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"I'M A DOCTOR'S CHILLEN; THEY WON'T BITE ME," SAID FLAXIE. Page 11.



FLAXIE FRIZZLE STORIES.

DOCTOR PAPA.

BY

SOPHIE MAY

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE PRUDY STORIES," "DOTTY DIMPLE
STORIES," "LITTLE PRUDY'S FLYAWAY STORIES," ETC.

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I.

THE SCARECROW SISTER.

ONE morning little Miss Frizzle danced about her brother Preston, as he was starting for school, saying,—

"If a little boy had one poggit full o' pinnuts, and one poggit full o' canny, and one in his hands, how many would he be?"

This was a question in arithmetic; and, though Preston was a large boy, he could not answer it.

"Answer it yourself," said he, laughing.

"He'd have fousands and fousands—as many as *four hundred!*" said Flaxie, promptly.

[10]

"Shouldn't wonder! What's the need of my going to school, when I have a little sister at home that knows so much?" cried Preston, kissing her and hurrying away.

Flaxie wished he and her sister Julia—or Ninny, as she called her—could stay with her all the time. She was lonesome when they were both gone; and to-day her mamma said she must not go out of doors because her throat was sore.

She stood for awhile by the kitchen window, looking at the meadow behind the house. It was sprinkled all over with dandelions, so bright and gay that Flaxie fancied they were laughing. *They* didn't have sore throats. O, no! they could stay out of doors all day long; and so could the pretty brook; and so could the dog Rover; and the horses, Whiz and Slowboy; and the two young colts.

[11]

By-and-by the colts came to the kitchen window, which was open, and put in their noses to ask for something to eat. Flaxie gave them pieces of bread, which Dora handed her; and they ate them, then ran out their tongues and licked the window-sill, to be sure to get all the crumbs.

"What if they should bite you!" said Dora.

"O, they won't! I'm a doctor's chillen; they won't bite *me*," said Flaxie, who was never afraid of any thing or anybody.

"Well, you mustn't keep that window open any longer. You'll get cold, if you *are* a doctor's children," said Dora. "Run into the parlor to your mother. Why, you haven't seen her for an hour."

Flaxie was not at all anxious to see her mother, but ran into the parlor and called for a slate and pencil. Mrs. Gray gave them to her; and Flaxie drew pictures for ten minutes,—such pictures! Then the squeaking stopped, and she began to cry.

[12]

"What is it, darling?" said mamma.

"I've losted my *pessle*," sobbed Flaxie.

"O, well, I'll get you another. Don't cry."

"I've losted it *up my nose*," screamed the child, running to her mother in great distress.

It was true. The pencil was a very short one; and, in poking it into her nose, just for fun, she had pushed it too far, and it would not come out. Mrs. Gray tried her very best; but the harder she tried the further up went the pencil, and the more Flaxie's nose bled and swelled. It was growing worse every minute; and Mrs. Gray, not knowing what else to do, called Dora from the kitchen and sent her for "Dr. Papa."

[13]

When Flaxie knew her father was sent for, she cried louder than ever; for she thought she must be dreadfully hurt.

"Is I a-goin' to die?" said she. "I wouldn't die for fi-ive dollars!"

"No, indeed, pet, you won't die. Dr. Papa will make you all well in two minutes."

"Will he? O, dear, my nose is *so* sick! Kiss it, mamma!"

Mamma kissed the poor purple little nose, which helped Flaxie very much; but she burst out afresh, next moment. "How bad Dr. Papa'll feel when he comes home!"

Her mother soothed her; but soon she fell to crying again.

"How *Ninny*'ll feel when *she* comes home!"

[14]

Mrs. Gray comforted her for this with more kisses; but presently Flaxie sobbed out once more,—

"How *Pesson* will feel when *he* comes home!"

For the child truly believed her friends would grieve more about it than she did.

Dr. Papa hurried to his darling as fast as he could; but, by the time he got home, her nose was badly swelled, and he had to hurt her very much in order to get out the "pessle." When it was all over, he took her on his knee, and tried to make her forget her troubles by showing her some pictures.

"The man in this picture is a school-teacher," said he; "and the little boy who stands by his desk must have been naughty, for the teacher is going to whip him with that stick." [15]

"Goin' to w'ip him? Well, I'll wait and *see* if he w'ips him," said Flaxie, folding her hands and staring at the picture with all her might.

Dr. Papa laughed. He often laughed at what Flaxie said; and Mrs. Prim, a lady who lived in town, thought he "spoiled her." Perhaps he did.

"O, see the pretty chickies," said the child, as her father turned to another picture. "Does God make chickies?"

"Certainly."

"Well," said she, thoughtfully, "how they must have *hollered* when he stuck the fidders in!"

I must confess Dr. Papa laughed again. Then he put Flaxie down, and said he must go, though she held him by the vest-buttons, and declared the next picture would be "awful funny." [16]

"How do you know?"

"O, I *guess* it will!"

"Well, dear, if it's ever so funny, Dr. Papa will have to go, for a sick lady wants to see him."

"Did the lady get a pessle up *her* nose?"

"No, she didn't; but she is very sick for all that. Good-by, pet."

As Dr. Gray went out of the yard, he said to his stable-boy,—

"Crawford, I think the crows are getting too much of that corn we planted. Can't you put up a scarecrow?"

Crawford thought he could, and went into the house to ask Dora for some old clothes.

"I'll tell you what you'd better do, Crawford," said Dora. "Make a *little* scarecrow, and dress it up like Flaxie Frizzle. I'll get you some of her old clothes." [17]

"That's just the thing," replied Crawford. "Give me her red hood and waterproof, and I'll stuff 'em out with hay. O, my, won't the crows be scared?"

Crawford chuckled to himself all the while he was making this little image; and, when it was done, he carried it out to the corn-field, and fastened it upon a stump.

"Well, it does look exactly like her, and the crows won't know the difference," said he: "only she couldn't keep still to save her life. Guess I'll pin on a veil or something to blow in the wind, as if she was moving."

Dora gave him an old red scarf; and it certainly did make the image look very much as if it were alive. People who rode by turned to gaze at it, and said,—

"There's the doctor's baby. I'm glad her mother has wrapped her up so well: it's pretty cold weather for this time of year." [18]

But you must know Flaxie Frizzle was surprised when *she* saw the scarecrow! She had climbed the sofa, and was looking out of the window. What did she see, standing there in the corn-field? It was her own self! She rubbed her eyes, and looked again.

"O mamma, mamma," called she. "Come here *just* as kick! You s'pose, mamma, who's playing *coop* out there? It's ME! And *here's* ME, right here! Have I got a little sister?"

It was some time before she could be made to understand that the scarecrow was not herself, was not alive, and was only a rag-baby made of sticks and straw and old clothes. The next day it rained from morning till night; and everybody who went by the house thought it too bad that poor Flaxie Frizzle should be in the corn-field, getting so wet. [19]

At least a dozen times the door-bell rang; and a dozen people told Dora to be sure and let Mrs. Gray know her baby was out in the rain!

Dora laughed, and assured the kind people that "*that* baby in the field was neither sugar nor salt, and water wouldn't hurt her a grain."

But she told Crawford "it did her good to see how much the neighbors thought of Flaxie Frizzle, for all she was such a curious-acting child."

"And, Crawford, you'll have to take down that 'scarecrow sister,' and put up something else; for I can't spend my time running to the door to explain to folks that it isn't Flaxie Frizzle."

II.

 [20]

FLAXIE'S DOSE.

THAT summer Grandpa Pressy came to Dr. Gray's, visiting. Flaxie Frizzle had five grandfathers, but she loved Grandpa Pressy best of all; and he loved her, too, and called her his "little boy."

Now, the dear old gentleman had a poor memory; and, if he laid down his newspaper or

spectacles, he hardly ever knew where to find them.

"I guess I left my silk handkerchief up stairs," said he, one morning. "Won't my little boy run up, and get it off the bureau?"

Flaxie went in a moment, but the handkerchief was not there. There was a silver box on the bureau, though, a very pretty one; and Flaxie thought she would open it and see what was in it. It was an old-fashioned snuff-box. Grandpa Pressy did not use snuff, but he carried his medicines in this box when he went away from home. There were three kinds of medicine,—cough lozenges, sugar-coated pills, and a tiny bottle wrapped in cotton-wool, and marked "wine of antimony." [21]

First, Flaxie took out a cough lozenge, and put it on her tongue; but it was rather fiery, and she said,—

"O, it quackles me."

She would not touch the "candy pills," for she had seen the same sort before, and knew they were bitter inside; but she picked the vial out of the cotton-wool, held it up to the light, and thought it looked "very nice." [22]

"Mayn't I have some, grandpa?" whispered she.

She knew her gampa was not there to hear her: it was a way she had of talking to herself.

"Mayn't I have some, gampa?" Then she smiled very sweetly, and replied aloud,—

"Yes, little boy, you *may* have some."

Ah, Flaxie, Flaxie! To think you should know no better than to meddle with such dreadful things! The antimony was as poisonous as it could be; but, if anybody had told you so, you would have swallowed it all the same, I suppose, you silly little creature!

How much antimony Flaxie took, I'm sure I don't know, but it was a great deal; and it frightens me now to think of it, for this is a true story. [23]

"I'm a doctor's chillen; I *mus'* take mederson," said she, making a wry face as she found it did not taste at all "nice."

