairies aren't just particularly quick people?" she said suggestively. "There's no fear of any one here voting against your proposal, Auntie Keren, dear."

"No, indeed, Miss Keren! I never had such a birthday present. I can't say how glad I am to get this invitation," cried Robert, with such evident sincerity that Margery's bright color deepened. "You'll show me your brook, and Don Dolor, and your Rosie and Mahlon, your mountains, your little all-sorts store, everything, won't you, Miss Margery?"

"How much she has told him and how well he remembers!" thought Happie, as Margery nodded smilingly. "There's a Valley of Eden up there, not too far to go to. Shall I show you that also?" she asked.

Robert had once more arisen to go. He stood looking down at pretty Margery smiling up at him. "You do that in spite of yourself," he said.

"Auntie Keren, you really are a duck!" said Happie, putting her arm around the elder Keren-happuch's tall, thin figure and conducting her down the hall. "Let me take you safely to your room, Fairy Godmother. You are much too valuable a fairy godmother to go down this long passage alone." [206]

"I am not going to my room, Happie," said Miss Keren as Happie paused at what had been Bob's door. "I want to talk with your mother in the dining-room a half hour. She is giving Laura mathematics, or trying to. Mathematics and the artistic temperament seem to have no affinity. It is wonderful that child can count time! You run back to Margery and Gretta, I don't want you."

"Frankness, Miss Keren-happuch, is admirable, but horrible. I suppose I can't be offended with a fairy godmother, though! Only think of going to bed with three, a whole three, good times to dream over! How deliriously happy we are going to be!" Happie recklessly squeezed Miss Keren as she pulled away her arm and faced right about on her summary dismissal. Her last vestige of awe of Miss Keren had vanished. She realized the squeeze herself only when she had almost reached her own door. "It's the fourteenth of February—why, so it is!" Happie thought, stopping short at the discovery. "We've been getting valentines. Winter must be breaking up, for there's not a trace of ice between Aunt Keren and me now."

## CHAPTER XIV

### LITTLE SERENA

"I WONDER what it all means," said Happie, as she turned from the glass to let Margery button the middle buttons of her waist. "We are giving a party to-day in the tea room; next week we intend to close it for three days. It seems to me it isn't as much like a real business as it should be, not a businesslike business. I meant to go into it in a life-or-death way. Just as if I were all the time reciting, 'Give me three grains of corn, mother,' and the tea room were the three grains of corn; all there was between us and starvation, I mean. But it is rather like a playhouse tea room. I wonder why?"

"It's Miss Bradbury's fault," said Gretta before Margery could answer. "First she paid the rent ahead, now she invites us up——"

"To your house!" Margery laughingly interrupted.

"Well!" admitted Gretta. "Only it never can seem mine. Up to the Ark, anyway, and tells you to close the tea room. I think she makes us all feel as though the tea room weren't necessary, somehow."

"Gretta's right," said Margery. "There is something in the air that makes the tea room seem like a side issue. Yet no one could have been more in earnest than we were about it. And we have helped mother a great deal with its results this winter. Oh, I suppose we imagine it. It really isn't important that we close the room for those three days. It will go on just the same, and we are a little tired. That is what Aunt Keren saw, probably. Yet there is a stir in the air—as if something were going to happen."

[208]

Margery pinned a long-stemmed American Beauty rose on her breast as she spoke, having shaken it out of the box where it lay with twenty-three of its sisters, and smiled at her reflection, without seeing it.

"Something good, I hope," said Happie.

"Good? Oh, yes! Nothing but the best of good things happens to the Scollards lately! I hope we are grateful enough. I don't feel as though there were enough of me to be as grateful as I ought to be," Margery responded.

"A full teacup is as full as a full ocean, Margery. I think we're grateful in the best way when we're happy," said Happie, perhaps more wisely than she knew. "Now if you two big girls are ready we'll go and help motherums with the little girls, and be off to our mixed-tea room party, as Bob calls it."

It was an unusual party, "but that was no harm," as Polly sensibly pointed out. In the first place parties are not usually held in tea rooms, nor do they combine the oldest with the youngest child, and all the ages between, flanked by two mothers, as in this case. Mrs. Charleford came with Edith. Mrs. Scollard accepted her invitation with more pleasure than any one else, perhaps, because she "so rarely had a chance to see her flock frolic by daylight," as she said herself.

[209]

Mrs. Gordon was asked, but could not come. Ralph and Snigs represented the family, unsuspecting Margery's plot to increase their family joy, or rather to widen it. Happie had caught all three of her E's without an engagement, as it chanced. Little Serena Jones-Dexter came with her nurse, looking very white and pathetic. She had sprained her ankle and could not enjoy the party except as a spectator. She had so strongly set her heart upon coming that her doting grandmother had not had the courage to say her nay, so Serena came in state, borne in by a footman, attended by her nurse. She was ensconced in pillows in the very centre of the room in the biggest of chairs where she could see everything, poor little patient bit of childhood, with the big eyes and the beautiful little white face.

It was a holiday, of course, and the girls had felt sure that no one would try to visit the tea room, but hardly had the guests all arrived when some one did turn the door handle and in walked Hans Lieder. He stopped short as he saw the assemblage and took off his wide brimmed hat with a profound bow.

"A thousand pardons, young ladies," he said. "I see that this room is not this room to-day. I did not know."

"Oh, if he would play!" whispered Laura to Margery.

[210]

"We are having a party, Herr Lieder," Margery said, stepping forward, looking so pretty in her pale green gown with the American beauties against her golden hair and nestling close to her fair skin, that Herr Lieder's gloomy eyes lightened involuntarily as they rested on her. "It is a party of all ages and sizes, rather a frolic than a party. Would you care to watch our games?"

"If my music would give you or your guests any pleasure, mademoiselle, I should gladly remain to play to you," said the man who still was a person of mystery to the six maidens.

"Pleasure! It would be more than that, Herr Lieder. Only we could not play games; we could do nothing but listen, if you were playing," said Margery.

"No," said Hans Lieder, throwing his hat down in the corner and following it with his cloak as he divested himself of it. "No. I can be the Pied Piper when I will, and set your pulses throbbing

beyond the possibility of doing anything else but frolic."

"This is our mother, Mrs. Scollard, Herr Lieder," said Happie, bringing her mother up to this unexpected addition to the party, "and my brother. You are very kind, but we should be sorry to have you tire yourself for us, or——"

"Fräulein Glücklich," said Hans Lieder, and Happie laughed in pleased appreciation of this variation on her name, "Fräulein Glücklich, there is nothing rests me, nothing interests me, nothing helps me to forget, save music. It will give me pleasure to play for you until you beg me to stop. This piano is a sort of miracle to me, and it is my greatest pleasure to touch it. I once had a piano of this make, this action, this same case; in short, it is identically my piano again, and I play on it wondering at the similarity, and dreaming that the impossible has happened and that all that I have thrown away is restored to me."

[211]

Happie glanced around to see who had heard these strange words that thrilled her with a feeling of fear and awe. Her mother had moved away after the bow with which she had acknowledged Happie's introduction; Bob had gone; no one had heard what this singular man had said, and he went immediately to the piano and began to play.

Ralph, Bob and Snigs had never heard him before. "The moment he begins you have to sit up and take notice," remarked Bob to Ralph, who nodded with all his might, being too engrossed in the "notice" he was taking to reply otherwise.

The girls had not intended to have a dancing party, but there was no resisting the waltz into which the long fingers fell, inviting the keys to magic, all feet to motion.

Ralph danced, with Happie first, with Laura, and then with Happie's friends, but as he turned, with Edith Charleford as a partner, his eyes caught little Serena's across Edith's shoulder, so bright, so unchildlike in their beauty and wistfulness that Ralph's big heart went out to her with a bound.

[212]

"Poor little thing! Sitting there so patiently!" he thought. "The girls say she is a fairy dancer! I wonder why I shouldn't be decent to her as I would be to any other forlorn mite? She can't help being my cousin, and she doesn't know she is; she's too little to know about family feuds anyway. She looks as though she were bearing the burden of Mrs. Jones-Dexter's misbehavior. I should think the Jewish scapegoat might have looked like that when it was a kid. I never saw such wistful eyes." Ralph laughed at his fancy about the youthful scapegoat, and Edith stopped dancing imperatively.

"I wonder what you will be when you are an old man?" she exclaimed pettishly, being accustomed to attention whenever her prettiness demanded it. "You are as absent-minded as if you had been vivisected, and your mind taken out. I have spoken to you three times and you haven't heard me! and just how you laughed, when there was nothing to laugh at!"

"There certainly isn't, when a fellow is rude to a girl, and Happie's best friend at that," said Ralph contritely, though his implication that Edith derived part of her importance from Happie was not flattering. "I beg your pardon, but the truth is I was engrossed in that little girl over there, the child that isn't well, and if you will excuse me I think I'll go over and try to get her to look less like sixty and more like six, which is her age, I believe."

[213]

He led Edith to a chair with perfect certainty that he was to be released, and Edith stared at him in amazement. "Well, you are an extraordinary boy!" she gasped. "But I don't mind your rudeness at all. I think it is rather nice of you to be interested in that child. Yes, I'll excuse you."

"Thank you," said Ralph calmly, and walked over to little Serena.

"Not much fun sitting still, is it, little lady?" he asked in a way he had which made all children go to him like butterflies to blossoms, the secret of the true child-lover which cannot be imitated nor taught.

"I love to dance," said Serena wistfully.

"Will you dance with me?" asked Ralph.

"I can't, not to-day. I have sprained my ankle," said Serena.

"Ah, but I haven't!" cried Ralph. "Let me take you for a waltz. My feet are so much bigger than yours that one pair like them will take the place of yours and of the little partners you have when you are dancing up-stairs. Come, your Serene Highness!"

Serena looked up with a delighted laugh. "That's my dearest pet name! How did you know it?" she cried, and held up her hands for Ralph to lift her. "I'm going to dance with this nice, this very nice big boy, Mary," she added to her nurse.

Ralph lifted her carefully. "I'll not harm her," he said to the doubtful Mary, and adjusting Serena to his broad shoulder Ralph began to dance with his little cousin, quite unmoved by what the other boys and girls might think of the queer performance. What Margery thought of it would be hard to say. She caught Robert Gaston's sleeve, he being nearest to her as usual, and her eyes shone like stars.

[214]

"Look!" she whispered. "Do look at Ralph! It's the most fortunate thing that little Serena happened to be hurt! Ralph can hardly resist a sweet child at any time, but one that is suffering is wholly irresistible to him. And Serena is such a lovely child!"

"Fortune is favoring you, Lady of the Deep-laid Plots," smiled Robert. "I am not surprised. I felt almost sure that the lion and the lamb would lie down together if you led them up."

"Oh, they haven't done that yet, but I can't help hoping!" cried Margery.

"Never try to help hoping, it's the best thing that one can do—I think I hope a little, wee bit myself these pleasant days, Margery."

Margery looked straight before her, trying to hide the tumult of her pulses as she heard her name without the prefix for the first time from Robert's lips, and guessed his meaning—as she easily might do.

In the meantime Ralph circled around the room with his small cousin whose pale face was rosy from laughing at this kind big boy's nonsense. He stopped at last before her chair and deposited Serena in it. She looked up at him from its depths with affectionate admiration. [215]

"I've had a perfectly lovely waltz," she said fervently.

"So have I," echoed Ralph. "I think henceforth I shall never dance with a partner who is too big to be carried—saves all the bother of steering. They're going to play a game—try to cut down George Washington's cherry tree over there. How would you like to play it too instead of watching them? In my arms, you know. You will be blindfolded, and so shall I, and you shall tell me where to go, but you shall make your own chop at the tree and try for a prize as well as the rest who haven't sprained their ankles. What do you say to that idea, your Serene Highness?"

Serena clapped her hands, then her bright face clouded. "I'd love it!" she cried. "But it would be hard for you to carry a great girl six years old, and I wouldn't like to spoil your party—not anybody's party, but specially anybody so dearly good."

"And so goodly dear," said Ralph. "Little Serene Highness, don't you worry over that. I'd be playing the game double, twice blindfolded, twice chopping, with you in my arms, so I'd have twice as much fun, don't you see?"

"You must be fond of children, sir," said the nurse, looking curiously at Ralph.

Ralph caught the suspicious note of the lower order of mind, which is apt to doubt the motives of unusual kindness, as well as the jealous note of the nurse for her nursling. [216]

He smiled at Mary, and Ralph's smile generally inspired confidence. "There isn't anything much nicer than little people, is there?" he asked. "And this little person has a look that seems to make one want her to have as good a time, for as long a time, as she can. I'm glad to carry her around and let her get into things."

Mary's eyes suddenly filled. "I know the look; they don't see it," she said very low. "You're a fine boy, whoever you are, and I hope you'll be sent good times of your own for the interest you take in this darling."

"Thank you," said Ralph. "Why, here's my Polly!"

"She's my Polly too," cried Serena. "And Penny's my Penny, but most of all Miss Margery's my Miss Margery."

"I didn't know you knew our Ralph, Serena," cried Polly, running up to take possession of Ralph's hand. "Happie sent me to tell you she wants you to help stand the tree up, Ralph."

"I'll be back for you, little Serene Highness, when we've propped the tree," said Ralph hastening to obey.

They put the tree into its place and distributed hatchets to all the company. "First, the national parade!" shouted Bob, under an inspiration. "Shoulder arms!" [217]

Everybody shouldered his tiny hatchet, Herr Lieder began to play a medley of national airs in march time. Ralph rushed over, caught Serena up on his left arm, fell into place, and all the company, large and small, marched around and around the tea room, brandishing hatchets and trying to sing familiar words that no longer fitted familiar airs when played in marching time, regardless of the original tempo.

"The first chop is Auntie Cam's!" cried Happie. "Come and be blindfolded, auntie. And next motherums!"

Mrs. Charleford submitted to the bandage over her eyes, while Herr Lieder played the queerest sort of music, so humorous that everybody laughed at it just as they would have laughed at funny words. When Mrs. Charleford was safely blindfolded and Bob turned her around three times to the left, and thrice to the right Herr Lieder played something that Laura correctly described as "dizzy." It was full of hints of tunes, none of which developed. "Don't you see?" cried Laura in ecstasy. "It means you don't know where you are!"

Then to the accompaniment of soft running arpeggios Mrs. Charleford went slowly forward, hesitated, turned, went in the opposite direction, raised her hatchet, put out her other hand gropingly, stopped when everybody cried, "No fair; no fair feeling!" and struck—to a crashing chord of Herr Lieder's—a valiant blow directly at Elsie Barker's head, who dodged it by throwing herself on Eleanor Vernon. "She thought you were a cherry, Elsie!" cried Edith amid the applause that greeted this first blow. Elsie was so proud of her red hair that there was no danger in teasing her about it. [218]

Mrs. Scollard walked without a moment's hesitation to the portière and struck her hatchet deep into its folds. "Mother is trying to bury the hatchet," said Bob, untying the handkerchief that hid her eyes. "Come, Eleanor! you might bear in mind that it is the tree, and not the tea room or its friends that we are after."

Eleanor seemed to heed the warning, for a shout of applause greeted her as she aimed a blow at the tip-most top of the little tree, and Robert Gaston pinned on the spot the first numbered slip the tree had received.

Margery followed. She walked directly to the book-shelf and struck her blow on the back of "Lady Baltimore."

"Oh, come now, Margery! You don't want to hit anything that is stamped Baltimore!" protested Snigs.

"I don't know about that special kind of cake, the Lady Baltimore of the novel, but Margery thinks Baltimore things take the cake," said Elsie Barker.

There were some of the players who could keep their bearings, or were more lucky than the first ones. Gradually the little cherry tree began to blossom with white strips, and the Scollards were reassured by seeing that some one could take a prize, which seemed doubtful at first while everybody was aiming wide of the tree. [219]

Ralph came up with Serena to be blindfolded. He had played for himself and had deposited his record on a table nearest to the window and farthest from the tree. Now he had to be blindfolded again, to be sure that he was really guided by Serena and playing fair, and Serena herself had a handkerchief bound around her fair hair, hiding her excited eyes.

"That way, Ralph, walk that way!" she cried, pointing directly to the tree. Ralph obeyed. The child pushed and pressed him from side to side; it was a hard matter to be certain what she wanted him to do, but Ralph patiently did his best, and stopped when Serena gave the order. "Now!" she whispered, drawing in her breath.

She struck a mighty blow, using all her strength as if it had been a veritable tree chopping, and her blow went home, right above the mark on the tree which had been made to designate the spot used as the standard for prize winning.

"Hurrah for little Serena!" shouted Bob hurrying up to uncover the child's eyes and her bearer's. "Nobody else has come near you, Serena, and I'm sure nobody will. You're the one who has done it with your little hatchet; you've won the prize, sure thing." [220]

Serena turned and hugged Ralph frantically. "Oh, you dear, dear, darling big boy!" she cried, to everybody's amusement. "I love you and I love you! I never won a prize in all my life, and I'm six. I'm going to give half of it to you!"

There were not many more to try their skill after Serena, and the interest in the game flagged a little with the certainty that the best possible blow had been struck. Serena had won the first prize, Robert Gaston the second, with a mark to his credit on a short lower limb, near the test mark on the trunk of the tree.

The consolation prize had to be drawn for by five, Mrs. Charleford and Ralph among them. Mrs. Charleford won it, a little Japanese hen standing on a card bearing the inscription "A hatch it you may count on."

Serena was given a candy box in the shape of a tree trunk, tied with red, white and blue ribbon, finished with a bunch of artificial Japanese cherry blossoms, and filled with candied cherries.

She beamed at it and at Margery who brought it to her.

"I'm so glad it's something I can divide with my nice boy," she said. "I'm going to give him 'most all the cherries. Maybe he won't mind if I keep the box and the flowers and the ribbon? Oh, he's right here! Will you, Ralph, care if I keep what's outside and give you the inside?" [221]

"Not a bit, little Serene Highness! I don't want more than one bite of a cherry from the inside. I'm just your horse that you drove to win the race, you know."

"Didn't we have fun?" sighed Serena contentedly. "I never went to so nice a party, Miss Margery, and I'm six. Grandma said, 'What's the use of going, Serena, when you can't move about one bit?' But I was crazy to come. She didn't know Ralph was here. Neither did I. We didn't know there was a Ralph. Isn't it funny how you don't know people till you do know them, and then you love them?"

"It's wonderful, little Serena!" Margery assented with fervor. "And then you can't imagine how your old world used to look without them! I'm glad that you had such a happy time, dear. I'm very glad Ralph gave it to you!"

She smiled on Ralph, and he turned away. "I'm not feuding on my own account, you know, and anyway it wouldn't be this child's fault," he murmured.

"I must take you home, Miss Serena," said Mary. "Mrs. Jones-Dexter said not later than five."

"I don't believe she knew how early five would be here," sighed Serena, submitting to the decree meekly. "I wish you'd come and see me, my nice Ralph."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, little Serene Highness, but maybe we'll meet again. Life is long and very queer in its ways. Good-bye, sweet little lady." [222]

Serena said good-bye wistfully and watched Ralph walk away with longing in her eyes. Not because life is long, but because it is short, Serena was soon to see again the cousin whom she did not know.

The frolic broke up by seven. It had been a pleasant afternoon to everybody who had accepted Margery's peculiar invitation. Even Herr Lieder seemed to have enjoyed making music for the

young people, and watching the fun. Certainly he had added a great deal to the success of the afternoon.

Margery, walking down the street behind the rather long procession of her family and guests, with Robert Gaston beside her, sang in her heart as she brooded over the real success which she believed she had attained.

It could not be, she felt sure, that Ralph's kindness to little Serena, given without a thought of consequences beyond making the ailing child happy for a few hours, could be without fruit. Some day, she felt sure, his goodness of heart would win him further friendship from Serena, who would not forget "her kind, big boy."

Margery knew how hard it was going to be for Mrs. Gordon to send Ralph to college the coming year and yet how certainly she was going to struggle to do so, and how Ralph was planning to help himself through the course. "If only Serena should beg to see the 'big boy' again, if she should grow deeply fond of him, if for her sake Mrs. Jones-Dexter should do what she easily could do for her niece and her grandnephew, if as years went by Serena, growing fonder and fonder of Ralph——"

[223]

"What are you dreaming of, Margery? I have spoken to you twice, and you did not hear me!" complained Robert Gaston at her elbow.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I was dreaming of the possible fruit of the little tree at which we have all been vainly chopping this afternoon," Margery answered. "I do think it's heavenly to fancy you see a sweet story working itself out, and to feel as though you had contributed one tiny page of it yourself!"

[224]

---

## CHAPTER XV

### "'MONGST THE HILLS OF SOMERSET, WISHT I WAS A-ROAMIN' YET!"

THE house party in the Ark—especially because it was to be composed only of the household—seemed so desirable as the time for it grew nearer that the party to see the Midsummer Night's Dream paled before its beacon light.

Yet Robert Gaston gave his guests a blissful evening! Margery, Gretta, Happie and Mrs. Charleford sat in the first box, with Ralph and Robert himself for the black-coated background to their brightness. Edith, Laura, Bob and Snigs were in the second box under Mrs. Scollard's care. Of course there was no real division of the party.

"We just happen to have a fold in the middle, like a big birthday card," said Happie, laying her hand on the plush-covered railing of the next box as she leaned over to speak to Edith.

Margery settled into her chair, half hidden by the curtain, with a long breath of satisfaction. Gretta sat serenely in the middle, lost in admiration of the handsome theatre, the well-gowned women, the rustle of anticipation, secure in her sense of being unknown and of no consequence. She did not guess that many a glass was turned upon her face, with its brilliant tints of red and white skin, dark eyes, and heavy masses of dark hair. Margery and she were rare foils for each other, like a jasmine blossom and a Jacqueminot rose. No one could claim for Happie regular beauty, but she was alight with life, fun, eagerness to enjoy and to give pleasure. Her hair, always lawless, gleamed like tarnished copper, her eyes danced, her dimples came and went, her lips curved and quivered—she was like an incarnate electric current. Margery was lovely, Gretta was handsome, but Happie was charming, and on the whole that is the greatest gift of the three.

[225]

It did not take long for the audience around the boxes to discover and grow interested in the theatre party. It was not often that one could see so many winsome creatures together as Robert was entertaining that night, with a keen sense of the fact and no little pride in his guests.

Not Laura alone enjoyed the music of the Mendelssohn overture, but Laura did enjoy it, leaning far over the edge of the box, her pale face responsive to its spell. Then the curtain went up and the girls were admitted to fairyland, to the realm of visions, under the domain of sleep-like trance in which the actual world was no more a reality. Shakespeare's poetry, aided by the skill of today, wrought the spell. Electric fire-flies flitted through the forest, stung Bottom's sleepy poll, flew hither and yon at Puck's behest, while the owl in the hollow tree winked his electric eyes as the elf teased him. Fairies lifted their arms and then flitted across the stage and disappeared among the trees as Titania or Oberon commanded them; it was hard to believe they were mortals, so perfectly managed was the illusion of their flight. Happie put a hand over one of Margery's and one of Gretta's, giving herself up to the fun of the grotesque players of Pyramus and Thisbe, yielding her imagination to the forest elves, perfectly happy and unconscious of real life, as Happie always could be when she read or saw or heard. Not till the curtain fell on the last act in the palace of the duke, with the fairies flitting through the gathering darkness shedding wedding blessings on the reunited lovers to the softly sung music of Oberon, did Happie stir, sighing. The lights blazed up in the body of the theatre, on every side there was a rustle of preparation for the street. The illusion was over, and Broadway, with its roar of trolley and its stream of varied types of life, waited to swallow up the mortals who for three hours had been transported to the kingdom of dreams.

[226]

Robert Gaston had taken Mrs. Scollard for a walk in the lobby between two of the acts. As she put on her hat Happie fancied there was between them an air of understanding. Her mother seemed stirred, while Robert looked blissful. He helped Margery into her coat carefully, and laughingly disentangled Gretta's heavy braid of hair from Happie's obtruding hook.

"I have had the best birthday I remember, and I'm a thousand times grateful to all of you who helped make it that," he said, forestalling the thanks which they were all ready to pour out to him. [227]

The tea room claimed the girls for two more days, and then came the longed-for Friday when they were to go to Crestville.

Mrs. Scollard, alone, was not to be of the party. She and Jeunesse Dorée, she said, would look after the Patty-Pans, for she could not well be spared from her duties at that time.

"Well, you take good care of yourself while we go out of the Patty-Pans into the mire," said Bob, hunting around for a mislaid blacking brush.

"That's what we did when we went up the first time, but there's no mire now, Bobsy; only 'the snow, the beautiful snow!'" cried Happie in high feather. Their libations to Jack Frost, which Aunt Keren had suggested, had not been in vain. The ground was white, the streets were vociferous with the Italian drivers of tip-carts, as the "white-wings" gangs labored to clear the snow away in the least possible time.

It was an early start that the eight o'clock train necessitated, but there was no other train until twenty minutes of two, and that would not get them to Crestville until nearly half past five—too late and too dark for pleasure-seekers. Besides, what was the use of wasting the valuable afternoon which might be gained by taking what Crestvillians called "the mail train"? This arrived at noon, in the sunniest, brightest part of the day. Nevertheless, catching it meant leaving the Patty-Pans at not much past seven. Not that there was any doubt of getting off. The Scollard family was stirring before six, and the first sound it heard was a pounding on the dumb-waiter, announcing that the Gordon boys were ahead of them. [228]

Mrs. Scollard bundled her youngest into an extra coat as a protection against the mountain wind that she would face driving up from the station, and kissed her children all around with fervor enough to make up for the two days in which she should not kiss them. She clung to Margery and kissed her repeatedly.

"Good-bye, little Margery, good-bye, best of daughters. You're such a comfort to me, dear, and no one will ever love you quite as mother does," she whispered.

Margery looked at her, guessing, perhaps, the reason for this tenderness.

"I'm never going to be less than your eldest daughter, mother dear. I couldn't care for anything that took me from you," she whispered back.

Then the joyous crowd started out noisily, all the Scollards, flanked by Ralph and Snigs, who joined them in the hall.

They had allowed more time than they needed to get down to the station, and sat watching the crowd of incoming suburbanites hurrying through the outer gates as if New York were a mammoth kinoscope which they were barely in time to see. [229]

After a short wait a personage in brass buttons with a voice of marvelous volume and monotony aroused the occupants of the waiting-room with what sounded like a recitation from the gazeteer, a long list of stations at which this mail-bearing train stopped. The Scollard party hurried through the gates, and lengthened down the car aisle, ten strong.

"Let's divide up our crowd and sit on both sides of the car. If we're all on one side we'll have to telephone if the first pair should wish to communicate with the last pair," said Snigs. "I sit with Happie!"

"Not this trip, little brother!" observed Ralph, elbowing up to take that place.

"Happie sits with Gretta," announced Happie. "And Mr. Gaston must be one of the right-side people, because that side has a better view of the Water Gap. All the rest of us have seen it before."

Margery slipped into a seat on the right side of the car, Robert Gaston beside her. Bob dropped down behind them beside Gretta, and defeated Happie accepted Ralph's presence and crow of victory without perceptible regret. Laura on the other side of the car welcomed Snigs as a traveling companion, with a gracious smile, and Polly and Penny settled down together behind them, immediately to unsettle with excited bounces on the seat, kneeling up to look out of the window, then flouncing down for two minutes in which they tried to convey the impression that they were seasoned and somewhat blasé travelers. [230]

"We look like a bridal party, with Margery in that gray suit ahead, and Gaston so beautiful to behold in his new top-coat—I'm sure it's a new one!" Ralph whispered to Happie. "Bet you what you will the people in this car think Margery's a bride, and Bob and I are bridesmaids."

"And Snigs and I the stern parents!" added Happie. "Rather a young bride, I should think. It's years before Margery will be old enough to marry. What do you suppose they think Polly and Penny are?"

"Grains of rice," said Ralph promptly. "As to 'years before Margery's old enough,' she's eighteen, and after that danger signals are flying."

"Humph!" ejaculated Happie with more sincerity than politeness.

The three hours and a half journey up to Crestville is pretty for the first half of the distance, and beautiful the last half. At eleven o'clock the jolly young group from the Patty-Pans was looking out of the windows with twenty eager eyes to see the approach to the Delaware Water Gap. Laura and Snigs were perching on the arms of the seats of those on the more favorable side, and Polly and Penny had crowded, one in with Happie and Ralph, the other with Gretta and Bob.

The train curved around the shining track like a snake, the locomotive plainly to be seen as it tugged along the bend that brought it into view from the rear cars. The river, swollen by snows, ran swiftly down its rocky bed and on either hand rose the dark mountains, snow-patched and pine-clad, through which in countless ages the Delaware had cut its way to the sea. [231]

"We begin to be proud about here," Bob explained to Robert over the latter's shoulder. "From this point up we consider our feet upon our native heath and our name is MacGregor, of the purest Gregorian—if you doubt it, look at Gretta."

Robert laughingly turned. Gretta's eyes were dilated, they were darker than ever, and looked ready to leap across the intervening mountains to behold Crestville. Her cheeks were crimson, her lips parted by her quick breathing; joy radiated from her very hands.

"It's a beautiful country, Gretta," said Robert. "How you do love it! I don't quite see how you stay away, when it makes you feel like this to get back."

"I never was away to get back to it before," said Gretta. "I couldn't stay away with any one but these dear people. There isn't any one up here that really cares a bit what becomes of me, yet it seems as though all these trees knew me, and the mountains—oh, I can't tell you how the mountains look to me! Not a bit the way they look to any of you, I'm sure of that. I see the mountains, too, and how splendid they are, but I see them something as you see your mother—something that I saw when I first opened my eyes." [232]

"Yes, I understand," said Robert gently. "Strange, and beautifully strange, the kinship we all feel for our mother bit of earth!"

The ride up the steep grade from the Water Gap to Crestville seemed long to the hungry and impatient "Archaics," as Bob had called the Ark occupants the previous summer. It took three-quarters of an hour for the train to wind up the fifteen miles, ascending sharply, and with the track curved and inclined so that the locomotive came in sight often, as it labored to get its charge up the grade.

"There's the solitary pine, Hapsie!" cried Bob, pointing to a landmark that stood out alone on a summit which they passed in the drive from the station over to the Ark.

"I see!" Happie's voice echoed Bob's pleasure, and Gretta caught her breath.

"Crestville! Crestville!" shouted the guard. But the party for the Ark was on its feet before the announcement, and Penny had bolted for the door, to the dismay of careful Polly, burdened with responsibility for her successor who lacked all of her own steadiness.

Drawn up beside the station platform as the Archaics came around, was Jake Shale's team. The horses were as discouraged-looking as ever, but the children had learned that their gauntness and melancholy were rather habits than the proof of actual discomfort. They were harnessed to a bright blue wagon body, set on two sleds. The wagon was filled with straw, and Jake sat on the seat smiling helplessly, with no change of expression on his cadaverous face to indicate the pleasure that he really did feel on seeing the Scollard young folk again. [233]

Beyond Jake stood Don Dolor, fairly shining with prosperity and grooming, harnessed to a pretty dark green sleigh with a removable second seat, which none of the newcomers had ever seen before. Mahlon Gruber held the reins. He was just as limp, just as near falling to pieces, apparently, as ever, but he grinned with inane joy as Bob shouted to him: "Hallo, Mahlon!" and responded "Hallo," with an approach to animation.

Margery and Robert, the latter because he was the guest of honor and Margery because he was largely her guest, got into the back seat of the sleigh, and Polly and Penny were tucked in beside Mahlon, with some regret for the straw-filled wagon body and the majority.

"Do they let you drive alone, Mahlon?" asked Bob, tucking in his large and his smaller sisters, and patting Don Dolor—dolorous no more—on his handsome black nose.

"Ye-e-ah!" said Mahlon in a long drawn note of triumph, ending with a staccato snap. "Yep! Yes, sirree! I kin drive that there horse anywheres. He knows me good." [234]

"He looks fine, Mahlon. You take every bit as good care of him as I did," said Bob, turning away to join the waiting Shale party.