Suddenly a voice called out,—

"Where's that try-patience?"

It was Dora; she was close by the door. Flaxie threw the vial and the box behind the looking-glass, and answered, in an innocent tone,—

"Here I is!"

Of course she knew Dora meant *her*; for Dora never, never called anybody else a "try-patience."

"What are you up in this chair for, rummaging round in folks' bureaux?" said Dora, hugging and scolding and shaking her, all in a breath.

"I wasn't doin' nuffin," said guilty little Flaxie, pouting. "If you scold to me, Dodo, I'll *make* me a naughty little goorl!" [24]

"You're always naughty, without *making*. There, now, come away: this room is no place for you."

"O, now I know what I came for," said Flaxie; "it was gampa's hang-ger-fiss."

"O, lor', I found his hang-ger-fiss long ago in the dining-room. Away with you. I want to make the bed."

As Dora spoke, she kissed Flaxie; and I wonder she didn't perceive that the child's breath smelt of medicine.

"There, there, you're an old darling," said Dodo, "whatever you do."

That was the way Dora's scoldings usually ended; and Flaxie did not mind them in the least. She danced down stairs in a great hurry; for, in the front yard under the trees, her brother Preston and two other boys were swapping jack-knives, and Miss Frizzle always liked to be on the spot when any thing was going on. [25]

The boys all smiled when they saw her coming; and Preston drew her close to his side, and straightened the lace frill in the neck of her dress. He was only eight years old; but he had always felt a great deal of care of his little sister.

"Come here, Miss Frizzle, and I'll put you in my pocket," said Bert Abbott.

"Got some canny in your poggit? If you have, I'll go," responded Flaxie, with a roguish smile.

This was considered such a bright speech that the boys, all three, turned their pockets inside out to see if they had any sweetmeats to offer. Bert Abbott found a broken tart, and Jack Snow a few peanuts. Flaxie took the "pinnuts" with a cool little nod, but the tart was not to her fancy. [26]

"'Cause I don't like pie-grust, and *that's* because," said she, curling her lip as she looked at the crumbs.

"Guess you don't like 'pinnuts' either," said Jack Snow; for she was dropping the shells down Preston's back and the kernels into the grass.

"Yes, I like 'em; pinnuts is *le-licious*," replied Flaxie, faintly; but she was beginning to grow rather pale round the mouth.

"Come, boys," said Preston, who had not the slightest idea that any thing ailed his precious sister, "let's go and have our sail. I'll run and get Flaxie's hat."

They called it "sailing;" but it was merely rocking about in the pretty boat, called the "Trout-fly," which was moored on the bank of the brook. As the boys did not know how to swim, Dr. Gray never allowed them to unfasten the boat. [27]

It was a lovely day. The hills were as blue as the sky, and the sky was as soft as a dream. What harm was there in having a little "sail" in that black and green "Trout-fly?" Preston thought they were doing a proper thing, and so they were; but the young passenger they took with them was soon to give them a world of trouble.

The boys had a pretty good time; but they could not make Flaxie talk: she said her "teef were tired." There was an anxious look on her face, and she never once smiled.

"What under the sun ails you?" said Preston, as she threw herself down in the bottom of the boat, with her head on his feet.

"I don' know," replied Flaxie; for she had no more remembrance of her dose of poison than a kitten has of its last saucer of cream. [28]

"Are you sleepy?"

"No; but my *eyes* are."

"Let her go to sleep; don't bother her," said Jack Snow.

"Yes, I shall bother her too. She's real white; and I can't stand it," said Preston, stroking her cold cheeks in alarm.

At that Flaxie began to cry. She was not in pain, as she had been when she got the slate-pencil up her nose; but somehow she felt very unhappy.

"Guess I's goin' to die," sobbed she.

"Why, Flaxie Frizzle Gray, what do you mean by such talk as that? What do YOU know about dying?"

"O, I know 'bout it; we'll all die some day, mamma said so; guess it's *some day* now," gasped Flaxie, mournfully. [29]

"That's not a pretty way to talk," said Bert Abbott. "Here, eat a raisin, Flaxie, that's a good baby."

Flaxie shut her eyes firmly, and would not touch the raisin. Preston began to feel uneasy: he had never seen his sister's rosy little face look like this before. "See here, boys," said he, "let's get out of this, and I'll carry Flaxie home to mother."

If he could only have done it! But, somehow, before he had fairly got the child in his arms, she drew away from him and leaned over the stern of the boat. I suppose she was blind and dizzy; but, at any rate, she lost her balance and fell head-first into the brook, which was deep enough, even by the shore, to drown a man. It was done so quickly that nobody had time to stop her. Jack Snow reached out as far as he could and clutched the hem of her cambric dress; but it slipped through his fingers, and the child sank down, down to the very bottom. [30]

"Hullo there!" screamed the boy, as if that could do the least good!

Preston plunged into the water. He did not know how to swim much; but he never stopped to think of himself, he must save his darling sister. O, *where* was she? Why didn't she rise to the surface? He had heard his father say that people did not drown till they had risen at least once. Perhaps you, who know of Flaxie's taking poison, can guess why she did not rise. She had fainted away!

Preston dived, but came up without her. She had gone out of his reach. When he rose, he said to himself,—

"I'll never go home without my darling sister! If she drowns, I'll drown!" [31]

"Jump into the boat," screamed the boys. "It's no use; you can't get her!"

"Yes, I *will*," said Preston, and dived again. That time, without knowing it, he *almost* touched Flaxie, lying still as a log, ten feet below.

When he came up, the boys reached after him and pulled him into the boat. He struggled with all his might; but it was two against one, and he could not help himself.

"Oogle, oogle, goggle!" screamed he; for his mouth was so full of water that he could not speak.

"Pat him on the back," said Jack Snow, always ready with advice.

"Oogle, oogle, oggle, goggle!" cried Preston, striking out both arms, and determined to dive again; but the boys held him fast. If they had not held him, he would certainly have drowned, but he could not have saved Flaxie. He had courage enough, and will enough for a grown man; but, alas, his strength was only that of a little boy. [32]

And what could be done? Bert Abbott ran up the bank, screaming for help. Was all the world deaf? If those boys had never prayed before, they prayed now. "Help us, help us, O God, *won't* you help us? Send somebody to save Flaxie!"

It was quite five minutes—so I am told—that the child lay in that brook before any help came. At last a man, who was going by, heard the outcry, and thought it sounded like something more than boys' play. He ran to the spot; and, as he could swim, he soon had Flaxie out of the water; but,

whether dead or alive, that was the question.

There she lay in his arms, as still as a stone. The water dripped from her beautiful flaxen hair, from the tips of her white fingers, from her dimpled chin; but not an eyelash stirred, and her little heart had ceased to beat. [33]

"The poor thing is clean gone, no mistake about that," thought the man, putting his lips to Flaxie's cold mouth.

"Rub her! Roll her! Run for father!" shouted Preston, flinging himself upon his lifeless sister, and kissing her wildly.

"Here, boys, you run ahead and get the doctor, and I'll carry her to the house as quick as I can," said Mr. Bond.

"Don't take on so," added he, soothingly to Preston. "Folks do come to, sometimes, and live, when they look as far gone as she does."

He said this from the kindness of his heart; but in reality he had very little hope of Flaxie. Dr. Gray had scarcely any hope either: he thought she had been in the water too long. [34]

Ever so many men and women worked over the child for hours and hours: Dr. Papa and mamma among the rest, of course; and even Grandpa Pressy helped a little, though his hands trembled, and he was very pale. It did not seem to be of the least use; still, they kept trying.

"O, you dear, beautiful baby," said Mrs. Gray, the tears falling over her cheeks, "it is so hard to give you up!"

Dr. Papa held his cold little darling, his "Pinky Pearly," to his heart; but he could not speak a word.

But, just as they were all giving her up, she was seen to breathe, very, very softly.

"Saved!" whispered Dr. Papa.

"Saved!" echoed mamma.

"Thank God!" said Grandpa Pressy. [35]

How did Preston feel when his dear sister slowly opened her blue eyes? He would have given his life for her,—was he glad she was saved? Ah, *was* he glad, the noble boy?

In a few minutes Dr. Papa knew the whole story: he found out that Flaxie had been taking poison.

"Now I understand it all," said he. "She fainted away before she fell into the brook. If she had not fainted she could not have lived so long under the water."

"Was that what made her lie so still?" asked Preston. "If she had moved a little I might have pulled her out; but she wouldn't move, and I couldn't reach her."

"You tried your best, my son," said the doctor, laying his hand on Preston's head. "It makes me happy to think my little girl has such a brother!"

III. [36]

THE KNITTING-WORK PARTY.

FLAXIE recovered from this accident a great deal sooner than Grandpa Pressy did. Somehow, the shock of seeing his "little boy" lying so white and cold made grandpa ill. He was so ill, in fact, that Dr. Gray sent for grandma.

It was very pleasant having grandma in the house; and her dear old husband began to feel better the moment he saw her.

"Dear little Mary, how do you do?" said she to Flaxie, who was lying on the bed. Flaxie made no answer, except to put out her tongue.