"I bet ye!" said the proud Mahlon emphatically, and with the thin giggle that the children remembered so well.

"She couldn't come over," said Jake Shale, turning his long vehicle with its long squeak on the frozen snow. "She sent word yesterday I'd got to be over till to-day fer the mail train. She was afraid she hadn't the dare to come, fear of cold. I didn't see how I was goin' to make it—I'm haulin' fer a man that's lumberin' a piece he's took over the other side. He's cuttin' mine props and ties. But I told him I'd have to do it a while, to oblige her, and I come. If I hadn't a went Aaron could, but I was using the team. So you was to the city, Gretta. You look good."

"I am good, Jake," said Gretta, as keenly alive now as any other distinguished stranger, to the



dialect of her native village.

"Miss Bradbury isn't ill, is she? She's able to be out?" asked Happie, rightly construing Jake's feminine pronoun to apply to her godmother.

"I guess," said Jake. "But she was afraid she might wetten her feet out, so she said she guessed she hadn't ought to went. Rosie wouldn't leave her go, for all; she wanted to come along bad, but she said she'd have to let the meetin' you folks to me."

[235]

"And she couldn't have 'let' it to a better man, Jake," said Bob gravely.

The drive up to the Ark could not have been more beautiful if Crestville had felt precisely as the young Scollards felt, and had wanted to show Robert Gaston the country under its most attractive aspect. A light, but wet snow which had not reached New York, had fallen here on the preceding day. It was the sort of snow that rests on the bare tree branches and clothes them in white. The entire landscape was a study in black and white, trees all white on a line of black limb, serried ranks of black woods touched with white in the distance, white fields, black rocks, all against a gray sky that had the effect of nearness and of palpable softness.

"Dear me, it is a lovely country!" Robert said, looking about him delightedly. "What a glorious view! No wonder Gretta is glad to get back!"

"It was the dreariest, most desolate place to us when we came here last April that one could imagine. The house dilapidated, unfurnished, or furnished with rickety fragments, and mother so ill, and our future so unsmiling! Aunt Keren was everything to us; she literally saved mother's life, we think, but indeed it was discouraging enough the night we drove this road for the first time," said Margery. "There is our Ark!"

Mahlon let Don Dolor turn in at the gate. The big sled was not far behind, speed being nearly equal up hill between tired horses and a fresh one.

[236]

Miss Keren risked taking cold, standing on the upper step to beam her welcome. Beside her stood Rosie Gruber, as tall and gaunt as ever, but now her gauntness had the effect of an original design, and when the Ark had first known her Rosie had given the impression of being gaunt from over-work and under-feeding.

She caught Polly and Penny into her arms, both at once, like a capacious threshing machine grasping at peculiarly succulent little grains.

"Well, my days, children, I didn't know you'd have room enough in New York to grow like you have! I guess country air shown you how! You run in and see once what Rosie's fixed for dinner! Margery, you dear girl, leave me hug you!" Rosie's welcome forestalled Miss Keren's in these cases, but Miss Keren was welcoming Robert, whom she presented to Rosie, and to whom Rosie extended a hard and bony hand, with a keen glance that appraised the young man accurately.

"Glad you come," she said. "It hain't so cold where you live, but you wouldn't feel it if you stayed up to git use to it. My days, there's the team, and Bob, and Ralph—and Happie yet!"

Rosie's tone expressed her sense of Happie as a climax. The second Scollard girl had always been to her the perfection of girlhood.

In a moment they were all hugging and shaking hands with Rosie, while Robert Gaston looked on with amused and admiring eyes, fully appreciating the relations between this free-born American citizen and the family she looked after.

[237]

Miss Keren submitted to the arm Happie wound around her, as they all bundled into the small entry and into the library. On the hearth Rosie had built a generous fire of logs, odorous cherry logs, which filled the room with faint fragrance and emphatic warmth. Aunt Keren looked better, Happie thought. And how pretty this room was which they had found so forlorn on its first sight! The low ceiling, the wide planks in the flooring, the comfortable chairs, the table, book-strewn, the shelves lined with books of all sizes and colors, the soft short curtains, the good pictures, the firelight throwing shadows and high lights though it was noon, for the day was gray—how pretty and individual it all was.

"Now get your things off while I dish up, and then you kin all set up and eat a while," said Rosie, in the familiar phrase which had amused the family so much on their first acquaintance with it.

"Let us help you, Gretta and I!" cried Happie throwing off her hat and coat. "We always did."

Dinner was served quickly, generously, and though Rosie, who waited on the table, joined in the conversation and asked eager questions, it was obviously not from disrespect, but rather from a mutual respect that did away with inequalities. Margery—and for that matter the two Keren-happuchs—watched Robert to see how he took this Arcadian simplicity. They felt, justly enough, that it tested his intelligence and the genuineness of his breeding.

[238]

His eyes were full of humorous kindness, he was eating with boyish relish the country viands, and he smiled at Rosie's queer ways with a smile as friendly as it was amused.

"Well, he'll do!" thought Miss Keren.

"I knew he'd look like that! He never fails one," thought Margery.

And Happie nodded approvingly to Gretta as she signaled her admiration of Robert's appetite for schmier-kase and apple butter.

"We have a long afternoon," said Miss Keren when dinner was over. "All of my guests know the place rather better than their hostess—except Mr. Gaston. What do you propose for your own

entertainment?"

"We thought we would go skating, Aunt Keren," said Bob. "We four boys—if Mr. Gaston permits our counting him in—and Margery, Happie,—all the girls, except the kiddies."

"I am going to stay in the house all the afternoon with Aunt Keren," announced Happie.

"I am going to take Polly and Penny coasting; I promised it a week ago," said Gretta.

"Laura and Margery, will you desert us?" asked Bob.

"Let's all go coasting!" cried Ralph. "Let's borrow sleds somewhere and coast. It's more fun than skating—we'll skate in the morning." [239]

"Much more fun!" cried Robert Gaston.

"And Happie, I won't allow you to stay here with me," said Aunt Keren decidedly.

"If it's coasting I couldn't, dear Auntie Keren. I haven't coasted since I was young," cried Happie.

"How can you remember it then?" inquired Ralph.

[240]

---

## CHAPTER XVI

### HAPPIE GRANTS AMNESTY

ALL night long the wind blew furiously. As it came sweeping down from the higher mountain points there was nothing to allay its force accumulating down the stretch to Crestville. Such small objects as presumptuously stood in its way—farmhouses and red barns—it buffeted, chastising them soundly for attempting to stay it, and sweeping on down to the Jersey plains which were to calm its wrath.

The old Ark shook almost as though it had been a veritable ark out on stormy waters. Blinds rattled, and even the beds trembled, but "the Archaics" slept through the tumult. Coasting is an excellent sedative, especially when followed by a hearty supper and an evening before a blazing log fire.

"It's rather like automobiling to spend the night in your front bedroom, Miss Bradbury," said Robert Gaston at breakfast.

"Funny you thought of that!" cried Happie. "Gretta said last night we ought to have gone to bed in automobile veils and goggles."

"What's the order of exercises this morning—for all day, in fact?" inquired Bob. "The wind has gone down, and I don't know how we could suggest an improvement in the sort of day we've got."

He waved his hand towards the window. The sun was pouring into it, and beyond the window the fields were shining, brilliantly white in the sun rays, blue white in the shadows; yellow stubble, where the grain had been cut, showing in stretches on the upland slopes, black woods and impressionistic purple mountains as a background to the picture. [241]

"And gittin' warmer yet!" chimed in Rosie. "You do what you want to do to-day, though. There's more snow comin'. 'Tain't fur off. It's sure to be here by Monday, if 'tain't here to-morrow."

"We thought we'd go skating, if you boys would come with us," said Laura.

"This morning you are all going for a straw-ride in the bottom of Jake's big blue sled," announced Miss Keren.

"When in doubt play trumps," observed Bob. "That's a lead that takes all our tricks, Aunt Keren. I thought we might put off our skating till Monday morning—we don't go down till nearly two o'clock—and this afternoon return to our innocent childhood's ways. Mahlon says the pond is rough and the skating not much good anyway, because they've been cutting ice from it and it's made it uneven."

"What ways of innocent childhood, Bob?" asked Margery.

"Snow forts," replied Bob promptly. "And snowball assault of them."

"Good for you!" cried Ralph. "That would beat skating to my mind. I never had a chance to fight in a snow fort but once in my life, and then I was too small to stand a chance, even though I had one. We ought to have a rousing scrimmage here. Oh, what's the use of being young in a city, anyway!" [242]

"I suppose Mr. Gaston will command one side, as he's the oldest boy," began Snigs, but Robert said at the same moment: "I'm the oldest boy here, and what's more I've had the advantage of college athletics, football, for muscle training. I'll stand you three fellows, if you'll let me have Gretta and Happie on my side, for they'll be the best fighters among the girls I'm pretty certain, and I think that's fair."

"That's all right. Margery and Laura would be best in the Red Cross department," assented Bob. "So it will be you and the two girls against us three boys, and we'll do you up, Mr. Robert Gaston. You'll want to sing 'Maryland, My Maryland' when we get through with you."

"Cockadoodle do-o-o-o!" commented Happie, gently insinuating that crowing was not always prophetic.

"Now you youngsters go and wrap up in everything you can find, and be ready to start in half an hour. I laid a pile of robes and blankets, old coats, furs, all sorts of things, on the couch and table in the library. Help yourselves, and please don't keep Jake waiting. He is going to take you up around the hotels on the mountains, where you will see glorious views, but you will be as cold as Arctic explorers," said Miss Keren rising.

When the party came out ready for the sleigh ride they were such a funny lot, bundled in knit scarfs, shabby furs, handsome furs, and everything else available, and carrying patchwork quilts and thick comfortables on their arms, that Rosie Gruber laughed at the sight of them, as the Scollarads had never seen her laugh before, and Mahlon swung his left arm and leg in delirious unison, laughing in precisely the way he used to cry in his sorrowful time when they first knew him. [243]

"My days, you look like carpet rags come to life and walkin' round!" cried Rosie. "Penny, leave me carry you out, you can't walk, you poor little mamma you. You look just like those Egypt mammas I seen once in some of them books in the room."

It was true that Penny looked mummified in her wrappings, and that her little legs had short play, swaddled like a papoose. But they bundled her into the straw, tucked her and Polly down between their elders, drew up the motley quilts and covered them decently with robes, and were off, drawn by Don Dolor and a young horse from Jake's neighbor, Pete Kuntz.

"How did you manage about your hauling mine props to-day, Jake?" asked Bob from his seat of honor—and exposure—beside the driver.

"Let it," said Jake promptly. "He'll have to git along without me to-day. I had to leave Aaron haul a while still. She'll pay me as much fer driving you all as I git a day haulin', and it leaves my team work yet. I like to be obligin'." [244]

The Scollarads laughed, Jake did not see why, but he was used to their laughing when the fun was invisible to him.

"A wand'ring minstrel I, a thing of shreds and patches," sang Robert, drawing his yellow and red quilt, lent by Rosie, around his shoulders. One of Robert's gifts was a very good voice.

This started the choir and the party sang as the sled went briskly up the gradual rise in the road to the mountains where the many large hotels made in themselves, and drew around them, a very different summer life from the indigenous life of the section.

It was intensely cold, but there was no more wind, and the air was so dry that the blood flowed faster and off-set the lowly thermometer. People came out to look as the musical sled spun past, for it carried an amateur choir of unusual ability; and the harmony sounded so beautiful through the frosty air that many a listener wished the horses would loiter before his door.

It was unpleasantly cold coming home. "The wind is right up from the Gap," said Gretta. "There's a storm coming."

"This isn't much fun," remarked Penny, with stifled pathos, from the depths of her eclipse under enveloping skirts, quilts, shawls and robes. "I wish I was home." [245]

"I don't," said Polly stoutly. "I think it's nice to be very uncomfortable when you go out for fun—sometimes, I mean—so you'll know how awful it is when it isn't fun." A shout of laughter greeted this philosophical seeker after experience.

"We'd better sing, 'In the Good Old Summer-time,' and see if we can't mind-cure ourselves into warmth," said Bob with a shiver.

"What's the matter with, 'A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night'?" asked Ralph.

"We'll have that in our forts before night," said Robert.

The sled turned into the Ark driveway an hour before dinner, with its load loudly singing: "Ching-a-ling-a-lu," which was so pretty, with its chromatic effects given in harmony, Margery's sweet voice sustained by Laura as another soprano—for with Robert there Laura was not obliged to sing tenor as she usually did—Happie and Gretta's alto, Ralph and Bob and Snigs humming baritone and bass, and Robert singing fine tenor, that Miss Keren dashed out to hear it as well as to welcome her merry crowd. "You don't know how well that sounded," she cried.

"Don't we!" cried Happie. "Aunt Keren, we have warbled our way up the hillsides and back, and plaudits are echoing still on our track, we think that as singers there's nothing we lack, but, oh, you can't guess how our dinner will smack!" [246]

Happie jumped out over the side of the sled as she uttered this remarkable inspiration, and the companions she thus left sitting among the straw burst into applause that actually made Don Dolor plunge and threaten to get up on his hind legs.

"You ridiculous child!" cried Miss Keren. "Rosie has enough to satisfy you, and it is almost ready, so get yourselves ready, and don't tell me anything about the drive until we are at the table."

Dinner was a rapid, but not a slender meal, that day. The snow forts were as interesting as though the boys were not almost grown up and Robert Gaston had not cast his first presidential vote for President Roosevelt.

Margery and Laura were non-combatants. They were to mold the bullets, which meant that, one on each side, they were to make snowballs for their warriors.

The forts went up quickly, the object being to make them resistant, but not too much so. The boys

wanted one or the other of them to fall at the end of the scrimmage. Still, when the walls were up they did pour a few pails of water over them to stiffen them, for there was not much doubt that it would freeze.

It was bitterly cold, but the garrison of the two forts, equal in numbers if not in prowess, marched into them—Robert, with his two amazons, Gretta and Happie; Bob, Ralph and Snigs to oppose them. [247]

The balls flew hot and heavy. Miss Keren had improvised a flag for the front of each fort, and the object of the fighters was to down the opposite flag first of all.

"Where did you learn to throw, Happie?" asked Robert, as Happie sent her snowballs true. "I don't wonder so much at Gretta, but you throw well for a city girl."

"Bob," replied Happie, too out of breath for details.

"I hate to hit 'em," murmured Ralph on the other side, sending a ball just past Happie's ear as she put up her head to do her own throwing.

"You let Happie catch on to your sparing her because she's a girl, and I pity you, Ralph," replied Bob. "She won't stand fooling. If she plays with us, she doesn't want favor. You found that out last summer."

"Well she's got to take 'em soft then," grumbled Ralph. It may have been that his chivalry weakened his strong right arm; for some reason Ralph did not fight with the zest of his adversaries and comrades. It was Gretta who came up and held her place while snowballs whizzed around her, and sent a big, icy ball that carried off the flag and snapped the flagstaff on the fort of her foes.

A cheer and the Harvard yell from Robert was answered by a defiant howl and the "yell of the Ark," which these same young people had compiled during the summer: [248]

"Hark, hark! keep it dark.  
Keren-happuchs in the Ark.  
Weather-tight, we're all right.  
Gretta, Gretta, glad we met her,  
Zintz, blintz, Bittenbender!"

"Flag's down! Now for the sortie, girls!" cried Robert, his face flushed with his enthusiastic efforts to carry the opposing fort.

It had been agreed that if either flag fell the combatants from the other fort were to be allowed to rush out and try to carry the adversaries' fort by assault. Robert tore out of his fort, followed closely by Happie and Gretta. The foe was ready to receive them. A storm of snowballs fell on them, but like a well-disciplined legion the three attacking warriors wavered, but did not halt. Two of them—the amazonian wing of the army—bent down and came on somewhat like jackknives, doubled over, but came on, nevertheless, presenting their backs to the foe in a sense that was not cowardice.