"Can't you speak to grandma?" said Ninny. [37]

"No: I'm a doctor's chillen, and doctor's chillen *always* puts out their tongues," replied Flaxie, showing it again.

"It doesn't look very sick," said grandma, laughing.

"Then what makes my mamma keep me in bed?" whined Flaxie. "I don't want to be in my nightie. I want to be in my pretty dress, and sit in your lap."

"She is very, very cross," said Ninny to grandma, with a patient smile, as they left the room.

"Perhaps we can amuse her," replied grandma; and next morning she gave her some bright worsted to make her doll, Miss Peppermint Drop, a scarf.

Flaxie was well pleased, for awhile, tying the worsted into knots and putting it over the needles; but it soon tired her. [38]

"O gramma, the needles won't knit: they're *crooksey* needles," said she.

"Well, come sit in my lap, dear, and I'll tell you a story about a knitting-work party, that I had a

great, great while ago, when I was about as old as Julia."

"That's a funny party, *I* should fink," said Flaxie, curling her head down on her grandma's shoulder.

"A knitting-work party, did you say?" asked Ninny, preparing to listen.

"Well, yes. You know girls in those times didn't have so many parties as they do now," replied grandma; "and I had been wanting this one for weeks and weeks before I even dared ask my mother about it. When I did ask her, she said,—

"Why, Polly, don't you see how much spring-work I have to do? How can I stop to cook a supper for a dozen little girls?" [39]

"O, but I'll cook it myself," said I. 'I can make gingerbread and cup-custards.'

"And what will you do for bread?" said she.

"I didn't think there would be any trouble about that. 'There was *always* bread enough,' I said. 'Little girls didn't eat much, and twelve wouldn't make the *least* difference!'

"Well, but mother wanted to know what I could give them for sauce. The dried apples were all gone, and she couldn't let me have any preserves; she was keeping those for sickness.

"I said I would give them some molasses. I liked molasses, and thought everybody else did.

"Mother smiled.

"'But if I let you have a party,' said she, 'you can't do your knitting. You know I'm in a hurry for you to finish father's socks.'" [40]

"That was what made me think of turning it into a knitting-work party. I spoke up in a moment, and said I,—

"'O mother! if you'll only let me have it, I'll ask all the girls to bring their knitting-work, and then we'll measure yarns! O, won't that be grand? And, when we get our stints done, we'll go out and play in the barn. We won't trouble you one speck.'"

"'Well, Polly,' said mother, 'I've a great mind to say yes; for that sounds to me like a very sensible kind of a party; and will be setting a good example too. Yes, you may have it, if your sisters are willing to show you how to cook, and you won't make *me* any trouble.'"

"You may depend I was pleased. I skipped off to the kitchen in great glee, and danced about the kneading-trough, where sister Judith was mixing brown-bread, crying out,— [41]

"'I'm going to have a *knitting-work party*, Judy, and cook it myself! Give me a pan and a spoon!'

"My eldest sister, Sally, was pounding spices in a mortar; and I remember Judith turned to her, and said,—

"'Now, Sally, you *don't* suppose mother is going to let that child bother round?'

"'O, *I* shan't bother,' said I. 'I'm only going to make gingerbread and cup-custards. 'Twill be very easy!'

"Sally laughed,—she was very good-natured,—and told me to run out to the barn for some eggs. While I was gone, I suppose she and Judith talked the matter over, and thought they would keep me out of the kitchen; for, as soon as I came back, they sent me off to give my invitations. [42]

"'We'll do the cooking,' said Sally; 'but you may set the table yourself, and wait upon your little girls. We will not see them at all.'"

"I ran off, happy enough; and I have thought a great many times since, how kind it was in Sally and Judith to leave their work to do that baking for me. They were good sisters, certainly.

"I had a grand time that morning, going from house to house, asking my friends to my knitting-work party. Everybody was delighted; and everybody came, of course, and got there by two o'clock, or earlier.

"Mother left her quilting long enough to put marks with red worsted into each little girl's knitting-work.

"'There,' said she, 'at four o'clock I will come to see which has beat. I must be the one to judge; for there is a difference in your yarn,—some is coarse and some is fine; and we must be fair about it.'" [43]

"'O, yes'm,' said the girls; 'we want to be fair.'"

"'Well, now I'll leave you,' said mother; 'and I hope you'll have a nice time.'"

"And we did, for awhile. As we sat busy with our knitting, we heard now and then the tender bleating of a lamb in the barn,—how well I remember that!

"'That's my cosset,' said I. 'She hasn't any mother, you know. I'll show her to you, girls, when we get our knitting done.'"

"Persis Russell 'didn't see the use of waiting,' she said. 'Why couldn't we run out and look, and right back again?'

"Just then the lamb began to bleat louder, and in a very beseeching tone, as if he felt lonesome and wanted company. It seemed to touch the girls' hearts; and they sprang up, and started for the door—all but me. [44]

"Well, run along if you want to,' said I, 'I'll come in a minute.'

"But you mustn't stay here and keep on knitting,' said they; 'that wouldn't be fair.'

"I don't mean to keep on knitting. I won't knit another stitch; but I want to sweep up the hearth,' said I.

"As I spoke, I dared not look anybody in the face, for a dreadfully wicked thought had come into my head.

"If I could only pick out the mark mother had put in my work, and sew in another lower down! A black satin bag was hanging on a nail by the window; and in the bottom of the bag was a needlebook with the very needle and red worsted mother had used to sew in the marks! [45]

"The girls ran out, and I seized that needle—O, how thick and fast my heart beat! It was as much as I could do to make the stitch, my fingers trembled so. But I did it. I put in the mark almost an inch below the right place, and picked out the first mark with a pair of scissors. Then I swept up the hearth a little bit, and went out to the girls.

"They were so delighted with the lamb that they scarcely looked at me; if they had, they must have seen something strange in my face.

"Come, girls,' said I, speaking very fast, 'let's go right back and knit; and, when it's four o'clock, we'll come back here and play Ring Round Rosy, and every thing else.' [46]

"They were willing enough to go back; and for half an hour our fingers flew fast; but I took good care not to let any one see the mark in my stocking.

"Just as the clock in the kitchen struck four, mother came in with a pleasant smile for all the little girls; and they brought their knitting-work along to her with blushing faces, for children in those days were more bashful than they are now. Mother took the thirteen pieces of knitting-work, and laid them down together. Little Polly Lane had knit the least of any one, which was not strange, for she was the youngest. Nancy Shaw came next; then Ellen Rice and Phebe Snow. Persis Russell was the oldest, and known to be a very 'smart' girl. Her stocking was seamed, and she had knit a longer piece than Mary Jane Cullen;—another 'smart' girl;—but, strange to say, Flaxie, not a single one had done as well as your little grandmother! Mother was surprised: she had not supposed I could knit as fast as Persis Russell, who was twelve years old; but here was my stocking right before her; it was finer than Persis's, and the mark was half an inch lower down! [47]

"Well, I didn't expect this,' said mother; 'but I shall have to give it up that Polly has beat. You may come here and see for yourselves!'

"The girls looked, and some of them could not help feeling disappointed. I know Mary Jane Cullen had thought if anybody beat her it would be Persis Russell; and Persis knew her fingers had moved faster than mine; yet I had got ahead of them both!

"You may be sure I was very modest, and did not put on any airs. I felt rather sober in spite of my victory. We played noisy games for an hour, and then I said I must go in and set the table, for this was *my* party. I didn't say I had done the cooking, but I was quite willing they should think I had. When supper was ready I called the girls in, and asked Persis Russell to sit at one end of the table while I sat at the other and poured the tea. It was currant-leaf tea, and wouldn't have kept a baby awake. Then Persis passed the bread, and asked if I made it, and I had to say, 'no.' [48]

"And you didn't make the gingerbread, either, I suppose,' said she; and I had to say 'no' again, 'I only stirred it.'

"Persis felt better when she heard that. I wasn't the smartest girl in the town of Concord after all.

"Who made the custards?' asked she. [49]

"Well, Sally made those,' said I; 'but I hunted up the eggs.'

"Then little Polly Lane said she could hunt eggs, if that was all.

"And Patty Stevens said, 'Yes, so could she; and her mother said *she* might have a knitting-work party if she'd have it just the way Polly did; and she was going to tell her how Polly didn't have to cook the things.'

"I hope Polly won't begin to knit till the rest of us get started,' said Mary Jane Cullen; 'for I don't think it's fair.'

"O, I tell you, Flaxie, by that time I had begun to feel ashamed of myself; and, at seven o'clock, when my party was all over, and the girls had gone home, I felt more ashamed still. I sat down on the meal-chest in the back room where Sally was churning, and watched the dash as it moved up and down, and the cream oozed out around the little hole in the cover. She asked me if I'd had a good time. She said she thought the girls had all behaved very well. [50]

"Why, yes, we'd had a *pretty* good time,' I said, rather faintly; and I helped myself to the cream till Sally sent me off for fear I'd be down sick.

"By that time I was feeling very wretched; I did not really know why. Perhaps it was all knitting-work; and perhaps it was partly cream;—and I began to think some of it might be molasses. I went to bed, but could not go to sleep, and fell to crying all by myself in the dark. Mother heard me, and came in to ask what was the matter.

"I want to see my little sister Abby,' said I; 'that's what I'm crying for.'

"But you never saw your sister Abby,' said mother; 'she died before you were born.' [51]

"I know it, mother," sobbed I. 'I never saw her, and that's why I want to see her now!'

"Is that all you're crying about, Polly?" said mother. 'I'm afraid something happened wrong at your party.'

"O mamma, I'm ashamed to tell," said I, covering my head with the sheet. 'I guess I ate too much molasses—I—I—'

"Well, daughter, and what else?" said mother.

"I ate too much cream,—I—I—'

"Mother waited patiently.

"I picked out the marking you put into my knitting-work, and I sewed in another lower down," cried I, desperately. 'O dear, O, dear, I did. O mother, I knew you'd feel bad! Say, what shall I do?'

"Mother was so surprised and distressed that she did not speak for nearly a minute, and then she said,— [52]

"It was a dreadful thing, Polly. Do you think you are truly sorry?'

"O, yes, I guess you'd think so,' sobbed I, 'if you knew how I feel right in here. It's a little speck of it molasses and cream, but most of it's knitting-work; and I want to get right up and dress myself, and go and tell the girls how I cheated.'

"Are you willing to tell them?" asked mother.

"Yes, I want to: 'twill choke me if I don't,' said I. 'Patty Stevens is going to have a knitting-work party, and I can tell the girls there; but seems 'sif I can't wait.'

"If you feel like that,' said mother, 'I believe you are truly sorry. And now let us tell our Heavenly Father about it, and I know he will freely forgive you.' [53]

"There," said Grandma Pressy, smoothing down her cap as she finished, "that's the whole story; but it is a bitter thought to me that I was ever such a naughty child."

"It's bitter to me, too," said Flaxie, making a wry face. "Won't you give me an ollinge, now, to take the taste out?"

IV. [54]

MAKING FLAXIE HAPPY.

"WE *thought*, in the first place, my little sister had water on the brain, her head was under water so long," explained Preston to the boys; "but she has got over it now, only dreadful cross."

It was a hard time for everybody when Flaxie was cross. She tried to sew, but her work acted "orfly;" the stitches were "cross-eyed," she said.

"I hate my padge-work," cried she, angrily; "I hate it *dead*!"

"Then I wouldn't sew," said kind Ninny. "Come out to the shed, and I'll swing you."

That was no better. After swinging a little while, Flaxie happened to fall off a pile of boards, and ran into the house, crying out,— [55]

"I swang and I swang; up real high, most up to the sky. Hurt me *orfly*. Look at my stoggins and see 'f I didn't."

"Perhaps you'd like to hear a story," said Mrs. Gray, taking the child in her lap.

"Yes, tell me a story with a long end to it. Tell about Cindrilla."

Mrs. Gray began; and, when she got as far as this,— "Cinderella asked her mother, and her mother said, 'No, Cinderella, you can't go to the party,'" then Flaxie smiled. Somehow she liked to hear about Cinderella's having a hard time: she thought she had a hard time herself. But, when the story was half done, she wanted something else.

"You don't tell good stories, mamma. I wish you'd never been made!" [56]

"O, how can you talk so to your good mother?" said Ninny, much shocked. "You'd better tell a story yourself, and see if you can do better than she does."

"Well, mamma," returned Flaxie, "do you want me to tell a story?"

"Yes."

"Does God know I'm going to tell it?"

"Yes."

"Does He know what it is?"

"Yes."

"Did He always know?"

"Yes."

"Forever and always?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Flaxie, puckering up her lips, "I ain't a-goin' to tell it; so *now* what'll he fink?"

Mrs. Gray tried not to smile when Flaxie said such strange things about God; but this time Ninny laughed aloud. [57]

"Now, Ninny, you needn't laugh to me," said Flaxie. "I'm going to be mad with you a whole week."

"What for?"

"'Cause you won't make Pep'mint Drop no boots, and *that's* because."

"Seems to me you scold very hard at your sister," said Grandma Pressy. "I think she is a very good sister."

Ninny was standing by the sink at that very moment, washing Peppermint Drop's stockings in a pint dipper; and Flaxie was beside her, cutting soap.

"I know what I'll do," thought Ninny, wringing the suds from her hands. "I'll see mamma alone, and ask her if she won't let Flaxie take my place, and ride to New York this afternoon. Perhaps that will make her feel better." [58]

"And would you really like to have her go instead of you?" said Mrs. Gray, looking at Ninny's upturned face, and thinking it was one of the sweetest faces she had ever seen in her life.

"Yes'm, I should," said the little girl, earnestly. "I can't bear to have her so cross; and you can't bear it, either, mamma. It almost makes you cry."

"But will she be pleasant if she goes to ride?"

"I think so, mamma. You know she is generally pleasant when she has her own way."

And, indeed, Flaxie's little snarled-up face smoothed in a moment when she heard of the ride.

"I'll sit as still as a *possible* mouse," said she, dancing about her mamma. "I won't trouble papa one bit. Take off my *sicking* dress, Ninny, and put on my rosy-posy dress. Do it kick." [59]

Was she sorry there was not room enough for Ninny,—good Ninny, who did so much to make her happy? O, no: Flaxie herself was to have a fine time; and that was all she thought about it.

"Let *me* hold the reins, Dr. Papa," said she, as soon as she had climbed into the carriage. "I can make the hossy go like a tiger."

"You must sit between your mamma and me, Mary Gray, and keep still; or I shall take you back to the house," said Dr. Papa, sternly.

"I *will* keep still," replied Miss Frizzle, in alarm. "I'll keep as still as a possible mouse!"

The ride was a very pleasant one. The bright dandelions were gone long ago; but there were plenty of other flowers by the roadside, and the birds in the trees sang gaily. [60]

"See 'em fly 'way off up! O Dr. Papa, they touch the *ceiling* of the sky!" said the "possible mouse."

When they reached the city, she wanted to walk the streets by herself, but consented to take her mother's hand. She loved the many-colored windows and the loud noises; but she was happiest of all, when, at five o'clock, her father and mother took her into an eating-saloon, and called for a lunch.

She had never been in such a place before.

"I want some jelly and cake and pie and puddin' and *every thing*," said Flaxie, as her papa tapped the little bell.

"Dry toast for three; tea for two," said Dr. Gray to the waiter. [61]

"But *I* want some *nuts*," whispered Flaxie, ready to cry. She meant doughnuts.

"Toast is all you can have," said Dr. Papa, with one of his stern looks.

But Flaxie was a bold child, as well as a bright one. She had seen her father touch the bell and call a boy, and thought she would do the same, and see what would happen. Out went her little hand, *ting-a-ling* went the silver bell, and up came the same boy.

"*Nuts for one girl!*" cried Flaxie, before her father had time to stop her.

The waiter covered his face with his hand, and laughed; Mrs. Gray smiled; and Dr. Gray tried to frown.

"Do let her have at least some jelly, Dr. Papa," pleaded the gentle mother. [62]

"Well, I see you want to spoil her! Yes, let her have some jelly," said her father.

Ninny was sorry to see, the next day, that this ride to New York had done Flaxie Frizzle no good. The fact was, she had caught cold, and was sick again for nearly a week.

"My little sister has been having *conjunction* of the lungs. I mean she came pretty near it," said Preston to the boys. He always made the most of it when any thing ailed Flaxie; for he was rather ashamed of belonging to such a healthy family.

After this, the little girl was obliged to stay in the house; and of course she made everybody unhappy.

"Why can't I go ou' doors, mamma?"

"Because you have such a cold."

"Wish you never'd been *made*, mamma!"

[63]

"What a naughty, naughty girl," said Ninny.

"It's my *mamma's* naughty! I'll have to tell her a story," said the child. People told stories to Flaxie when *she* was naughty; why shouldn't she do the same thing to other people when *they* were naughty?

"Well," said she, folding her chubby hands, and looking as severe as her father did sometimes,—"Well, once there was a little *good* girl, and her mother wanted her to stay in the house all the days; and she staid in the house and didn't go ou' doors; and she *kep'* a-stayin' in the house. And you s'pose what *'came* o' that little goorl? She staid in the house, and staid in the house; and in two weeks she *di-ed!*"

Mrs. Gray turned away suddenly; for Flaxie was spreading her hands and making a grieved lip, as if she pitied the "good goorl;" and it was really too funny.

[64]

"See, dear," said Grandma Pressy, "here are some nice summer sweetings in my work-bag. If you'll stay in the house pleasantly, all the morning, you shall have one."

Apples were rare, for it was early in the season, and Flaxie looked delighted.

"I'll stay *velly* pleasantly," said she, and ran into the kitchen for the chopping-tray, in order to chop up a few of the animals in her Noah's ark and "make some lion hash for breakfast."

But, soon tiring of that, she came back to the sitting-room, and looked wistfully out of the window.

"Gamma," said she, "*O* gamma, mayn't I have a *wormy* apple, and go ou' doors?"

Grandma Pressy laughed, and said,—

"I think I know of something that will make you happy, little Mary. You just go into the nursery and see what's there."

[65]

Flaxie went at once; and there, on the rug, sat Lena Vigue, fondling a pretty Maltese kitten. Lena was the washerwoman's barefooted daughter; and she had just brought the kitten in an old covered basket.