If the defending garrison had had ammunition in supply equal to their need they might have held their fort against their foes, at least much longer. But Laura was a languid snowball maker at best, and was very tired of her task, so that one of the boys had to reinforce her while the other two fought, and with the garrison thus handicapped the victory was quick and sure for the besiegers. [249]

Robert had been rolling snowballs as he advanced, and Happie, catching his idea, helped him. With her arms full of ammunition, and Robert's left arm laden, there was no delay between the shots which fell on the devoted heads of the defenders of the fort every time one of them popped up to fight off the assailants.

"Surrender!" ordered Robert.

"With honors?" stipulated Bob.

"Certainly. March out with colors flying, gallant garrison—provided you can find your colors, which my amazonian general knocked to smithereens," returned Robert. Bob and Ralph had provided themselves against defeat. Three combs were the main part of their provision, supplemented by tissue paper—the instruments of a military band. Bob picked up the broken flagstaff with its flag still pendant. Shouldering it, he placed himself at the head of his men, Ralph, Snigs, Laura, the ammunition maker. These three played "Down Went Maginty," in the slowest possible time, with immense expression—it sounded like a dirge.

"We shall proceed to raze your fort, under the terms of the surrender," announced Robert. Strictly speaking there had been no terms stipulated in the surrender, but before the siege began it had been agreed that the defeated fort should be destroyed. "I feel like Marius," Robert added.

"Suppose we take a hand," suggested Bob. [250]

"Take a foot," corrected Ralph, setting the example by kicking a hole in the wall he had just been defending. "The sooner it's over the sooner to eat."

It did not take long to knock down the walls. "Now, this cruel war is over," announced Robert. "What time do we sup to-night?"

"It's really dreadful!" cried Margery. "If I were Aunt Keren I would never have a house party of young people again in winter."

The storm did not set in on Sunday until night. A cloudy, gray morning showed new beauties of a country winter. The air was less cold; it was still and significant, as if the atmosphere hung low with its weather secrets reluctantly concealed. "No matter how they have treated me, I'm going to see Eunice and Reba," announced Gretta. "They never wanted to let me live with them, but they did give me what home I had when I was small, and they are my cousins. It isn't right not to try to do my part."

"They may be civil now that you own the farm and have friends, Gretta. But you'll see there's no use in trying—still, you are right enough to try. I am going to stay with Aunt Keren this morning, no matter what she says, or the others do," said Happie positively.

"The boys are going over to the Shales', partly to see them and partly to bring back nuts which they are going to take to New York to-morrow, because we are going skating in the morning and there won't be time to get them then," said Gretta. "And Mr. Gaston is going to take Don Dolor and the sleigh, and Margery is to show him Eden Valley." [251]

Happie sighed. "He thinks she shows him Eden no matter where she is. I suppose they will take the children? There are two seats," she said.

"Now, Happie! I don't suppose any such thing!" Gretta laughed aloud. "The second seat can be taken out."

"It wouldn't be proper for Margery to drive unchaperoned in town, but I suppose it doesn't matter here," said Happie gloomily.

"There weren't any chaperons in the Garden of Eden, and there won't be one in the Valley of Eden," said Gretta, buttoning her coat, and pulling on her gloves. "Miss Bradbury knows, Happie. Now I'm going down to Eunice's, and I'd just as lief go to a dentist, with a jumping nerve."

Gretta walked away with such stiff resolution that Happie knew she dared not let herself hesitate. When she had gone Happie went in quest of Miss Bradbury. She found her alone before the log fire, Laura being at the piano, the two least girls out in the kitchen with Rosie, the boys gone after their nuts and character study at Jake Shale's, and Margery and Robert departed to find Eden Valley.

Miss Keren was not inclined to talk. She sat looking into the fire, and Happie imagined a gently pensive mood upon her usually abrupt name donor. [252]

That day the noon dinner was to be done away with in favor of a mid-afternoon meal, and a tea served in the library shortly before bedtime.

Gretta came back with slow step, and clouded face.

"Never mind, Gretta dear, I knew you could not make anything of that material," whispered Happie, passing her on the stairs.

Gretta shook her head. "I thought I knew them but I didn't realize what they were when I was seeing them every day," she said.

Happie went off for a solitary walk, to renew alone and under winter conditions her acquaintance with some of her favorite nooks. The brook, especially, she wanted to see, as one can see a brook only by standing on its bank with the greenness of its summer setting replaced by snow and ice pushed high on either side and its waters flowing black in the contrast.

She was gone some time and came back peacefully happy. She stopped at yesterday's fort, and glanced in. There was Robert Gaston groping about the floor of the fort. He looked up, and sprang to his feet as he recognized her.

"Ah, dear little Happie!" he cried, to Happie's amazement. "I had a fountain pen yesterday, which has disappeared. I thought I might have dropped it here. But it doesn't matter. Happie, I have seen Bob since I came in, and he has made me welcome in my new rôle. I wanted to speak to you myself, for I'm afraid you aren't going to live fully up to your nickname. Will you take me for your brother, and love me a wee bit, as Margery's dearest sister should?" [253]

"Already? Now?" gasped Happie, looking up at him with horrified eyes.

"Dear Happie, Margery took me to Eden this morning," said Robert. "Before we came up here—the night of our theatre party—I asked your mother if I might ask Margery to—well, might ask her if some day she would be my wife. Your mother said yes, and now, this morning, Margery has said yes also. I am so happy, little Happie, that there is no way to describe my happiness. I'm afraid it is hard for you to share Margery with me, but will you try to be generous? And the best way to get at it is to be fond of me, if you can. Oh, Happie, don't, my dear!"

For Happie, as the full realization of what had taken place, and that her fears were fulfilled so much sooner than she had expected, and as Robert's caressing voice touched her emotionally, sat down on the snow floor of the fort and burying her face in her hands cried and cried.

"Is it I—no, I'm sure that you don't dislike me, Happie. We were friends at our very first meeting. Don't cry like this, Happie. It is dreadful. And don't sit on that cold snow——"

Robert had endured Happie's tears as long as he could, pacing the fort and looking desperately at her as she cried. To his surprise she interrupted him, sobbing out: "There—isn't anything but—cold snow here to sit on." [254]

He stared at her an instant, and then he laughed with great relief.

"Nothing like a sense of nonsense to tide one over hard places, Happiness! Come, get up then. If

there is nothing but cold snow to sit on, then sit on nothing! Happie, you're much too big-hearted a girl to grudge Margery her happiness, and she's happy to-day, as happy as I am! And please God I'll make her happy all her life—our pretty, sweet Margery!"

Happie liked that. She essayed to dry her eyes, and accepted the hand which Robert held out to raise her. "Oh, I won't be silly—if I can help it," she sighed. "I won't be mean and selfish, anyway, whether I can help it or not. It's only that Margery was waiting to be the dearest sister in the world when I was born, and I worship her, and I can't breathe without her. But if she has to marry I'm glad it's you; I'll say that. I meant to live with her always. I planned the dearest little house! If you're going to take her to Baltimore——"

Happie paused, her eyes tragic under the new apprehension.

"I'm not. I am going to enter a New York law office, and you shall never be separated from Margery," promised Robert. "Your hand, little sister, and say, 'Robert, I'll forgive you, and by and by I'll like you—for Margery's sake.'" [255]

Happie's lips still quivered, and her voice quivered still more, but she looked up with a pale smile making a supreme effort to acquit herself as Margery would have wished her to.

She put both hands into her new, almost-brother's, and said, "There isn't anything to forgive, and I like you now for your own sake, Robert."

"You dear little soul!" said Robert very sincerely. And he drew Happie's hand through his arm to take her to the house.

"It was appropriate for you to grant amnesty in the fort, Happie," he said, as he left her at the library door. [256]

---

## CHAPTER XVII

### JONES-DEXTER PRIDE

THE snow came down by four o'clock, soft, and as thick as if the dull gray sky of the day had been a blanket full of feathers of which some one had suddenly dropped the four corners. It was a snow-storm that began in the middle, not working up to severity, and Miss Keren felt forebodings of unbroken roads and difficult getting to the station on the following day.

In the meantime it was delightful to sit by the gray stone hearth, with the logs burning cheerfully and odorously, young voices chattering and laughing around her, feeling the white silence that wrapped the earth outside while within all was rosy and noisy.

Happie did not contribute greatly to the cheerful sounds. She sat, rather quiet, watching the flames, close to Aunt Keren's side, not sad but thoughtful.

Aunt Keren, glancing at her, thought that her girlish face looked older as well as more serious, pensive too, as if it were a maturing and sobering thing to know that one of the Scollards was actually betrothed.

Margery and Robert, on the other side of the hearth, were merry. Margery's face had a deeper sweetness of expression, the look of one who felt herself consecrated to something noble as well as blissful—which was precisely how one would have expected Margery to feel on the day of her betrothal. Margery was always serious, not the girl to make lightly a solemn promise. Robert had no room for any other feeling but light-hearted rapture. He talked gaily and steadily, till the hymn hour came. Laura went to the piano, and with the others still in their places around the hearth, played for them to sing hymn after hymn while the evening wore away. New logs had twice replaced the first ones, and supper hour struck. [257]

The entire party helped Rosie bring in the steaming chocolate, the foamy schmier-case, the white bread in its big slices, the delicious homemade butter, and the cake, so golden and perfect that Happie's layers of fudge between the yellow were almost intrusive.

"Isn't this great?" Robert demanded of no one in particular, stretching out his legs to the snapping fire, and receiving a large spark on his knee as a reward.

"Look out there! You have to watch that fire a little. I put in some pine sticks to hurry it a while," cried Rosie. "A big spark flew over across to where Dundee was layin' by the door there a coupler weeks ago and he'd have took fire on his tail if I hadn't happened to be in here."

Dundee, whose pleasure in getting his family back had been beautiful to behold, wagged the great plume of a tail in question and hitched himself along nearer to Bob, thrusting his nose into the empty hand on the boy's knee, as if to say: "I eat cake." Bob gave the collie a generous mouthful. It had no effect except to bring Dundee up one short hitch nearer, and Bob pulled his ear. [258]

"We don't want you cremated, you braw, bonny Scotsman you! But neither can I give you all my cake," he said. "I think this is great, brother Robert. We sat around the fire like this before we went away, for we stayed up till December, you know—or didn't Margery write you?"

"It's much nicer to eat supper this way than it is to have three proper meals a day. Everything tastes so especially good," said Margery, frowning at Bob.

"I always liked to eat a piece at night," said Rosie.

"'Eat a piece' means to take a light lunch, in Madison Countyese," Margery explained in a whisper to Robert.

"But Mahlon always wants to set up and eat—thinks he's gittin' more," Rosie continued. "The thinner a body is the more victuals he seems to eat. My days, I often think to myself it's a lucky thing buckwheat cakes is so indigestible. They give a body a chancet to git something done in the forenoon without havin' Mahlon in and out every coupler minutes askin' when a body's goin' to git dinner over."

"I've eaten a great many pieces—of bread, and cake, and jam," announced Snigs.

"We are going to bed early, dear children," said Aunt Keren. "It may be that we shall be obliged to take a morning train. We can't stay here until Tuesday, because of Bob's business, and the tea room, and I am told by Rosie and Gretta that the road to the station may be impassable by tomorrow afternoon if this snow keeps up. Will you all promise to waken early? All waken together, at the same moment, and waken one another?" [259]

"We solemnly swear," said Ralph, in a sepulchral voice. "That's just our kind of a pledge."

"It seems a pity to go to bed," said Happie. "We have had three such pleasant days——"

"That you want to sit up all night?" Miss Keren finished for her, with a hand on the second Keren-happuch's shoulder.

"It does seem a pity to shorten this blessed day," said Robert. "There never comes again the first day in Eden, you know."

He smiled down at Margery, who said: "If we go to sleep we can waken to the second day, and think how glad we shall be to find we had not dreamed to-day!"

"When this little girl's grandmother helped her husband to die, he told her that the last day was the happiest of their happy married life," said Miss Keren.

There was silence for a moment. Robert broke it by rising and saying gravely: "Sing one more hymn, and then good-night! Let's sing the splendid old long metre doxology, the Old Hundredth. I think there's nothing quite like it when you feel no end grateful and not fit to have half you've got." [260]

"Let me play it, for I can't sing," said Miss Keren unexpectedly.

She took Laura's place and played the glorious old choral. The fresh young voices' sang with heart in them, and the harmony rose up the fireplace of the old Ark and floated out from the chimney upon the snow-storm, blanketing the once desolate house with beauty and warmth, symbolical of its interior change.

"Now, good-night, Miss Keren. You ought to have good nights and happy days, for you've made us all happy," said Robert.

"Good-night, children. Remember your promise to waken early!" said Miss Keren. "Happie, come to my room for a while. I want you."

The Archaics fulfilled their promise and aroused early. They wakened to a world in which only the higher objects survived. The snow had fallen steadily all night, fences were gone, shrubs stood huddled in shapeless obtrusion above the fields, and roads were not—a uniformly undefined surface made road and stonerow equal.

"Snowbound, by John G. Whittier!" exclaimed Bob coming into the dining room. He used the Quaker poet's name as if it were an affirmatory oath.

---



**"BOB, GRETTA AND DON DOLOR  
BROKE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE  
SNOW"**

"Nothing of the sort, Bob!" cried Happie. "We can't be snowbound, not by anybody—not even by snow. We must get to the station—don't you think we can?" she added with an anxious change of tone. [261]

"I think if we must—and you are right that we must—we ought to start this morning," said Bob. "If this began to drift all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't get us through it. And knowing Crestville, it is safe to 'look for wind about this time,' as the almanacs say."

"Aunt Keren is ready to leave on the 11:26, if it is better," said Happie. "You will have to drive down to Jake's to let him know. And, oh, Bob, sit with me going down, for I've something to tell you, and I can't wait—besides they would all hear if I told you in the Patty-Pans."

"I shall consider myself engaged for the final act. If I'm going down to Shale's, I must take a sort of lunch counter breakfast and start. And I'm going to get Gretta to 'go along,' as they say here. I'll go talk to Aunt Keren and find out if she wants me to go."

Bob went off whistling "The stormy winds do blow, blow, blow," and Happie ran to meet Margery, whom she did treat, as Ralph said, "as if she were damaged and liable to drop into nothing before her eyes."

Bob, Gretta and Don Dolor broke their way through the heavy snow, not yet drifted, and fetched back Jake Shale's Aaron, with the blue sled and the Kuntz horses, to take the Archaics to the station. Already the wind was lightly stirring; by afternoon there would be impassable drifts, very possibly, between the Ark and the station. [262]

Rosie bade them all a gruff good-bye, but it was not a dismal one, for in a little more than two months, in May, the Scollards would come back, all of them as they supposed, not knowing what changes were awaiting them.

Mahlon swung his arm and leg together in his usual feeble-minded fashion, but the boys chose to construe it this time as a farewell.

"Yes, ta-ta, Mahlon. Good-bye! Shake a day-day back again to Mahlon, Penny!" said Ralph with his solemn face unsmiling as he waved his hand to Mahlon, a salute that Rosie took to herself and returned with a waving apron.

In the train the party no longer divided evenly, augmented as it was by Miss Bradbury. Gretta joined her, after glancing around and seeing that Bob had dropped into a seat with Happie, at a little distance from any of the others. Happie wondered if she imagined Gretta's face fell ever so slightly as she saw that her companion of the journey up had failed her. Sometimes Happie fancied that Gretta liked to be with Bob as well as she liked to be with Happie herself. She wondered if at some future day when handsome Gretta had grown into a splendid and well-educated woman, Bob might—she shook herself mentally. "Just now she is fifteen! This is what comes of Margery's getting herself engaged so young. I am beginning to be silly about all of us— [263]



the others." Happie quickly corrected this slip in the thoughts she was thinking. Perhaps Ralph's slender gold bangle of Christmas came down over her hand at that moment to remind her to except herself from her dreams of the future.

"Now then, Hapsie, let her go! What is this that you want to tell me?" asked Bob, bringing her to the immediate present.

"Aunt Keren called me into her room last night," began Happie. "Bob, she said a good deal that I don't know how to repeat. She told me in the Patty-Pans, some three or four weeks ago, why she cares for us as she does. We are her children, because—it is a dear story, and I'd like to tell it to you nicely, but you can't in a car! She met our grandfather before grandma did, and she thought he was going to care for her, but grandma came, and it was she he loved. And the two girls each cared most for the other to be happy. But it was grandma who married, and dear auntie who didn't. They were devoted friends always, you know. Aunt Keren feels as though mother were her very own, because she was not only her two dear friends' child, but if grandpa had cared most for auntie she would have been auntie's daughter, not grandma's. So, she says, we are her nearest of kin. She wants to adopt me legally, so that there will be no chance of some very horrid nieces breaking her will when she leaves me nearly all her money, by and by. I never told you about those nieces calling and being perfectly outrageous up at the Patty-Pans. I didn't tell even mother. Aunt Keren wants me to have most of her money when she dies. And she wants us to give up the Patty-Pans, and let her take a house somewhere, and come to live with her. We are to come up to Crestville for the summer, and in the autumn she wants us to begin this new plan. Of course I was not to decide it, we shall all have to talk it over together, and it will be as mother says, but that is Aunt Keren's desire. It took my breath away."

[264]

"I should rather say so!" exclaimed Bob with a low whistle. "Why, Hap, I never heard such a story, so full of several surprises! you to be legally adopted? And to be an heiress? Has Aunt Keren much money? We all thought her poor."

"Yes, she has a good deal, she says. I don't know how much. I never thought to ask—to wonder, I mean; of course I wouldn't ask about it," said Happie. "I wanted to talk about this to you alone first, because you always were my Rock of Gibraltar, Bobby. Besides, I never know what I think about anything until I talk about it, then I find I have unexpected opinions, for I begin to express them."

The brother and sister talked over Aunt Keren's amazing announcement all the way down to Hoboken, which they reached sooner than any of the others, in a sense, owing to the absorbing interest of their topic. The train was late, impeded by the snow. It was five o'clock before the party reached the Patty-Pans.

[265]

They found Mrs. Gordon watching for them with the door of her flat open and Jeunesse Dorée, whom she looked after during the day while he was deserted, in her arms.

"Oh, Ralph, I'm so glad you are here at last!" cried his mother. "I was so relieved when I got Miss Bradbury's telegram this morning saying you would take the earlier train! Dear people, the most wonderful thing has happened! Mrs. Jones-Dexter, my unfortunate Aunt Lucinda, has been here this morning."

"Cæsar's ghost! What for?" cried Ralph. But Margery instantly guessed.

"Serena's ill!" cried Margery.

"Serena is ill," assented Mrs. Gordon. "Poor little Serena is desperately ill, so ill that you must not take off your coat, Ralph, but must go down to the Jones-Dexter house as fast as you can. I only hope you may be in time. The poor little blossom has been begging for you, for her 'kind big boy,' for 'Ralph,' but she did not know any other name for you, and Aunt Lucinda was frantic because she did not know where to find you, while the Scollards were gone. She would do anything to gratify little Serena at any time, but how when she is so ill, it might make a great deal of difference, affect her recovery, if her wishes could be granted. Mrs. Jones-Dexter remembered that the Charlefords might know who Happie's friends were, so she went to them. Mrs. Charleford did know who you were, and told her, Ralph. Then, putting under foot her bitterness of so many years' standing, and her Jones-Dexter pride, the unhappy old lady came here this morning to beg us to take pity on little Serena and send you to her. And she found you gone! Needless to say I promised that you should go to her house the moment you arrived. So go at once, Ralph dear, and stay as long as you are helpful and do all that you can for the child. Strange, that she has taken this violent fancy to her distant and unknown cousin! Hurry, dear Ralph. If you comfort Serena stay, but send me a message if you find you can't come home to-night."

[266]

Ralph went away at once. Robert said good-night, and accompanied him. The Scollards closed their door and went into the Patty-Pans feeling that their holiday was indeed over, and that events were rolling up around them faster than an incoming tide. For Margery had come home betrothed, Happie in demand for a legal adoption, and now here was Ralph summoned to the sick bed of his little third cousin, with a family reconciliation and all sorts of possible good results looming up ahead through the mediation of the child. It was saddening to think of little Serena lying dangerously ill, her flower-like little body a prey to fever and to pain. The girls would not think of the other possibility at which Mrs. Gordon had hinted—that Ralph might come too late.

But Laura reveled in grief and fully realized that here was an opportunity. She immediately took possession of the piano, and while Margery and Gretta busied themselves with the household duties involved in a return after a three days' absence, and Happie, with a sober face, went out to

[267]

the delicatessen shop to supplement the deficiencies of their larder, Laura played dismal music, at the same time composing words for it. Tears of distress rained down her face while she artistically steeped herself in misery of the keenest painful enjoyment, because she was "making little Serena's funeral hymn," she said.

The announcement was too much for Polly. That good little girl, who rarely was cross and never in a passion, flew into one now under the stress of feeling far too strong for her.

"It's not her funeral hymn! Stop that horrid playing Laura Scollard!" she screamed, throwing down Phyllis Lovelocks, her beloved doll, with such violence that the petted creature must have been amazed. "Serena isn't going to have a funeral! She shan't die. I love her, I love her! She's the dearest of all the dancing school children. Stop, Laura! Laura, stop! It's just like a—just like a—just like a *cannibal*, to do what you're doing, that awful music and those horrid, horrid words!"

Polly's voice had risen to an hysterical shriek, and Margery flew in to calm her.

"Really, Laura, I agree with Polly," she said, gathering the excited child in her arms. "Please don't regard everything as an opportunity for your talents. It may be artistic, but it seems somewhat inhuman." [268]

It was after ten that night when Ralph came home. His mother and Snigs were waiting for him in the Scollard flat. A message had told them that there was no hope of Serena's living till midnight, and that he would return before many hours.

He came at last, a very tired, solemn-looking Ralph, to whom Margery, Happie and Gretta brought hot chocolate and sandwiches, and to whom Mrs. Scollard gave the most comfortable chair.

"I'm not hungry, thanks, Happie," said Ralph. "Yes, I'm glad of the chocolate, Gretta; it's cold out. My little new-found cousin is dead. Poor baby! She looked so frail and sweet. She was a dear little creature. She seemed touchingly glad to see me. She was restless, and I carried her up and down the room, and through the other rooms on that floor until just before—the end. Her grandmother had told her that I was coming, and that I was her cousin. She was very loving. She seemed to be delighted that I was hers, that she had a claim on me. She kissed me and patted my cheek when she could no longer see. Well—we'd better not talk about Serena. I am awfully sorry for Mrs. Jones-Dexter. The child was the one soft spot, the one devotion of her wilful life. Every one else she intended to compel to live for her, but she lived for Serena, and lived IN her. She is an old, broken-down woman to-night. She talked to me in a way that was pretty hard for a boy like me to hear from a woman of her age, but I knew she was crushed under this blow, and that it made her feel better to talk, so I sat still. She wants us to forgive her, mother. And she wants something else. Serena asked her to take care of 'Ralphy' once to-night while I was walking with her, and she said, 'I will do anything for Ralph that he will let me do.' While she was talking to me she told me that she felt as if little Serena had given me to her, in a sense. And she reminded me that she was your own aunt, mother. She begs me to allow her to settle an income on me during her life. It would have been more if it had been given to Serena, she said, but this will be Serena's gift to me. She said—with just a glimpse of her old manner—that she knew we needed money, she had seen our Harlem flat this morning! I hesitated, because I didn't want to take it, mother, and I thought that you wouldn't want it either, and when she saw that I was trying to say no gently, she almost went on her knees to me. It really was awful. She begged me not to be hard on her, to punish her for all her cruel, wilful life—that was what she called it. She said the Jones-Dexter pride had cost her all that made life worth living, and how God had stricken her in her old age. She said I had no right to refuse her a slender comfort, I in whose arms little Serena had died. Little Serena, all that she had! It would go hard with me one day, as it was going hard with her now, if I, with my life all before me, was cruel to an old woman. Mercy on us, you don't know what it was to hear her, and I couldn't speak to tell her that she had misunderstood. As though I wanted to keep up a row that was never mine, nor mother's either, for that matter! Finally she broke down from sheer exhaustion, and then I made her understand that I was not quite the proud, headstrong fellow she thought, and that I would take the gift if mother would allow me to, and that I hoped I might be some comfort to her because my little cousin had loved me. And at last I got away. Talk about pride! If any one could have seen that poor, broken, stiff-necked old lady to-night, desolate, all alone through her own fault, her son dead whom she had quarreled with and driven away, and now this flower-like little idol of her last years dead up-stairs, I think if he were tempted to pride the sight of the Jones-Dexter pride in the dust would humble him! I don't want to go through another such scene. When Serena lay in my arms, gasping, dying, so gentle, so affectionate, I cried like a baby—I don't mind owning it. But it was a sweet sort of grief; the dear little creature seemed so safe and peaceful when we laid her on the pillows at last. But desolate old age, and a proud old woman crushed, that's another sort of pathos." [269]

The circle around him had listened to Ralph without once interrupting him. No one there had ever seen him so stirred and carried beyond his American-boyish self-consciousness and false shame under emotion. [270]

"Dear Ralph, this child's death seems like a providence to soften her hard grandmother. By and by she will be more at peace, if not happier, that Serena left her," said Mrs. Gordon. "Ralph, does this gift help you to college, dear?" [271]

"It would more than solve our problem, mother. If we take the allowance our troubles are over," said Ralph.

"You must take it, of course," said Miss Keren quickly. "No one but a brute would refuse that poor soul a chance to make some amends before she dies, and to feel that she still is doing something

for Serena."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Gordon quietly. "It would be cruel to Aunt Lucinda, and not fair to Ralph to refuse it. Little Serena's love will work him immense good. Margery, dear, this was your bringing about."

"I hoped for something, but I did not foresee this," said Margery through her tears.

[272]

---

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A SIEGESLIED

ALL the remaining force of winter had gathered itself together in the snow-storm in which Miss Bradbury's party had left Crestville. When the storm was over the sun came out with such warmth that the streets ran in rivulets before the snow could be shoveled into carts, and people paddled about in rubbers hardly high enough, but with furs swinging well back on over-burdened shoulders.

Spring was anticipating the equinoxial date by nearly two weeks, and more than the disturbance of spring unrest was in the air.

Miss Bradbury was eagerly pressing her claim to a home of her own, a house which could be possible only as Mrs. Scollard consented to share it with her, and which should take the place of Miss Keren's own destroyed apartment and of the Patty-Pans.

"By and by Margery will be married," Miss Keren reminded her adopted family. "When that day comes there won't be room in the Patty-Pans for her to make the promises! And Happie must grow up into her own place in the world, the place to which she was born. You can't entertain in the Patty-Pans. I need you and you need me, Charlotte. I want you to let me legally adopt Happie as my heir, and I want you to bring your children into a house which shall be equally the home of us all. I don't see how you *can* hesitate! I could be happy as I never was in all my life before. It has been my lifelong dream to share a home and have a family—how *can* you hesitate, Charlotte?"

[273]

But Mrs. Scollard hesitated. The advantages to her little brood were so great in this arrangement, the consequences of the experiment's ending badly, if thus it should end, would be so tragic, that she dared not agree to the tempting proposal until she had weighed it long and carefully.

While it pended, the unsettled feeling of spring made the Patty-Pans its headquarters.

"I never felt so queer and upset in all my life!" Happie declared to Gretta. "I feel as though I were a thin muslin gown hung out in a very high wind by only one clothes pin—I can't tell what minute, nor where I'm going to drop."

Gretta laughed. "As long as you see nothing but soft grass all around, it doesn't matter much," she said.

There was no little excitement in the flat across the hall during these days of untimely warmth. The Gordons had been to see Mrs. Jones-Dexter by special invitation. Mrs. Gordon dreaded going on one ground, and remembered the visit painfully on another. It had seemed formidable to call on an aunt whom she had never known except by forbidding repute, but it was almost worse to find that stern person crushed, pathetically eager to make amends for the bitterness she had sown and fostered, and to do for Ralph all that lay in her power. The boy stood to her less as her grandnephew than as the legacy of little Serena, the "kind big boy" in whose strong arms her frail life had ended.

[274]

Another visit had followed the first one, in which Mrs. Gordon and her elder boy were bidden to meet Mrs. Jones-Dexter's lawyers, to receive the principal which Mrs. Jones-Dexter had set aside for Serena's maintenance. The interest of this money would enable Ralph to go through college without a care as to his expenses, and next year he would enter Columbia.

Ralph had been ready to face the self-denials, the effort of working his way through the four years that lay ahead of him, but it was not a little thing suddenly to be freed from this necessity. It meant a great deal to the mother and to both boys, and the flat across from the Patty-Pans was full of grateful excitement as the March days went by in which these important happenings were perfecting.

Easter fell on an early date that year, and little Mrs. Stewart was busy preparing for her spring exhibition. More than the languor of spring was in the delicate little woman's eye and carriage. Lassitude that was rather mental than bodily weariness was betrayed by her every motion. She came oftener into the tea room in the morning and Margery and she became great friends. The young girl's confident happiness drew the older woman to her, and she won Margery to talk of her hopes and plans. It was not hard for Margery to see that she listened to them much as one reads and re-reads a poem that brings the tears which comfort in their shedding.

[275]

Mrs. Stewart did not return Margery's confidences on her own young romance by the story of her unhappy life, nor did she precisely withhold such confidence. By a word here and there the girls learned that the little dancing mistress with the lovely face and gracious manners, was one of those pathetic creatures, a lady cut off from her proper setting in life, deprived of the support

that should have been hers and without which she was peculiarly unfitted to exist. Physically and instinctively Mrs. Stewart was ill-adapted to combat the world. Margery knew without being told in so many words, that the little dancing mistress' husband had been a German, an extraordinary musician who had given up, for his art's sake, his family, which was one among the lesser nobility of the Fatherland. But she knew also that he had selfishly sacrificed to his music the frail American wife he had married after coming to the United States, and that in some manner that Margery did not understand, he had neglected her, been cruel to her, and that his one child had died because the heart-broken mother could not give him what he required.

Margery's heart went out to Mrs. Stewart more than ever when this story had been learned piecemeal. She and Happie discussed it night after night when they should have been asleep. Happie was enraged by it and pointed out to Margery the dangers of marriage, but Margery wept over it without so much indignation. She could not help pitying the man who had been guilty of thus wronging such a lovable creature as Mrs. Stewart. Both girls wondered, but never discovered, whether he were alive or dead. Margery felt sure he must be dead, or he would have returned, but Happie was equally certain that he was alive, basing her opinion on the general feeling that an out-and-out wretch is likely to be long for this world. [276]

One thing was clear: if her husband had been a German Mrs. Stewart's name could not be Stewart. What, then, was it? It was most interesting, and rather exciting, to feel that they knew the heroine of a pathetic story, a story that included an *incognita* for its heroine!

In the meantime this heroine was preparing for the Eastertide exhibition of her school. Little Serena's death cast a shade of melancholy over the remaining weeks. Mistress and pupils alike, missed and mourned the exquisite little child whose pretty ways had pervaded every hour of the winter. Serena was to have danced the solo dance, and now the honor was to be Penny's. Penny was beside herself with delight. There hardly could have been a sharper contrast to ethereal Serena than Penny was, Penny, all color and life and decision. She danced well, with animation, gaiety, abandonment, to the pleasure of the moment. Serena had danced like the milkweed silk to which Laura had compared her, floatingly, dreamily, as if swayed by the breeze. Dear little white Serena, who had floated away as softly as the milkweed floats heavenward in the soft winds of September! [277]

The tea room seemed to be more popular than it had been during the winter, now that the warm days made people weary, ready to rest and to sip tea on the slightest pretext. The girls were so much interested in the preparations up-stairs that it was a trial to them to be kept from slipping up to the rehearsals. Only Laura contrived to go, no matter how busy they were in the tea room. It was Laura's way to do precisely what she pleased, though the sky fell.