"O Lena, I didn't know you's here," said Miss Frizzle, dropping her "lion hash" in a chair. "I'm glad you bringed your kitty."

"It's *your* kitty now," sighed Lena. "I've got to leave it here."

"*My* kitty?" cried Flaxie, clapping her hands.

"Yes; your mamma asked me to fetch it. She told me she'd give me te-en cents if I'd fetch it," said Lena, who always spoke with a drawl.

Flaxie danced for joy.

[66]

"There, I knew you'd be happy now, Flaxie Frizzle," said Ninny, who stood anxiously looking on.

"I hope the *kitty*'ll be happy," sighed Lena, who thought that was far more important. "I hope you'll feed it well; it's used to it," she added, a little proudly.

"O, yes, what do you feed it with?" asked Ninny.

"*Sour milk*," drawled the little French girl.

"I never heard of sour milk for a cat," said Ninny, when Lena had left; "but perhaps this is a French cat."

"At any rate we'll try sweet milk first," said Mrs. Gray, smiling.

"See, she likes it, mamma," cried Flaxie, stroking the pretty creature. "See her drink it out of her tongue."

Ninny and her mother looked at each other and smiled, as if to say,—

[67]

"How glad we both are to have Flaxie happy for a little while."

But it did not last long. Preston, who was always setting traps for rats and mice and foxes, set a dreadful one in the shed, and caught the kitty, which of course had to be killed. Preston was in great distress about it.

"There, Frizzy-me-gig, *don't* cry. John Piper is going to give me something a great deal better than a kitten."

"What is it? O, what is it?"

"You'll see when I get it."

"Will it be my ownny-dony?"

"No-o, not *yours* exactly; but you may look at it and touch it."

Flaxie was a little comforted; for now she must try to guess what it could be that was better than a kitten.

BETTER THAN A KITTEN.

THE next day, Preston and his grandfather rode away after old Slowboy.

"They might have let me gone, too, *I* should fink," grumbled Flaxie. "What they goin' to get in that basket? Tell me, Ninny."

"Something nice that you never saw before," replied Ninny.

When they came home that night, they brought two things that made Miss Frizzle's eyes dance and sparkle like stars. Curled up together in a soft heap were two beautiful rabbits,—one brown, the other snow-white.

John Piper, a man who had once lived at Mr. Abbott's, had given these rabbits to Preston Gray and Bert Abbott, for their own. It was very kind of him; but he made one mistake—he forgot to say which of the boys should have the white rabbit. The brown one was "very respectable," as Ninny said; but the other was lovely—as plump and white as a snowball, with pink eyes that glowed like gems. [69]

"Poh, who cares which is which?" said Bert.

"I'm sure *I* don't," said Preston, as he hunted all over the stable for an old rabbit cage Crawford had brought there last year. "If we keep 'em together it's all the same."

The boys were well satisfied for awhile; but no more so than Flaxie. After saying her "big prayer," she added,—

"O God, we thank Thee *specialy* for the *wabbits*; all but the cage; we had that before." [70]

Her cold was well by this time; and she was allowed to stay in the yard as much as she chose, and watch the pretty pets. It was a funny sight to see them nibble the vegetables their little masters brought them; and Flaxie stood and threw kisses to make their dinner all the sweeter.

As the cage was Preston's, and kept in his mother's clothes-yard, it followed that Preston saw more of the rabbits, and had more care of them than Bert. But, alas, Flaxie had the care of them too! When Preston was gone to school, she hovered around them, saying to herself,—

"I mustn't lose these wabbits. It isn't *my* wabbits. If I should lose 'em, I should be '*spised*'; and, when I grow up a woman, then folks will look to me and say, 'Flaxie, *where's* those wabbits?'" [71]

And, saying this, she let them out of the cage. A little while afterward, a cruel dog leaped over the fence, worried the poor timid things half to death, and, before Preston could get them back into the cage, had bitten off the beautiful white rabbit's white tail.

It was too much! Preston was very angry, not with Flaxie, but with the dog, and gave him a good beating; or it would have been a good beating if it had only hit the dog! But, after the first blow, the naughty beast ran around a corner; and that was the last seen of him, though it was not the last said or thought of him, you may be sure.

Both the boys were grieved at sight of their white rabbit without any tail, and Bert said,—

"Flaxie, what did you open the cage for?" [72]

But she replied, with an injured air,—

"You ought to not *lemme* open the cage,—such a little goorl as me."

And Bert laughed, but could not help remarking to Preston,—

"Sure enough, you're a smart boy to let that young one meddle round so much."

Then Preston had to answer,—

"Well, I didn't s'pose she could turn the button, and you know I didn't; and I wish you'd hush up."

Naturally, when Bert was told to "hush up," he only talked so much the more; and we all know that talking only makes matters worse.

"If that dog had bit old Brownie, I wouldn't have cared," said Bert, trying to be provoking; "but *my* white rabbit! I say it's a shame!"

"*Your* white rabbit? What you talking about?" [73]

"Why, John Piper was *my* father's hired man, sir; and you're only my cousin."

"Well, what o' that, sir? Isn't this cage mine? And would he have given the rabbits to us *without* a cage? No, *sir*: if it hadn't been for *me* you wouldn't have had *half* a rabbit, Bert Abbott!"

"Half a Bert Rabbit Abbott!" stuttered Flaxie, who never let any one be cross to her brother, except herself.

Then the words flew like hailstones,—pell-mell, sharp and thick, without mercy,—till the boys forgot that they had ever loved each other.

The very next day Brownie got her foot caught in one of Preston's fox-traps, and was lamed for life. Bert had scorned to call her his own when she was a perfect rabbit; but now, out of spite, he hunted up an old bird-cage, and went in great haste to claim her, before she got "killed dead." He said he "didn't care a cent about the old brown thing, but he wasn't going to have her abused." [74]

"Good riddance!" cried Preston. "I don't want to see her again."

"We don't like yabbits, any but white ones," said Flaxie, keeping back her tears with a mighty effort, for she dearly loved Brownie.

"O, yes, Preston Gray, you feel mighty smart because you've got the white one," retorted Bert, in a rage; "but she won't do you much good, now I tell you! You see if something or another don't happen to her, that's all!"

Considering the bad luck that seemed to hang over Preston's things,—from his living pets down to his kites and marbles,—it was very likely something would happen to the white rabbit; and Mrs. Gray told her husband she "trembled for Snowball." [75]



BETTER THAN A KITTEN. Page 68.

Very soon after this Preston rushed into the house one morning in great trouble, his lips quivering.

"Something ails Snowball," gasped he; "she's fainting away."

Fainting away! She was dying, and nobody could save her. All that could be done was to watch her graceful form stiffen in death, while everybody asked over and over, "What could have killed her?"

"She was poisoned," said Dr. Gray.

"O, O!" screamed Preston, beside himself with grief. "Then Bert did it! Bert *must* have done it; and I'll never forgive him as long as I live!"

"My son, my son! Never let me hear you speak in that way of your cousin."

But Preston muttered to Ninny and Julia,—

"Why, you see, I *know* he did it! He said something would happen to Snowball; and he said it so spiteful!"

"Bertie Rabbit's a drefful wicked boy, an' his playfings shan't stay in *my* yard," scolded Flaxie Frizzle, kicking away, with her foot, Bert's new green morocco ball that lay in the grass.

"Look there, will you! He dropped that ball when he brought the poison," cried Preston, very much excited. "Give that ball here to me, Flaxie".

Preston was sure now. He had made up his mind in a hurry, but he had made it up; he *knew* who had killed his rabbit.

Bert was not at school that day. [76]

"I didn't *s'pose* he'd dare to come," said Preston.

Then he took the ball out of his pocket, looked at it savagely, and told the boys what Bertie had done. [77]

Everybody was sorry, for Preston was a great favorite; but it is a grave fact that a few of the boys were secretly glad of a quarrel between two such good friends, and thought, "Now Preston will notice the rest of us a little more perhaps." And the boys who had these envious feelings did not try to stand up for Bert, you may be sure. They said, "You ain't a bit to blame for getting mad, Preston. It's pretty plain who killed your rabbit. Wonder how Bert Abbott'd like it if you should give a sling at Old Brownie? 'Twould be no more'n fair!"

"That's so," said Preston, growing angrier and angrier, as they talked over his wrongs, till it seemed to him he couldn't stand it another minute without revenging himself on Bert. [78]

"If he kills my rabbit, why shouldn't I kill his?" he argued with himself, stealing round by Aunt Jane Abbott's on his way home from school at noon.

Just before he reached her back gate, he picked up a smooth round stone and aimed it at a knot in one of the boards, which he hit right in the centre,—he was pretty sure to hit whatever he aimed at,—then he found the stone again, and hid it in his pocket. It was about the right size to throw at a rabbit's head.

Poor, unsuspecting Brownie! There she was, in the garden, munching cabbage-leaves, when Preston crept toward her, looking this way and that, to make sure nobody saw him. She heard the slight sound of his boots, and sat up on her haunches, perfectly motionless, to listen. Certainly he never could have had a better chance to aim at her than then. Very slowly he put his hand in his pocket, and very slowly he was drawing out the stone, when the loving little creature caught sight of him, and leaped joyfully toward him in her pitiful, crippled way. What boy, with a heart, would have harmed such a pet? Not Preston, I hope you know! He dropped the stone, and ran home in such a hurry that he was quite out of breath, when at the gate he met Flaxie, carrying Snowball's drinking-dish by the tips of her fingers. [79]

"Naughty old *fling*" said she; "I'm going to frow it down the *scut-hole*!" (Flaxie meant scuttle.)