It was the Wednesday after Easter, and the exhibition was to be on Friday afternoon. Polly and Penny were up-stairs with Mrs. Stewart, having come down with the older girls that morning for the last rehearsal of their dances. The tea room was unusually full for a forenoon. Gretta and Happie were flying about, while Margery was patiently discussing novels with a succession of people who wanted to borrow—not merely a book from the shelves, but guidance from the Six Maidens as to their choice. It was somewhat trying to be forced to meet book talk so early in the morning, to match adjective with adjective, and to respond interestedly to commonplaces. Margery acquitted herself perfectly, but Happie caught her eye and nearly upset her with the gleam in her own, as, passing, she heard a lady declare for modern writers in preference to mid-Victorian novelists—"Thackeray and Dickens were so tiresome!" she said. [278]

Herr Lieder came in just then, and Happie surprised herself by hailing him with sincere pleasure. He wore his great coat thrown far back because of the heat, but he atoned for this by having his hat more than ever drooping over his face. A look of gloom, beyond the ordinary, he wore, and he went straight to the piano as if for that only he were there.

Laura followed him, inevitably. He threw down hat and cloak tragically, and seated himself without a morning salutation to his "little Clara Schumann."

Bending over the keys he sat in silence for a few moments, then he began to play Chopin's Marche Funèbre, played it as it is rarely played, until the awful throbs of the first theme seemed to his hearers like the suffocating beating of their own hearts.

As he ended his head fell forward again upon his breast, and Laura, turning to him with her face as pale as emotion could make it, cried: "Herr Lieder, Herr Lieder, don't play—like that!"

Hans Lieder glanced at her. "This is the third of April. Fourteen years ago to-day my only child was born," he said. [279]

"Is he dead?" Laura managed to ask.

"He is dead, through my own fault. Even Chopin could not express the despair this day brings to me. I have no right to be here, but this piano is so like my own, and I was so miserable that I rose up, and came," said this strange man. His hands on the keys wandered into more of Chopin's despairing music, and Laura did not venture to protest, though it suffocated her with a sense of misery that she could not understand.

Up-stairs little Mrs. Stewart was in despair of another sort. Again her pianist had failed her. She knew no way out of her difficulty except once more to appeal to Laura for help. She disliked to do this, knowing that the little girl was needed in the tea room. Polly eagerly offered her sister's aid, and volunteered to go down to fetch her, but Mrs. Stewart said that if she must bother her dear little neighbors she would go herself to explain matters, and so it came about that she went.

As she came lightly down the stairs the music of Herr Lieder's making came towards her. At first

she heard it indistinctly, but as she proceeded it reached her ears plainly, and she stopped. Her hand pressed her side and her lips parted.

"No one else ever played like that, played THAT like that!" she murmured half aloud. With hardly a pause, as the Nocturne ended Hans Lieder had passed into the Rondo of Beethoven's Sonata Pathétique. The little dancing mistress groaned. [280]

"Oh, I mustn't listen! It is the day that makes me imaginative. It is the Herr Lieder of whom the children have told me! But I have never been reminded of his playing before——" She shook herself together, proceeded down the few remaining stairs, and went around to the rear door that opened on the hall, entering the tea room by that way.

Her face was so ghastly white that Gretta, turning from the gas stove on which she was making tea, set down the teapot she held and sprang towards her.

"Mrs. Stewart! Are you sick?" she cried.

"No, not at all; only tired," replied Mrs. Stewart. "Gretta, are you very busy here this morning? My pianist has not come, and I wanted to beg Laura to take pity on me again. But if you can't spare her say so honestly, and I'll slip back the way I came without speaking to Margery or Hap—— Gretta, who is playing?"

She stopped herself so abruptly, turning, if possible, paler than before as Herr Lieder drifted into a heart breaking little Russian song, that Gretta was frightened.

"That is Herr Lieder, who plays for us sometimes, plays so wonderfully," she said. "We are busy, Mrs. Stewart, but I am sure we can get on very well without Laura. When Herr Lieder plays she is no use anyway. Come through with me to the front, and speak to the girls." [281]

Gretta led the way through "the portière that hung between the tea and the room," as Happie had once said. She heard a sound like a sob that was half a stifled cry, and turned to see Mrs. Stewart fallen back against the wall, her hands clutching her throat, her wide eyes staring at Herr Lieder with indescribable terror.

Gretta's little teapot fell to the floor with a crash as she sprang to catch the swaying woman. But Mrs. Stewart was not swooning. She pushed Gretta away with both hands as the girl came between her and the piano, at which she still gazed with fixed, dilated eyes.

The breaking china and Gretta's exclamation as she turned back to Mrs. Stewart, drew towards them every one's attention. Margery and Happie hastened to Gretta's assistance and the ladies grouped about at the different tables pushed back their chairs, or arose, ready to offer help.

The stir reached Herr Lieder at the piano. He glanced over his shoulder carelessly, not interested in tea room events. Margery was between him and a clear sight of Mrs. Stewart, but as he turned away again Margery moved to one side, and he hastily looked a second time at the little dancing teacher standing motionless with her hands still clasping her throat, her white face thrown into relief against the dark red curtain. [282]

Herr Lieder leaped to his feet, overturning the piano stool. He, too, stood motionless, staring at that white face which stared at him. He began to shake in every muscle of his tall figure. Then one long-fingered, thin hand reached out and clutched frightened Laura's arm, though Herr Lieder's eyes did not waver from the eyes that held them across the room. He twice tried to speak but failed. Then he whispered hoarsely: "Wer ist—who is that?"

"Mrs. Stewart"—Laura had begun, when Mrs. Stewart sprang forward with a cry that brought all to their feet and made them fall away to allow her passage. "Gaspar!" she screamed, and fell fainting at the feet of the mysterious Herr Lieder. The tall man stooped and tried to raise her, but he was himself in too much need of support to accomplish it. Gretta came to help him with her strong young arms, and several ladies present, who were immensely excited at finding themselves witnesses to a drama they did not understand, in turn helped Gretta, and between them they got Mrs. Stewart into a great chair.

"Where am I to take her? We cannot stay here among so many," asked Herr Lieder abruptly.

"Her own rooms are above this," said Happie. "But the children are there for a rehearsal. I don't know——"

"She has her living rooms above that. Do you forget, Happie?" suggested Margery. "We will carry her there. I will tell her pupils that Mrs. Stewart has been suddenly taken ill, and dismiss them. Let us get her up-stairs before she becomes conscious; it will be easier for her. You are her husband, Herr Lieder?" [283]

"You have guessed right, Miss Scollard. I am her husband who never expected to see her face again—nor deserved to, nor deserved to! I am Gaspar von Siegeslied." Herr Lieder turned away from Margery with a groan, but he turned to little Mrs. Stewart as she lay unconscious in the chair and took her up in his arms, the expression of his face plainly declaring that if he had neither expected nor deserved to see his wife again, he had hungrily longed to see her.

Margery and Gretta went with Herr Lieder—Herr von Siegeslied—to do what they could for his wife, leaving Happie and Laura disturbed beyond all possibility of tea room duties being properly attended to for the rest of that morning.

It was more than an hour before Margery and Gretta came down. In the meantime Polly and Penny had arrived, disappointed by Margery's announcement that there was to be no rehearsal that day, and full of eager questions as to Mrs. Stewart's sudden illness. "Because, Happie, it

really might make it seem as if the tea room had something unhealthy in its tea," said Polly solemnly. "She came down here to get Laura to play, and she was perfectly well. And then she came back too ill to come back—I mean she had to send Margery to dismiss us. I hoped the girls wouldn't think anything." [284]

"I'll attend to that dark green lady," said Gretta when she and Margery came back. "You let Margery tell you about it. It's more wonderful than finding grandmother's will in the Bittenbender trunk! Polly will help me. I suppose Laura will have to hear what Margery tells you."

"Come over in the corner, Hapsie and Laura," said Margery breathlessly. "I must make it short, because there's so much to do here. Mrs. Stewart—Mrs. von Siegeslied—is all right now; she won't be ill. Just to think that this mysterious Hans Lieder has been coming and coming here because that piano which Mrs. Stewart—his wife, I mean—left here reminded him so much of his own! And it was his own! And he had no idea what had become of her, and there she was right above his head all this time! And to-day is their little boy's birthday, and she came down—never came once before when he was here!—and they met. I never can tell you just what happened when she came out of that swoon. It was the loveliest, most painful scene—Gretta and I cried with them both. But Herr Lieder is plainly as sorry as he can be for the wrong he has done, and she is so glad to see him again that I don't believe she knows he has ever done wrong—yes, she does! She knows it just enough to rejoice more in his return! Women are like angels; they are more glad of one sinner that repents than of ninety-nine who need no repentance." [285]

"Would you rather Robert were just reforming from something awful?" inquired Happie.

"Girls like stainless heroes," retorted Margery with a tiny laugh. "Wait till I'm a woman, Happie! No, I shall always be thankful for Robert's goodness. But our dear little lady up-stairs is in ecstasy at being able to forgive her husband, that's plain. Gretta and I felt dreadfully at being present when Mrs. Stewart opened her eyes and saw that her husband actually was there. She thought it could not be true. But we need not have minded, for neither of them remembered us. We sat and cried and held on to each other quite unnoticed. After a while the two von Siegeslieds were able to talk rationally. Mr. von Siegeslied told his wife that he had succeeded to the family estate and title—he's a baron, it seems—because his elder brother was dead, but that he had felt no desire to go to Germany. He had no heart, he said, for life anywhere. But here where he had lost knowledge of his wife, and where she must be, if she still lived, he would rather linger. He had enough to maintain him, he said; his wants were few, his tastes simple. But now that he had found her, he cried, he would go back to Germany and live among his own people, resume his own name, give her the place and the comforts that should have been hers. Then he remembered us, and he turned to us with his face transfigured. You never could imagine our mysterious and rather fearful Hans Lieder looking like that! 'Margery!' he said. 'It has all come about through your fortunate little tea room. There is no more a Hans Lieder to play for you. In his stead behold the Herr Baron von Siegeslied. Is it not suitable, little maid, that I should be resuming my own name and that it means a *song of victory*? Soon there will be no Baron von Siegeslied, either, to play for you, nor any longer your Mrs. Stewart so bravely to fight her hard battle alone, teaching the little ones on top of your heads.' He grew more German, Happie, as he grew more excited. 'We are rich people now, little maid, and people of consequence in the Fatherland. Will you allow us to wait on your mother at your home to beg of her a great favor? I want her to lend me my little Clara Schumann. She will trust her Laura to my wife, the best, the saintliest, the sweetest of women! I want to take Laura with me to Germany, into my own home, and I want to give her the musical education that shall prepare her to use the talent God has given her.'" [286]

Margery paused and looked at Laura who gazed at her blankly, silently for a moment as if she could not understand. Then the color rushed to her face and she began to tremble. "Me? Me to go to Germany? To study music? He wants me?" she screamed.

"Hush-sh, sh!" whispered Margery laying her hand on Laura's arm to quiet her, with her eyes on Happie's eyes questioningly. "Yes, dear, he wants to take you away for a long, long time, to train you as he thinks you should be trained. It is a serious proposition, but Mrs. Stew—von Siegeslied is so lovely that perhaps mother will be willing. Isn't it amazing, Happie? What do you say?" [287]

Happy looked totally unable to say half she thought or felt. "I don't believe Laura will ever be good for anything else," she said sincerely. "And it is too good an offer to refuse—Mrs. Stewart being herself, and a woman to whom mother would trust Laura."

"If I went," said Laura speaking rapidly and only half articulately in her excitement, "I would do everything Mrs. von Siegeslied bade me, and be far better than I was here to deserve it. Girls, you don't know what it means! Don't let mamma say no! Beg for me to be allowed to go." [288]

---

## CHAPTER XIX

### PATTY-PANS NO MORE

"IT is such an important decision! I make it, but I instantly unmake it. It is hard to trust a little thirteen years old girl to go away from us all to Germany!" exclaimed Mrs. Scollard. Her voice was full of anxiety and her eyes were troubled. It was the last minute; they were expecting the von Siegeslieds every instant to receive the answer to their offer to take Laura to be educated in music. Her mother had decided for and against it many times in the two days in which the

family had discussed it. The last decision had been that Laura was to go, but now, with the footfall of Laura's abductor audible, in imagination, on the stairs, once more her mother found herself reverting to the impossibility of giving consent.

Laura had betaken herself to her room and to tears, entirely unable to see her hopes wavering.

"It isn't as though Laura were good for anything else, motherums," repeated Happie. She kept coming back to this argument, which was not meant unkindly, though it had rather that ring. It struck her as a sound argument, for Laura being created especially for music it must be right to fall into line with this opportunity to develop her.

"Charlotte, my dear," Aunt Keren began patiently, for the unnumbered time. "I have known little Mrs. Stew—von Siegeslied a great while, and you know that I would not let one of our children go away in untried hands. She will train Laura up just as you would have done. As to her husband, don't you think that a man who has suffered bitterly from giving himself over to the selfishness of genius will be a good corrective to our little girl's inclination to selfishness, and to counting her art more than her heart? We all know what he is as a musical guide. And as to the obligation, Mr. von Siegeslied has set his heart on taking Laura. It will really be a favor to him to let him have the girl to train, and, while his wife would rather steal Happie, or Polly or Penny, still she will rejoice in having any one of the little Scollards to bring young girlhood into her home. Once more, Charlotte, while I shrink from the responsibility of a decision, still some one must take it, and I strongly advise you to ship your third girl to Germany." [289]

Bob whistled "Die Wacht am Rhein" under his breath, absent-mindedly. His mother turned appealing eyes on him, and just then the bell rang.

"Sie sind da gewesen—sein!" Bob ended triumphantly, after a breath's hesitation on the possibility of another form of the verb, acting on the serviceable German conviction that the more terminal verbal forms the better. German was not Bob's strong point. "There they are, motherums! Well, I say let Laura go. She'll never make a commonplace, domestic, old fashioned girl, like Margery, Happie and Polly—Penny, too, when she gets big enough, so let's try her in the big world. I don't believe one of your girls could turn out much awry, or for long. Transport her, motherums!" [290]

"Yes, mother, it seems to be for the best," agreed Margery, her eyes reflecting the anxiety in her mother's as they met.

Then Polly opened the door, and Mr. and Mrs. von Siegeslied came in. Mrs. Stewart was changed in more than name. Years had dropped from her shoulders, her face was radiant. And could this be the mysterious, shadowy Herr Lieders? The Herr Baron von Siegeslied overflowed with charm. The gloom had vanished from his eyes and mouth. In repose his face still looked life-worn, but joy and peace had taken the place of his morosely forbidding look.

Penny watched his greetings of the older members of her family from across the room, and came over to lean on his knee and express her sense of this change with the freedom of her age. "If you'd looked like this and been Mr. von Siegeslied at first we'd never been afraid of you," she said.

"So! And you were afraid of me!" Mr. von Siegeslied laughed. "Laura was not. Laura knew me in music, but Happie did better—Happie pitied me, didn't you, Fräulein Glückliche?"

Happie looked guilty. "Not at first," she murmured, embarrassed.

"When can Laura be ready to sail? You are going to let us have her?" said Mrs. von Siegeslied. [291]

"Listen to the voice of destiny—I am Destiny," said Miss Keren before Mrs. Scollard could speak. "Mrs. Scollard has had so much to do to make up her mind that when she got it made up she didn't know it—like some one who had bought a blue gown that proved to be green when it was made and worn. She has decided to lend you Laura, that much is settled. Laura, girl!" she expostulated, for Laura had jumped up and whirled around, and then rushed from the room in a tempest of hysterical rejoicing. Miss Keren shook her head. "It is a good deal to undertake, to bring forward the musician and keep in check the emotional girl," she said. "Well, for the rest there are some things which I have decided for Mrs. Scollard. I have taken a house in one of the Fiftieth streets and while she has been hesitating I have taken for granted that she is coming to live in it. There is a family that I want to bring here, into the Patty-Pans; another little widow, Charlotte, but this one has only two girl children. If you don't mind, she will take the remainder of your lease off your hands. We shall move your furniture into the new house, but not try to put anything in order till the autumn, when we return. When must Laura be ready to sail, Mrs. von Siegeslied?"

"We should like to sail on the steamer that leaves New York a week from next Tuesday," said Mr. von Siegeslied apologetically. "It must seem hurried to you, but having decided to return I can hardly wait to get into my own home." [292]

"And the tea room?" cried Margery and Happie together. Their absorbing interest in Laura's going away had driven all recollection of the tea room from their minds until that moment.

"My lease of that building expires in May. Perhaps you can re-rent from its next tenant," said Mrs. von Siegeslied.

"The tea room has fulfilled its end. It is suitable that it should end with that fulfilment," said Miss Keren decidedly. "Neither Mrs. Scollard nor I would care to have the girls down there without you over their heads—like a sort of guardian angel, little Frau von Siegeslied." [293]

"Laura going, the Patty-Pans given up, a new house taken, the tea room abolished—why, it's like an earthquake!" cried Happie.

"I am breathless!" cried Mrs. Scollard at last. "Why are we out in this cyclone of events?"

"But they are all favorable breezes, motherums!" cried Happie with a reassuring pat. Laura came back just then with such an uplifted look on her face that her own family hardly knew her. She went straight to her mother and put both her hands into the warm ones that clasped them as if they would hold the child, even now.

"I solemnly promise to obey Mrs. von Siegeslied precisely as I would you," began Laura impressively. "I solemnly promise to write to you every day a journal of all I do and think, and mail it to you each week. I solemnly promise to work as hard as I can to be as great a musician as Herr von Siegeslied thinks I can be. Because I am glad, glad, GLAD that I am going! And I mean to do everything I can to be worthy of such a great, such a very great, wonderful Opportunity!" Laura was immensely serious and she spoke of her opportunity with a capital letter in her voice. [293]

Mr. von Siegeslied looked at her with the first twinkle the Scollards had seen in his eyes. "Hear, hear!" he applauded. "That is right, my little Clara Schumann! Do all that you can, as I hope we shall do, and nobody can do more—not even Apollo, the chief of musicians! My intention, Mrs. Scollard, is to take a house in Leipsic—my estates lie not far from the city—and make a little home. My wife will see to it that our Laura does not lack the home training, while I watch over her musically. I am much mistaken if the child does not prove a pride to us all. I think she has much talent. If she adds industry to that talent, she will go far. I thank you for intrusting her to us." He had arisen to go, and his little wife arose with him and stood with her arm around Margery, from whom she dreaded to part.

"Laura has made her promises, please accept a pledge from me," said Herr von Siegeslied. "I will faithfully look after the little girl, and do for her everything in my power. You will miss your home, Laura, more than you realize. You will have many dark days when you will long to throw up every chance in life only to get back here into this merry, affectionate group. The artist must sacrifice much and suffer loneliness, longing, weariness of body and soul. But the recompense comes. Be assured, Mrs. Scollard, that the little girl shall have the best of care. And with all my faults I keep a promise. The von Siegeslieds brought down their name from the crusading days, and they are men of honor." The former Herr Lieder looked around him proudly, and his hearers felt certain that he would keep his pledge to them and be good to Laura. [294]

But his sweet wife did better. She went up to Mrs. Scollard and putting her arms around her, kissed her. "Thank you for lending me the child," she whispered. "I will do my best. My child is dead."

And after that brief speech Mrs. Scollard's last doubt of Laura's welfare in these hands finally vanished.

It was not half after nine when the von Siegeslieds went away. Bob rushed out to the kitchen and beat a tattoo on the opposite dumb waiter door. Snigs responded in the preliminary stages of preparation for bed.

"Get your collar on—or don't if you are opposed to doing it—but get Ralph anyway, and come on over here," Bob said. "We're having upheavals, and I'm not perfectly certain whether I half like it. We've got news for you—tell your mother to come, and I'll go around and lower the drawbridge for you to get in." [295]

Bob shut the dumb waiter door with emphasis and without delaying to learn whether or not Snigs was going to act on his suggestion.

"I've called the Gordons," Bob said, explaining his haste to reach the door, as he passed the parlor.

The Gordons came, the mother also, and the Scollards poured out their budget of news. Laura was to sail for Germany in less than two weeks. The tea room was to be given up, with the dancing school of the former Mrs. Stewart. But—and this was not wholly pleasant tidings—the Patty-Pans flat was to be abandoned, and the Scollards were to make one family with Miss Bradbury in the house she had taken much farther down in town.

Ralph, who had been standing to receive all these amazing items, forgot manners and dropped on a chair, astride of it, his chin resting on its back. Gloom, nay, positive consternation was on his face.

"You're not!" he gasped. "You're not going to move from here!"

"We are going to keep a hold on the Patty-Pans by letting it pass into the hands of some one I know," said Miss Keren. She did not say that she was going to lease the flat for the Mrs. Leland who was coming into it, because Miss Keren never spoke of her good deeds. "And Ralph, you and Snigs are going to spend the entire summer in the Ark, the guests of Gretta, as proprietor, and of me as householder. We are not going to be separated, dear Gordon boys!" [296]

Ralph's expression of dismay hardly lightened. "It can't be the same," he said, and his voice was husky. "Look at to-night, how Bob called us over to tell us the news! There's a big difference between being across a narrow passage and being four miles apart—especially in winter. We've got to stay right where we are for four years more. This is too near Columbia for us to move. And when I get through college there will be Snigs still struggling to acquire learning! We couldn't do better than to stay in our flat. Imagine us in it and other people in here!"



He looked at Happie as he spoke, and his head dropped on his arms with a groan that he intended to be mistaken for a burlesque, but which sounded perfectly sincere.

"Oh, we won't drift apart, Ralph!" Happie cried earnestly. "I think we are the kind of friends that are not geographical friends. I dread leaving the Patty-Pans myself—don't hear that, Auntie Keren, because it doesn't mean I'm truly sorry to go. The house will be great fun. Only—"

"Only you are quite right to love the bright little place where your brave mother made a home for you so long," interrupted Miss Keren. "But now for the next stage in your progress."

[297]

"It will be far, far better for you, dear girls, as you are growing older," said Mrs. Gordon. "But Ralph is quite right in foreseeing us disconsolate without you. And Laura is really going to Germany? And by and by Margery will be married! But the greatest change will be Laura's." She looked at Laura thoughtfully, realizing that it would be another Laura who would come back to the changing family group.

"She is going over to learn to be a Lauralei," observed Bob, objecting to the note of sentiment creeping into the conversation.

Mrs. Gordon laughed. "Come, Ralph and Charley; I don't think these neighbors of ours can have any more news to tell us, and if they have I don't think we could bear up under more. Good-night, nice people! We congratulate you on all these delightful happenings, but you can't expect us to reach the heights of being glad. It is hard to think of breaking up our perfect relations. When must it be?"

"If Charlotte thinks she can accomplish it," began Miss Keren doubtfully, "it would be better to go up to Crestville the very day that Laura sails. We ought to be there early, for gardening reasons—and it would be better."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Scollard catching her breath. Then to every one's surprise she added: "I can be ready then quite as well as later, and I should be glad to go."

Margery and Happie knew that their mother dreaded to come back to the little home without Laura. It would seem less like a parting if they all went to the Ark when Laura went away.

[298]

Gretta beamed at this hearing. She longed for her mountains more and more as the warmth of spring increased.

The Gordons went back to their own domain, Ralph with a face so gloomy that it was hard to recognize him whose liveliness failed then for the first time.

Bob closed the door behind them and came back with a thoughtful look. "Aunt Keren," he said, "I can't go to the Ark with the rest. I am a year older, and I can't leave Mr. Felton as I did last year and expect to get back in the fall. You know I'd like to spend the summer up there, but how can I? I think I'll ask Mrs. Gordon to take me in with her boys, and you'll let me come up Fridays, or Saturdays if I can't do better?"

"Oh, Bob!" exclaimed Gretta involuntarily, with such profound disappointment in her voice that they all laughed, and she colored furiously.

"I've got to be a man, Gretta," said Bob. "Time's up in which I can be merely a thing of beauty."

"And for me, too, Bobby boy!" cried his mother. "Isn't it strange that I did not remember my responsibilities until just now! I can't go off rustivating this summer as I did last year when I was an invalid, Miss Keren. Bob and I will board—no, we will stay in the Patty-Pans, and visit you and the children in the Ark for nice Englishlike 'week ends' every week!"

[299]

"Charlotte, dear, listen. You have a new position. You are no longer to be foreign correspondent to your down-town firm, but Housekeeper Plenipotentiary to Her Crotchety Highness, the Princess Keren-happuch. And a sorry time you will probably have of it!" said Miss Keren with emphasis. "To-morrow I am going to get you to meet me with Happie at my lawyer's and we are going to execute certain documents that will give Happie a legal claim on me."

"Shall I take your name, Auntie Keren?" inquired Happie.

"You are to add Bradbury, but not substitute it for Scollard," said Miss Keren.

"And not with another hyphen, please?" implored Happie. "Not Keren-happuch Bradbury-Scollard! Because my signature would look like those paper dolls cut in strings from folded paper—those that all hold hands, you know. I don't need a legal claim on you, auntie dear. I'll claim you illegally just as irresistibly."

"I never tried to resist you, Happie, but there may come a day when the legal claim will be useful," retorted Miss Keren. "I will dispense with the hyphens. Charlotte, as I was saying, to-morrow we will attend to my legal adoption of Happie. Then she will have a real claim on me. The first thing she would do if she had an income, she told me, would be to establish you in a house in idleness. I am not going to do that. But I am going to ask you to give up your position and come to look after an old woman whose dear and only daughter you are. Please don't interrupt me, Charlotte. You can't realize how close to my heart is this plan of mine! And for the other side of it, Charlotte, did you ever read good little books in your childhood in which the dutiful were rewarded and the naughty punished? I am not inclined to think your new life will be entirely free from annoyance, since I am moving you to Fifty-Eighth Street, and not to paradise. But I think it will be easier than braving the world daily as you now do. All these years, more than five, my girl, ever since your widowhood, I have watched you cheerfully, unflinchingly working for your children, teaching them, putting under foot and out of sight your own sorrow and weariness of

[300]

body and mind. Dear Charlotte, like the good little girls in the story books your reward has come. We will go out of these little Patty-Pan rooms into our own home, and by and by, if our children—your children, and my grandchildren, dear daughter of Roland and Elizabeth,—leave us, we will live on together and you shall help me get ready to follow my two best beloved. It is all settled, Charlotte, and you cannot hesitate to take what good there is in it for you, remembering the good you will do me. And don't you suppose I enjoy being the channel through which you receive a little reward for your great courage and devotion?" [301]

It was a long speech for terse Miss Keren, but she made it rapidly, and there were tears in her eyes and a quiver in her voice as she ended it with hands outstretched to Mrs. Scollard.

Margery sobbed under her breath, Happie walked swiftly to the window. Laura forgot her theme; her hands crashed down on the piano keys and her eyes overflowed with happy tears that sprang out of the warmest spot in her self-centred little heart as she heard her mother praised.

But Bob, who had listened with a face contorted by his efforts to appear unmoved, gave up the attempt at last. He crossed over to Miss Keren and lifted her bodily in his arms. He kissed her over and over again, and he was not ashamed that he made her cheeks wet from the contact with his own moist ones.

"Aunt Keren, you're dead right!" he cried. "You've got ahead of me in making a home for mother, but I don't grudge it to you! And if ever I forget what I owe you—for all our sakes—then I'm not Roland Spencer's grandson."

Miss Keren clasped the big boy close. He could not have thanked her in any words that would have warmed her heart like these. "You're his own boy, my Bob!" she said. "Girls, there isn't one earthly thing to cry about!" she added, shamelessly ignoring her own brimming eyes. "Gretta, you rival our Crestville brook! Next winter you are to be given an education, my girl, that will more than take the place of what the Barkers wanted to do for you! You are part of my plans, Gretta, and part of my family. Go to bed, children. This has been an exciting evening." [302]

"Yes, let's turn in," agreed Bob, somewhat ashamed of his recent outburst. "And it's *à bas, la Patty-Pans!* is it?"

"No! Long live our Patty-Pans—it's overflowed, that's all!" cried Happie turning from the window. "It's 'Lochaber no more.' I wonder what that air is? Laura, you don't know?"

Laura shook her head. "But I could make a song, if you all would wait for me," she said.

"So can I—without waiting!" cried Happie in one of her poetic outbursts which Bob said "weren't real poetry, but were real inspiration," and she began to sing:

"Our cakes have got so full of plums  
The Patty-Pans can't bake them;  
Now, by the pricking of my thumbs,  
It is a witch who hither comes  
And bids us to forsake them!  
It's Patty-Pans no more and it's Patty-Pans no more,  
Then bye-bye, little Patty-Pans, we'll love you as before,  
But we're going down to live behind our very own front door—  
So it's Patty-Pans we love you, but it's Patty-Pans no more!"

This gem of song was chanted to such a simple air that Laura at once fell into an accompaniment, and the Scollards sang it, marching with difficulty up and down the tiny room as they sang. [303]

"My dears! The people down-stairs! And we've tried to be good neighbors!" remonstrated Mrs. Scollard. "It's past bedtime. Please defer your farewell chorus! I'm afraid the other tenants will be glad we're going!"

"Not a bit of it, motherums!" cried Happie, catching up Jeunesse Dorée who was vainly trying to get out of the way of the celebration. "How will you like to be a backyard kitten and not a fire escaper, my golden catkins? For a backyard will be thine when it's Patty-Pans no more!"

[304]

---

## CHAPTER XX EAST AND WEST

**A**MID the bulk of trunks and packing cases filling the scant space of the Patty-Pans, Laura's importance loomed impressively. There was much to be done to get the family belongings ready to vacate the little apartment on the date set, but though carpets were being taken up, books packed, walls dismantled of pictures, the whole dismal process of moving getting done, Laura's sublime sense of what had befallen her had the effect of narrowing down the entire process to making the genius of the family ready for Germany.

"She's pitched on high C—for the high seas—and she drowns out all the other instruments," said Happie, compunctious for feeling disgusted on the eve of a long separation.

The little girl's outfit was to be simple, for once in Germany she would be more really a little girl than she had been at home, and a student little girl at that, whose needs are few. But Laura dove into literature with a view to getting points on the outfitting of the heroine who crosses the

ocean, and she emerged with convictions as to steamer chairs, steamer trunks, steamer rugs, sal volatile and numerous other accessories, down to a cap and veil.

"I should like a veil that fluttered on the breeze when I leaned over the rail to watch the—the dolphins," she said.

"My goodness! Dolphins, Laura! Drawing Neptune's chariot, or just out on a lark?" cried Happie. [305]  
"Porpoises, more likely! And it would be better if they were porpoises, because you know the Mock Turtle told Alice that no wise fish would go anywhere without a porpoise. He said: 'If any fish came to me and told me he was going on a journey, I should say: with what porpoise?'" Happie laughed with as much enjoyment as if she were seven years old, having her Alice read to her for the first time. She knew most of both the Alice books by heart—not that one can know Alice any other way!

Laura frowned. "I am not a fish, though I am going on a long, long journey," she said. "And I am glad to say there is plenty of purpose in my journey."

"But you know the Mock Turtle replied that he meant what he said, when Alice suggested that he meant 'purpose,' not porpoise. However, you never did like Lewis Carroll! As to a veil, Laura, that you shall have. I'll buy you—no! I'll give you one! Don't you remember that lovely pale ecru thing I found? The one with chenille dots? I'll give you that, and it shall flutter on the breeze, just as much as e'er you please, every near-by nose 'twill tease, till the seasick ones shall sneeze, while the por-phins sport at ease—isn't that a lonely rhyme to get started on?" cried Happie.

"Very lovely, and perfectly idiotic!" said Laura, walking out of the room in rigid disgust. [306]

Laura's offense at ridicule never lasted long, chiefly because she had the genius' chronic craving for sympathy. She came back after half an hour dragging with her a Smyrna rug, very much worn, but which in the course of its wearing had worn more on the Scollard nerves than on itself. It was one of those ugly gifts to which the most fortunate mortals are sometimes liable from their friends.

"Do you think I could use this as a steamer rug, Happie?" Laura asked anxiously.

Happie looked up and out of the packing-case which for the moment swallowed her. Her laugh was so contagious that Aunt Keren came into the room laughing, and Margery ran in ready to join the fun.