"Hold on, that's mine!" cried Preston, seizing the pan which he had painted a brilliant green only a day or two before.

"No, no: I'm going to frow it down the scut-hole," persisted Flaxie. "It killed the dear little rabbit: Dr. Papa said so." [80]

Yes: it was the fresh paint that had poisoned Snowball. Dr. Gray had said that at once when Flaxie had led him out to the cage to show him the poor, stiff little body, and he saw the flakes of green soaked off from the sides of the drinking-pan and floating on the water.

So really Preston was the murderer. Poor Preston! Didn't he hang his head for shame? And, as for Bert, he hadn't been near Snowball for two whole days; he had been on the sofa all that time with earache and toothache.

"Does you feel orfly?" said little Flaxie. "You going to cry?"

"Yes, I feel orfly; but boys don't cry," replied Preston, trying to whistle.

He tried to whistle again, when Bert, of his own accord, brought back Brownie and said,— [81]

"Come, Pres, let's go partner's again. Your cage is better than mine."

Preston choked up and could not speak; but, after this, he and Bert were closer friends than ever.

VI. [82]

THE STRANGE RIDE.

THE next summer Flaxie had a baby brother named Philip Lally Gray. Flaxie said he was "as good as any of the rest of the family, and lots better."

She loved him dearly; and perhaps it was in loving him that she learned to become unselfish. By the time he was a year old, he had pulled her hair, and scratched her face, and given her a great deal of trouble; but the more he tried her patience, the more her patience grew.

"Really, she is almost as sweet as Ninny," said Mrs. Gray to her husband.

When Philip was thirteen months old, he had no teeth, and Flaxie grieved about it. Her own were falling out, and she wished she could give them to her baby brother. [83]

"Never mind," said Dr. Papa. "If he never has any teeth of his own, I will buy him some gold ones."

"O, that'll be so nice," cried Flaxie. "I never saw any gold teeth in all my life."

That year, late in September, Flaxie Frizzle went with her mamma and baby Phil to the city of Louisville, in Kentucky, to see Grandpa and Grandma Curtis. Dr. Gray staid at home with Ninny and Preston.

"Poor papa couldn't come, 'cause he has to give folks their mederson," explained Miss Frizzle, before she had taken off her bonnet in grandma's parlor.

"Too bad," laughed pretty Grandma Curtis, who was ever and ever so much younger than Grandma Pressy, and didn't even wear a cap. "But we are glad he could send his little daughter." [84]

No wonder she was glad! Flaxie was all pink and white, with a mouth made up for kisses, and eyes laughing like the sky after a shower. The colored girl, Venus, had never seen her before; but she loved her in a moment, for Flaxie threw both arms around her neck and kissed her, like a butterfly alighting on a black velvet rose.

But that night Flaxie did not seem quite well, and the next morning she was worse; she could not even hold the baby.

"They're so glad I've got the mumps," said she, two or three days afterward, as she lay on the sofa, with hot, swelled cheeks and parched lips that tried to smile.

The remark was made to Peppermint Drop, the doll of her bosom; but black Venus took it to herself. [85]

"And what makes 'em glad you're sick?" said she.

"'Cause my mamma wants me to have the mumps all done, Venus, and then she can go to my *'nother* grandma's next week. I've got lots of grandmas. She's going to see this one next week, and take the baby."

"Yes," said Venus, dusting the chairs; "and prob'ly if you get well she'll take you too."

"No, O, no: she don't think's best," replied Flaxie, dropping a hot tear on Peppermint Drop's bosom, which would have melted it a little if it had been made of sugar instead of bran. "Grandma Hyde lives in the *other* town, 'way off, down where the boats go; and mamma says she *can't* take but one childrens. She's drefful sorry; but she don't think best." [86]

And the little girl dried her eyes on her doll's bib-apron; for she heard some one coming, and didn't want to be a baby.

It was mamma, with Phil in her arms, fresh from his morning bath, bright, wide-awake, and ready for mischief. His hair was golden,—darker even now than Flaxie's,—and his eyes were the richest brown.

"Shall I let him *go*?" asked mamma, as if he were a wild creature, and they generally kept him in chains.

"Yes, mamma, let him go."

And, when she dropped her hold of him, he rushed at his sister, and "hugged her grizzly," as she called it, like the most affectionate of little bears.

"Won't Grandma Hyde be *exprised* to see him? She'll love you and thank you dearly," said Flaxie. [87]

"I'm a little ashamed of him," laughed Mrs. Gray. "You know he has only one tooth."

"Well, he hasn't much teeth, and he can't talk; but he can stand on his head *so* cunnin'! Phil want to go in boat? Want see Gamma Hyde, and hug her grizzly?"

Was this our cross Flaxie? Indeed, she *was* almost as sweet as Ninny—sometimes!

When the day came for going to Shawneetown, where Grandma Hyde lived, Flaxie had got her mumps "all done," and was allowed to ride down in a hack to the "Jennie Howell," and see mamma off.

Little Phil wore a white dress and a soft white cloak, with silk acorns and leaves embroidered all over it; and a white cap with a white cockade set on top of his gold rings of hair. He looked like a prince; and his mother called him, "'Philip, my King.'" [88]

The last thing Flaxie saw him do was to throw kisses at a hen-coop which somebody was putting on board the boat. He thought there were chickens in it, and I suppose there were.

Flaxie looked rather sober as she rode back in the hack with Grandma Curtis. "He never went to *Shawtown* before," said she; "and he isn't much 'quainted with strangers. I spect I ought to gone with him."

"I spect he'll get along beautifully," replied Grandma Curtis, hugging Flaxie; "but, if you are needed, your mamma can send a dispatch, you know."

She little thought Mrs. Gray would really send a dispatch. [89]

Mrs. Gray and the baby steamed slowly down the Ohio,—very slowly; for the water was so low that in many places you could see the bottom of the river. Once the boat stuck fast for an hour or two on a sand-bar.

"I am glad it is not a snag," thought Mrs. Gray; "that would make me afraid."

A snag is a dead tree; and, when the river is low, it sometimes scrapes the bottom of the boat, and makes holes in it.

After supper she undressed Philly and put him in his little berth; for they were not likely to reach Shawneetown, at this rate, before morning.

"They are all longing to see us," thought Mrs. Gray, kissing her sleeping baby. Mrs. Hyde was her own mother, and they had not met for two years. "O, yes, Philly, your grandma has a nice supper [90]

ready, and your Aunt Floy has been at the window all the afternoon. How slowly we do go. Hush, Philly, don't cry,—

"The owl and the pussy cat went to sea,
In a beautiful pea-green boat."

Philly dropped off to sleep at last. His mother put him in the upper berth, and lay down herself on the lower berth, without undressing. She was quiet and happy, listening to the baby's breathing, and thinking of the griddle-cakes and honey grandma would give her for breakfast, when suddenly she was roused by frightful screams.

The boat was leaking! A great snag, which stood up in the river like a horned beast, had seized it and torn holes in its sides. It was of no use trying to stop the leak; the boat was sinking fast; all that could be done was to get out the people. [91]

The captain and his men worked terribly, taking them off into life-boats; but there was such a hurry and such a fright that it was not possible to save everybody. Some of the passengers went down. Among them were some bewildered little children, who did not know what had happened till they woke in heaven, and the angels told them the story.

Mrs. Gray was one of the people saved; but where was her precious baby? The men said they did not know, he was nowhere to be seen, and even his little bed had been washed away!

"Go without Philly? Go without my baby? I can't do it, I *can't* do it," cried the poor mother.

But two of the good men seized her and dragged her into the life-boat. They *would* save her in spite of herself. [92]

Dear Mrs. Gray, who had thought so much of seeing her mother and sister, and showing them her baby! She was taken in a carriage with the other passengers to Shawneetown, just where she had all the time intended to go; but, O, what a sad meeting! Her mother and her sister Floy met her at the door, not knowing what had happened.

"My baby is lost, my baby is lost!" wailed she, and fainted away in Aunt Kitty's arms.

A dispatch was sent to Grandma Curtis at Louisville, and another to Dr. Gray at Rosewood, New York. The poor doctor was wakened in the middle of the night to learn that his little boy was drowned!

Morning came at last; it always comes. The sun shone too; it is just as likely to shine when people are sad as when they are happy. But what a long day it was to that wretched mother! What a long day to her husband, who started before sunrise to go to meet her! [93]

In the evening, before Dr. Gray could possibly get there, a strange man called at Grandma Hyde's and asked if Mrs. Gray was in the house?

"She is," replied Aunt Floy, whose eyes were red with weeping. "I hope you haven't any more bad news for her! She can't bear any more!"

"I don't believe it's bad news," replied the man, with something that was almost a smile. "Did Mrs. Gray lose a child on the wreck of the 'Jennie Howell' last night?"

"Yes, sir, a baby. Speak low."

"Well," said the man, dropping his voice to a whisper, "I am pilot of the 'Jennie Howell,' ma'am. I went down to look at her this morning; and what should I see but a mattress, ma'am, floating in the cabin, most up to the ceiling, and a live baby on top of it!" [94]

"A live baby? O, not a *live* baby!"

"Yes, ma'am, sleeping as sweet as a lamb! My wife has got him now over here to the hotel—a pretty little yellow-haired shaver, as—"

"O, it's Philly! where is he? Bring him this minute! I know it's Philly!"

And so it was; for, my dears, this is a true story. It was Philip Gray; and he had been saved almost by a miracle. Was the finding of Moses in the bulrushes so strange a thing as this?

His mother was driven to the hotel, where the pilot's wife sat in the public parlor with a baby in her lap.

"O, my boy!" cried Mrs. Gray. [95]

And he rushed into her arms with a gleeful shout,—her own precious "'Philip my King.'"

VII.

 [96]

MAKING CALLS.

Not very long after this, Mrs. Gray, came back to Rosewood with Flaxie and the dear rescued baby whom everybody was eager to see, for,—

"They loved him more and more.
Ah, never in their hearts before,

Was love so lovely born."

And Ninny cried as she took him in her arms, and said,—

"He doesn't look as he used to, does he, papa? His eyes are *very* different."

"You think that because we came so near losing him," replied Dr. Papa.

Baby Philip looked round upon them all with "those deep and tender twilight eyes," which seemed to be full of sweet meanings; but I must confess that he was thinking of nothing in the world just then but his supper. [97]

The travellers had not been home a week before Grandpa Pressy sent for Ninny to go and make him and grandma a visit, and this left Flaxie Frizzle rather lonesome; for Preston did not care to play with girls when he could be with Bert Abbott. Besides, he and his cousin Bert were uncommonly busy about this time, getting up a pin-show in Dr. Gray's barn.

So Flaxie's mamma often let her run over to Aunt Jane Abbott's to see Lucy and Rose. I have not told you before of these cousins, because there have been so many other things to talk about that I have not had time. Lucy was a black-eyed little gipsy, and Rose was a sweet little creature, you could never see without wanting to kiss. [98]

Just now Aunt Jane had a lively young niece from Albany spending the fall with her, named Gussie Ricker. One day, when Flaxie Frizzle was at Aunt Jane's, Gussie proposed that Flaxie and Lucy should make a call upon a little girl who was visiting Mrs. Prim.

"O, yes," said Lucy, "we truly must call on Dovey Sparrow. She has frizzly curls like Flaxie's, and she can play five tunes on the piano. But, Gussie, how do you make calls?"

"O," replied Miss Gussie, with a twinkle in her eye, "all sorts of ways. Sometimes we take our cards; but it isn't really necessary for little girls to do that. Then we just touch the lady's hand,—this way,—and talk about the weather; and, in three minutes or so, we go away." [99]

"I've seen calls a great many times," said Flaxie Frizzle, thoughtfully. "I can make one if Lucy will go with me."

"I could make one better alone," said Lucy, in a very cutting tone. She was two years older than Flaxie, and always remembered it.

"I'll go wiv you, Flaxie, if Lucy doesn't," put in little Rose, the sweet wee sister; and then it was Flaxie's turn to be cutting, for as it happened she was just two years older than Rose.

"Poh," said she; "*you* can't do calls, a little speck of a thing like you! You don't grow so much in a year as my thumb grows in five minutes!"

Rose hid her blushing face in the rocking-chair.

"Do you truly think we'd better go, Gussie?" asked Lucy; for Gussie was laughing, and Lucy did not like to be made fun of, though she did make fun of Flaxie Frizzle. [100]

"O, certainly," said Gussie, trying to look very sober; "don't I always say what I mean?"

So, as they were going, Lucy took Flaxie one side that afternoon and instructed her how to behave.

"Dovey came from Boston, and we never saw her only in church; so I s'pose we *must* carry cards."

"Where'll we get 'em?"

"O, my mamma has plenty, and so has Gussie. I know Gussie would be glad to lend me her silver card-case that Uncle William gave her; she wants me to be so polite! But I don't dare ask her, so I guess I'll borrow it without asking."

"Hasn't somebody else got a gold one that *I* could borrow?" asked Miss Frizzle, looking rather unhappy as the pretty toy dropped into Lucy's pocket. [101]

"O, it's no matter about *you*; you don't need a card-case, for I shall be with you to take care of you," returned Lucy, as they both stood in Mrs. Abbott's guest-chamber before the tall looking-glass. "Do tell me, Flaxie, does my hat look polite? I mean is it style enough?"

"It's as style as mine," replied Flaxie, gazing into the glass with Lucy. How pretty she thought Lucy was, because her eyes were black and her hair was dark and didn't "friz!"

"I wish I wasn't a 'tow-head,' and I wish I was as tall as you!" sighed she.

"Well, *you* don't care," said Lucy, graciously. "You'll grow. You're just as good as I am if you only behave well. You mustn't run out your tongue, Flaxie: it looks as if you were catching flies. And you mustn't sneeze before people: it's very rude." [102]

"I heard *you* once, Lu Abbott, and it was in church too!"

"O, then 'twas an accident; you must scuse accidents. And now," added Lucy, giving a final touch to her gloves, "I want you to notice how I act, Flaxie Frizzle, and do just the same; for my mother has seen the President and yours hasn't."

"Well, my mamma's seen an elephant," exclaimed Flaxie, with spirit; "and she has two silk dresses and a smelling-bottle."

"Poh! my cousin Gussie's got a gold watch, and some nightly blue sirreup. Uncle William gives her lots of things; but I shouldn't think of telling o' that! Now, do you know what to do when [103]

anybody *induces* you to strangers?"

"What you s'pose?" replied Flaxie, tartly. "I speak up and say 'Yes'm.'"

Lucy laughed, as if she were looking down, down from a great height upon her little cousin.

"And shake hands, too," added Flaxie, quickly, for fear she had made a mistake.

"No, you give three fingers, *not* your hand. Just as if you were touching a toad. And you raise your eyebrows up,—*this* way,—and quirk your mouth,—so,—and nod your head.

"How d'ye do, Miss Dovey Sparrow? It's a charr-rming day. Are they all well at Boston?' You'll see how *I'll* do it, Flaxie! Then I shall take out my hang-verchief and shake it, so the sniff of the nightly blue sirreup will *waft* all round the room.—O, I've seen 'em!

[104]

"Then I shall wipe my nose—this way—and sit down. I've seen young ladies do it a great many times."

"So've I," chimed in Flaxie Frizzle, admiring her cousin's fine graces. Such tiptoeing and courtesying and waving of hands before the looking-glass. How did Lucy manage it so well?

"And, if people have plants," continued Lucy, "then you say, '*How* flagrant!' And, if people have children, you say, '*What* darlings!' and pat their hair, and ask, 'Do you go to school, my dear?'"

"They've said that to me ever so many times; and I've got real sick of it," remarked Flaxie.

"And they keep calling every thing char-ar-ming and bee-you-oo-tiful! with such tight gloves on, I know their fingers feel choked!"

[105]

"I s'pect we ought to go," said Flaxie, tired of all this instruction. "I don't believe you know how to behave, Lu Abbott. You never made any calls, more'n I did."

As they went through the hall, Flaxie thought she would "borrow" Aunt Jane's lace veil; but Lucy did not observe this till they had started off. They tripped along the roadside, past Mr. Potter's store, past the church, their feet scarcely touching the grass. Lucy felt like a princess royal till they reached Mrs. Prim's beautiful grounds, and then her heart fluttered a little. She had a sudden longing to run home and get Gussie to come back with them.

"Pull the bell," said she to Flaxie. Flaxie pulled so hard that her veil flew off, and she had to chase it several rods.

"Put it in your pocket, you awful child," exclaimed Lucy, as Kitty Maloney, the kitchen girl, opened the door in alarm, thinking something dreadful had happened.

[106]

"Why, bless my soul, if 'tisn't Docther Gray's little snip of a Mary. And who's this? Why, it's Miss Abbott's little gee-url. Anybody sick?"

Now was the time for Miss Frizzle's courage to come up. She stepped in front of the frightened Lucy, and exclaimed, boldly,—

"I'm Flaxie Frizzle, you know, and this is my cousin. We want to see Dovey Sparrow."

As Flaxie spoke, Lucy tremblingly drew out her card-case.

"Yes, she's in. She and Miss Prim has just come from ridin'. Will ye walk in?" said Katy, *very* respectfully.

"Please give her these," faltered Lucy, placing in Kitty's hands two cards, one bearing the name, "Augusta L. Ricker," the other a few words in pencil, which somebody must have written for a memorandum:—

[107]

"Kerosene oil.

Vanilla.

Oatmeal soap."

Kitty stared at the cards, then at the exquisite Lucy, and suddenly put her calico apron up to her face.

"Will ye wait till I give her the kee-ards, young ladies, or will ye come in the parlor now?" said she, in a stifled voice.

Flaxie Frizzle concluded to walk in; and Lucy, who was now nothing but Flaxie's shadow, followed her in silence.

Kitty Maloney disappeared; and, in about a minute, Dovey Sparrow tripped in, blushing and looking as frightened as a wood-pigeon. The roguish Kitty had just told her that her little visitors were very ginteel folks, and she must talk to 'em as if she was reading it out of a book.