"Only see, Auntie Keren and Margery, what Laura wants to take with her for a steamer rug!" cried Happie. "That dreadful, worn floor rug—Smyrna at that!"

"You funny little Exportation!" smiled Miss Keren. "That would hardly do. You won't need a chair and a rug, for you won't sit mummified on the voyage. Be satisfied with your delightful new flat trunk, that is the only steamer appurtenance you need. Are you going down to close the tea room this afternoon, girls?"

"Yes, Aunt Keren. The three E's are coming in, and the expressman is coming after our boxes. We are to send them right to the new house, aren't we?" Happie arose, dusting fragments of pine [307] from her knees as she spoke.

"Yes, except the books that you are giving to the hospital; better send them direct," replied Miss Keren. "I am going there now. I'll stay till the boxes arrive. Don't you think you ought to be getting started?"

"Immejit, ma'am!" said Happie. She was such a happy Happie these eventful and promising days that she could not talk sober sense.

Margery was ready that moment, so Happie and Gretta and Laura hurried on their hats and took Polly and Penny down to superintend shipping away the furnishings of the tea room, and to witness the ceremony of finally locking the door.

It was already a denuded tea room, the melancholy wreck of its pretty self. It had been a successful room, and more than an important one. The girls looked around its walls and stripped book-shelves, and wondered if any other venture could have to its credit in such a speedy closing so many vitally important results as this one showed. The reuniting of the von Siegeslieds, Laura's consequent good fortune, the endowment of Ralph for college—these good things were the direct consequence of the "Tea Room and Circulating Library Conducted by Six Girls."

Margery took the card bearing this legend from its hooks with a reminiscent smile, half pensive, yet wholly glad. Gentle Margery bore a thankful and a happy heart in these days. Not quite six months had passed since the Scollards had come back to town, and this half year had been [308] teeming with good fortune for them all, but it had brought to Margery—Robert.

A step outside made her look up just as she was creeping out of the deep window in which their announcement card had hung. An old lady, very small and somewhat bent, clad in deep mourning, was entering. She was so unlike her old self that for an instant Margery did not recognize in her Mrs. Jones-Dexter.

"I wanted to come here once more. The Charlefords told me you were giving up here to-day," she said as Margery sprang to place a chair for her.

She looked up in the girl's face and Margery could hardly meet the wistful, tear-dimmed eyes. She knew they both remembered that Margery had been little Serena's loving admiration.

"We are very glad to see you, Mrs. Jones-Dexter. But we are not going away, except for the summer. In the autumn we are coming back to live with Miss Bradbury in Fifty-eighth Street.

Perhaps we shall see you then?" said Margery, trying to give the pitiable old lady time to gain the self-control for which she was struggling.

"Ah, yes, I hope to see you, all of you, as long as I live," she said. "I have brought you something to-day, each of you. It seems rather like a parting, this breaking up of your pleasant little tea room, even though we shall meet elsewhere next year. I wanted your little Penny to have all of Serena's prettiest gowns and ribbons, if you will permit me to send them to her. She is younger, [309] but my child was small of her age, and they will fit her. And I want Polly to take care of her dolls, with Penny's help, and this little ring is for Polly. And to Laura I have brought this pin. Serena was too young to wear it, but she cared for it a great deal. And somehow I thought that Happie would be fond of this worn little copy of Stevenson's "Garden of Verse." Serena used to sleep with it under her pillow. And you, Margery, will take this miniature of my child. It is wonderfully like her, and it is beautiful as a work of art. You loved her and so will doubly care for it. You and Happie are to take, each of you, one of these chains—Serena has worn them both. Don't thank me!" Mrs. Jones-Dexter put up her hand to check Margery. "Such gifts are not for ordinary words. Now, as to Ralph. You know that I have settled upon him what was Serena's income?"

"We know it with unspeakable pleasure, dear Mrs. Jones-Dexter," replied Margery folding together the case that hid the lovely child face looking up to her from the ivory as it used to smile at her up-stairs.

"Tell me truthfully. You like Ralph Gordon? You think he is a good sort of boy?" asked the old lady making ready to go.

"He is the best boy I have ever known—except our best-of-best Bob!" said Margery warmly. "He is upright, truthful, kind and tender as a girl, full of fun, but reliable, and a model son and brother. We think there never could be better boys than both the Gordons—but Ralph is—well, [310] Ralph is the elder. Perhaps Snigs—Charley, will be just as fine at his age."

"Good! I mean to do a great deal for him—for them all—if I approve them. I knew that your opportunity of judging them was better than mine could be," said Mrs. Jones-Dexter. "My pretty Margery, did you know that my grandnephew, whom you praise so warmly, has a boy's love for your Happie?"

"Dear me, no, Mrs. Jones-Dexter!" cried Margery looking over to where Happie was busy with Gretta, putting into boxes the last remaining cups for the expressman's taking.

"He has," nodded Mrs. Jones-Dexter. "It is too early to be important, but it might be!"

"We girls have been brought up not to play at romance. Happie and Ralph are fond of each other, as Happie and Bob are—not as much so, of course, but in that same frank, chummy way," said Margery. "Mother doesn't like to have us think of romance—till it comes!" Margery stopped, with a laugh and a blush.

"As it has, and early too, to you!" commented Mrs. Jones-Dexter. "Quite right your mother is! Yet Ralph is dreaming of Happie. We will keep our own counsel, Maid Margery, and hope that the dream may grow into something more than a boy's first romance, if my grandnephew is the boy you think him. Happie, Gretta, come here and say how do you do and good-bye to me! I am going. [311] Laura, *bon voyage*, little girl! Kiss me, Polly and Penny." She stooped to kiss the children, and Polly gave her a gratuitous hug, moved by the expression in the desolate old eyes. But Penny did not get her kiss. Dropping her veil over her face Mrs. Jones-Dexter fled from Penny's warm, living embrace.

There was not time to dwell on the sadness aroused by this visit, for the expressman arrived earlier than he was expected, and proved to be so dense-minded that Margery and Happie committed their boxes to his care with the firm conviction that the cups and other tea room belongings would go to the hospital and the books to the new house, in spite of the cards attached to them and the girls' reiterated charges.

The three E's swept down like three of the four winds at the last moment, just when the girls were giving them up. They were standing taking mental farewell of the now empty room, bare of all save Mrs. von Siegeslied's piano. This stood crated and ready for its voyage to Germany. It had been too integral a part of the reunion of the husband and wife to be abandoned. Had it not been for this piano the mysterious Herr Lieder would not have haunted the tea room, nor been discovered as but the disguise of the Herr Baron von Siegeslied.

"We can't stay one single second," panted Edith Charleford, proving her words by dropping on an empty box, the only remaining seat, and fanning herself with the hat she promptly removed. "We got late going to a photographer and getting our pictures taken. Those strip pictures, Hapsie—six views of the face in the cutest ovals, all for twenty-five cents! We had them done to give Laura, and they are so nice we are going to get some printed for you. Here are yours, Laura. Take them over to the Vaterland, and remember we when these you see! Please look at the left profile on the strip of me! I had no idea the right side of my face was so different!" [312]

"Let me see, Laura!" cried Happie, crowding up. "It isn't, Edith. It's alike. It's the left side that is different!"

"Happie, you are such a delicious idiot!" sighed Edith with the most sincerely complimentary intentions. "There isn't one of the girls says the lovely nonsense foolish things you do. That's why we can't get along without you all summer! Do you know what? I've got mamma to promise to go up to one of the hotels—you're to select it—in your mountains, for awhile this year. We'd like to see Crestville, the Ark and our Happiness this summer."

"Hurrah!" remarked Happie. "We are worth seeing, all three of us. Gretta and I will drive up to call on you in state at the big hotel, and when you return the call you shall come down and play in our barn and ride on our hay wagon in no state at all."

"Hurrah!" echoed Edith. "That sounds fine. Now we must go home. Oh, there are the boys; that nice, independent, kind-hearted Ralph Gordon, your Bob—and Margery's Robert! Is my hat on straight, Eleanor? And am I mashing my bows with my hat pins?" [313]

"No, only trying to," remarked Elsie with a glance that pointed her remark. Elsie did not disdain slang nor a pun.

"Gretta, there is a package mother sent you. She said that you were not to think she considered it in any sense payment for what you did for me last winter. But she did want to give you some remembrance, since you wouldn't go to school."

Gretta almost laughed. "That would have been a reminder!" she said as she took the small square package. She opened it while the others were diverted by the arrival of the boys. It was a dark green leather case, in which rested a beautiful tiny watch. The watch was held by a pin, its design the seal of the State of Pennsylvania, dark blue and green enamel on a gold ground. A card lay on the satin cushion of the box. On it was written: "To Miss Angela Key-Stone, from Elsie Barker and her grateful mother."

Gretta closed the box. Bob looked at her, wondering at the pleasure in her face and thinking, as he thought of late more often than ever: "My, but Gretta's a beauty!"

He said aloud: "We four came to take you girls home from the ex-tea room for the last time. Nice little place, we're sorry to say good-bye!" [314]

The girls gathered in the doorway. They looked back as Margery put her key in the lock—the key that she was to relinquish to an agent in the morning—just as she had done when, nearly half a year ago, they had come down to see that everything was in order for their opening. But then Robert had not been there!

"All together say good-bye, and then, Margery, shut and lock the door!" cried Bob. "Now then: One, two, three—Good-bye!"

Margery pulled the door together, turned her key took it out and handed it to Bob, tried the door to make sure it was fast, and they all walked away. The tea room was no more!

There were not many days left in the Patty-Pans. Mrs. Scollard was at home to attend to the duties with which they were filled, at home for good and all, in fact. The foreign correspondence was over and done with. It all seemed like a dream, but to prove that it was not one there was the new house down in Fifty-eighth Street to which frequent visits were necessary, and the trunks into which she was packing summer clothing for the Ark.

Laura began to realize the great change that lay before her as these last days slipped past. Her pompous manner began to shrink; in its place came a timidity and wistfulness that was most becoming. Laura forgot that she was a genius and remembered only that she was a little girl about to separate from the best mother in the world for the first time and for a long time. Although she had grown too tall for rocking, she fell into the habit of creeping into her mother's room every night at dusk to be held in her low chair and rocked as if she had been three instead of thirteen. Her heels scraped on the floor, bare except for a rug left out to lay in front of the bed, but if the heels scraped, Laura's arms were tight around her mother's neck, and mother and daughter talked and talked, laying in a store of confidence and advice against the days of separation. There was so much that was comforting and intimate in these twilight confidences that they consoled Mrs. Scollard for the coming parting, even while they made her feel that she could ill spare this queer and somewhat remote child from out her little flock. [315]

At last there came the morning when, everything finished, the Scollards were to leave the Patty-Pans. Jeunesse Dorée was protestingly strapped in his basket; the two least children were ready, Polly in charge of the yellow cat, Penny intrusted with Phyllis Lovelocks, Polly's doll; Penny's family was never fit to travel in the public eye. Laura's ship sailed in the forenoon, and from Hoboken, so that her family was to see her off, dine as best they could in their station and take the train for Crestville which left at two in the afternoon.

Bob was going with them. He was tempted to regret the added twelve months which entailed upon him the responsibility of increased age, and prevented his spending an uninterrupted summer in the country, as he had done the preceding year. [316]

Miss Keren, crisp and brisk as usual in the excitement of marshaling her adopted family forever out of the pleasant little flat into a life of greater leisure and more opportunity, tied the strings of her little black straw bonnet with a snap. Then she picked up her gloves and turned from the window, with its background of jutting wall, which had been serving her as a mirror in lieu of mirrors packed and being moved out and into the vans below.

"Now, Laura, little girl, bid your old Aunt Keren good-bye, for I am going down to the Fifty-eighth Street house to receive these vans when they get there. I will meet you at the station, Charlotte, on the Hoboken side, of course. If anything happened that I didn't get there—as I shall unless these drivers are more than slow!—go right on to Crestville, and send Don Dolor down to the noon train to meet me to-morrow. Good-bye, Laura child. Remember to work hard at your music, but harder at your character. God bless you, dear."

Miss Keren walked away without a backward glance at the little Patty-Pans. But its proper tenants gave it many last looks as they slowly filed out. It had been home for nearly six years,

and, "be it ever so flat, home is home," as Bob truthfully said. The Scollards left their own furniture slowly starting away from the house. The janitor and the hall boy waved them a farewell, but the Gordon flat was blank. [317]

First among the crowd on the dock of the great white liner was Ralph, and just behind him was Snigs with their mother, and to their right all of Happie's E's, Robert Gaston and the von Siegeslieds, waiting the coming of the Scollards.

There was not much time for lingering; the Scollards were somewhat later in arriving than they had meant to be. The entire party crowded over the gangway and on to the swarming deck of the ship, amid the groups of gay, tearful, excited and tired people about to sail or to say good-bye.

There was time to inspect the stateroom which Laura was to share with Mrs. von Siegeslied, time to peep at the salon, and rapidly to glance at the decks and then to return to the stateroom to admire the flowers which had been sent by her pupils to her who had been Mrs. Stewart, and whose interesting change of name and fortune had been an absorbing topic for a day or two among her friends.

"Must you go, mamma?" asked Laura, looking white and helpless.

"I go west and you go east, Laura. Suppose I leave you here? Then after a little while Mrs. von Siegeslied will bring you out on deck and you will see us and wave to us as you steam out and we watch you from the dock!" proposed Mrs. Scollard cheerfully.

But Laura felt her mother's arms tighten around her as the little girl clutched her. "I'll say good-bye to you all here: Penny first," said Laura. [318]

Penny kissed her again and again as Laura devoured the Scollard baby's soft cheek. Next Polly, quiet and staid and deeply impressed, kissed good-bye this first sister to leave her. Happie hugged Laura speechlessly and relinquished her to Margery, who folded her in her arms in an embrace almost maternal.

"I'll kiss you good-bye, Robert, because you may be my brother while I'm gone," sobbed Laura, overcome by this leave taking.

Robert kissed the child and put into her hot hands a small package. "A consolation prize; open it after you start," he whispered.

Ralph, Snigs, Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Charleford, all the E's, bade Laura good-bye with warm good wishes.

"Mamma, dear, dearest mamma!" whispered Laura, and mother and daughter held each other close for a minute.

"But I'm glad, I'm very glad I'm going, and I shall come back famous!" declared Laura bravely, though tears made the prophecy difficult.

The Scollards drew up in line on the dock. Bob had joined them. He had lingered to say good-bye to Laura after the others, with a word of elder brotherly council that he had not cared to let any one else hear.

The great white ship swung out of the slip and into the open stream. The bright May sunshine lighted her clean scrubbed decks and illumined the pale and tear-stained, yet jubilant face of the little aspirant for glory. Laura waved her hands to her assembled family, held fast on one side by Mrs. von Siegeslied's arm, and on the other by the hand of him who had been Herr Lieder, laid caressingly and with a promise in its touch, on her shoulder. [319]

"We are a fortunate family!" declared Happie. "The six luckiest girls in the world."

"And boy," supplemented Bob. "Laura eastward, we westward! Now to dine, and then: Ho for Crestville and our mountains and green fields once more!"

#### Transcriber's Note

- [page 22](#) Magaret changed to Margaret (our beloved sisters Margaret and Keren-happuch)
- [page 43](#) solt changed to soft (Laura's a soft, faded pink)
- [page 137](#) forgiveingly changed to forgivingly (with a soul far from forgivingly at peace)
- [page 190](#) hasband changed to husband (Elizabeth Spencer and her husband)
- [page 194](#) sphagetti changed to spaghetti (steaming dishful of spaghetti)
- [page 283](#) Leider changed to Lieder (You are her husband, Herr Lieder)
- Happie, Happy, Hapsie are used as nicknames for Keren-happach.

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE  
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE  
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at [www.gutenberg.org/license](http://www.gutenberg.org/license).

**Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works**

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed,

viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.



1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

## **Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™**

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

## **Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation**

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification

number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at [www.gutenberg.org/contact](http://www.gutenberg.org/contact)

#### **Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation**

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit [www.gutenberg.org/donate](http://www.gutenberg.org/donate).

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: [www.gutenberg.org/donate](http://www.gutenberg.org/donate)

#### **Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works**

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.