[108]

Meantime Kitty was hiding in the back parlor, with her apron over her mouth, forgetting her potato yeast in her curiosity to watch these fine young ladies.

Flaxie rose and shook hands, but entirely forgot to speak. Lucy did the same.

"H'm," said Flaxie, snapping the card-case, which she had taken from Lucy.

"Yes'm," responded Dovey, trembling.

It was getting rather awkward.

Flaxie wiped her nose, and so did Miss Lucy. Then Flaxie folded her arms; also Lucy.

Poor Miss Dovey tried to think of a speech grand enough to make to these wise little people; but the poor thing could not remember any thing but her geography lessons.

[109]

Flaxie Frizzle was also laboring in vain. The only thing that came into *her* head was a wild desire to sneeze.

At last, her eye chancing to rest on the crimson trimmings of Dovey's dress, she was suddenly reminded of turkeys and their dislike of red things. So she cried out in despair,—

"Do you keep a turkey at your house?"

O, strange question!

"Does your papa keep sheep?" chimed in Lucy.

"We don't keep a thing!" replied Dovey, in great surprise at these remarkable speeches; "nor a dog either."

Then Flaxie Frizzle, growing bolder and bolder, came out brilliantly with this:—

"You got any *trundlebeds* to Boston?"

This was too much; the ice was beginning to crack.

[110]

"Why, Flaxie Frizzle!" said Lucy; and then she laughed.

"Look at that clock on the bracket! Why, what are you laughing at, girls?"

"O, how funny!" cried Flaxie Frizzle, dancing out of her chair.

"Do stop making me shake so!" said Miss Dovey, dropping to the floor, and rocking back and forth.

"O, ho," screamed Lucy, hopping across the rug, "you don't look like a bird any more'n I do, Dovey Sparrow."

They were all set in a very high gale by this time.

"Be still," said Flaxie Frizzle, holding up both hands. "There, now, I had a sneeze; but, O, dear, I can't sneeze it!"

"You're just like anybody, after all," tittered the sparrow. "Don't you want to go out and jump on the hay?" [111]

"Well, there," replied Miss Lucy, rolling her gloves into a ball, "you never asked us to take our things off, you never!"

"I didn't want you to," said Dovey; "you scared me half to death!"

"Did we?" cried Lucy, in delight. "Well, I never was so 'fraid my own self. You ought to heard my heart beat when we rang that bell."

"Me, too," said Flaxie Frizzle.

"But you're such a darling, though," pursued Lucy, kissing her new friend warmly. "I'm *glad* you don't know how to behave!"

"I'm glad you don't, either," said Dovey, tilting herself on a rocker like a bird on a bough, "I thought you were going to be, *O*, so polite, for you set Kitty all of a tremble. Come, let's go out and play."

"So we will. Come along, Flaxie Frizzle."

[112]

"What! is that Flaxie Frizzle? O, I always did want to see Flaxie Frizzle. Mrs. Prim has told me lots about her," said Dovey, as they skipped out to the barn.

You may be sure Lucy lost the "borrowed" card-case in the hay; and, when it was found, weeks afterward, it bore the marks of horse's teeth; but Gussie said,—

"It is good enough for me; I ought not to have filled the children's heads with such nonsense."

I am happy to state that Aunt Jane's veil,—a beautiful lace one,—reached home safely, and that this was the last fashionable call Lucy and Flaxie Frizzle ever made.

VIII.

[113]

TEASING MIDGE.

SOMETIME after this, Aunt Jane Abbott, who was sick with neuralgia, went to New Jersey for her health. She took Bert and Lucy with her; but little Rose came to stay with Flaxie Frizzle. Rose was her real name, but sometimes they called her Midge, she was so small.

She was a sweet child; and, the first day she came, Miss Frizzle was so glad to see her that she called for her new tea-set, which stood on the high shelf in the closet, took her best wax doll out of its paper wraps, and held a real jubilee in the nursery.

"O, Rosie," said she, dancing around her, "I wish you'd never, never go home again, only just long enough to see your mother, and come right back again to live in this house. 'Cause I haven't any little sister, you know, 'cept Ninny, and she's big,—'most twelve years old." [114]

"Well, my mamma's got the *algebra*; and I've come to stay a great, long while," said Rosa, seating

herself at the doll's table,—“all the time mamma and Lucy are gone.”

“What do you say your mamma's got?”

“*Algebra*.”

“You mean *new-algery*,” said Flaxie, smiling.

“Well, I guess it is,” returned meek little Rose, passing a wee plate to her cousin. “And now you say to me, ‘Won't you have some tea, lady?’”



“HOW IS YOUR CHILLENS, MRS. FRIZZLE?” Page 115.

The dolls sat in their chairs and looked on, while the young hostess turned the tea into the cups very gracefully. “Ahem,” said she, trying to look very grown-up, “does tea 'fect your nerves, Mrs. Rose?” [115]

“Yes'm,—I don' know,” replied Mrs. Rose, puckering her lips to fit the tiny spoon.

“You goin' to *piece* the meat, and give all as much as each?”

“No, Mrs. Rose: you may take your fork and put one slice of meat on each doll's plate.”

Rose obeyed; and then, as nothing else was said, she asked,—

“How *is* your chillens, Mrs. Frizzle?”

“All are well that you see here at the table, ma'am; but the rest are down with measles,” returned the little lady of the teapot. “Will you have some of the fruit, Mrs. Rose?”

“O, that isn't *fyuit*,” said the small guest; “that's *blackb'ry perserves*; but we'll make b'lieve it's *fyuit*. Yes'm: thank you, if you please.” [116]

“Brackberries *are* fruits,” said the correct Mrs. Frizzle; “and currants are fruits. You can tell 'em just as easy. When anything has seeds to it, then it's a fruit; and, when it *hasn't* seeds, it's a vegetable.”

“O, I thought peaches was *fyuits*; and peaches hasn't any seeds,” said Rose, faintly.

“Why, you little ignoramus! Of course peaches have stones! Who ever said they had seeds!”

“I don't like to have you call me *niggeramus*,” said Rose, with a quivering lip. “My mamma never said so.”

“Well, my sister Ninny says so; and she studies hist'ry. You don't know what words mean, Rosie; you don't go to school!”

“No,” said Rose, hanging her head, “I haven't never been to school, 'cause mamma says I'm not [117]

velly well."

"Fore I'd be a cry-baby, Mrs. Midge," returned Flaxie, enjoying the very humble look on her cousin's face. "You wouldn't dare go to school, 'cause there are cows in the road."

"I'm 'fraid of cows when they have their hooks on," said Rosie, still hanging her head.

"I guess everybody knows that. Will you please pass the cream-pitcher?"

"It's velly funny *queam*" said dear little Rose, winking away her tears.

"This isn't cream, ma'am; it's condensed milk."

"*Condemned* milk?"

"No: I said *condensed*, not condemned. You look as if you never saw any before."

"My papa hasn't got a condensed cow," said Rose, humbly.

[118]

"You goosie, goosie," laughed Flaxie. "My papa hasn't got a condensed cow, either; nobody has. You *buy* this kind of milk at the store. I'm going right into the parlor to tell my mother what you said."

"Don't, O, don't," implored little Rose.

Flaxie knew her young cousin dreaded to be laughed at;—all children dread it;—but, forgetting her manners, and the Golden Rule, too, she sprang up from the table and ran to the door, little Rose creeping after her, all the happiness gone out of her face.

Mrs. Prim was in the parlor, and it did seem as if she would never be done laughing about that "condensed cow;" but Mrs. Gray only said,—

"Well, well; no wonder the darling didn't know."

[119]

Sweet, sensitive Rose stood in the doorway, looking down at her boots and thinking how silly Mrs. Prim was, and how unkind her dear cousin Flaxie.

"I used to love Flaxie," thought she, squeezing back a tear; "but now I wish I could go wight home and stay there. Plaguing little girls like me, when I comed to purpose to please her!"

"What are you crying about, you precious?" asked Dodo, as the child wandered into the kitchen.

Gentle little Rose didn't like to tell.

"O, I know," said Dodo. "Flaxie has got into one of her teasing spells; and, when she does, there's no peace for anybody."

Mrs. Gray did not talk in that way to Rose.

"Flaxie loves you dearly, if she *is* rude. Don't mind all the little things she says to you, darling. Try to be brave and laugh it off."

[120]

"I would laugh, auntie, only it makes my head ache to shake it the leastest speck."

"Flaxie," said Mrs. Gray, taking her little daughter one side, "is this the way you are going to treat your dear cousin? I cannot permit it."

"Well, I won't," replied Flaxie, quite ashamed of herself; "but she cries so easy, mamma, as easy as a—a—beetle bug."

Next morning Rosa's head ached harder than ever, and Flaxie laughed and danced all the time. Rosie did wish she wouldn't be so noisy.

"How sober you are, Midge Abbott. Don't you want me to tell you a story?"

"Yes. Do, O, do."

What spirit of mischief seized Flaxie, just then, to want to frighten Rose? She loved her dearly; but she enjoyed making her tremble, she could do it so easily.

[121]

"Well, there *was* an old *woo-ooman*, all *skin* and *bo-one*," began Flaxie, in a singsong tone.

It was a dreadful, dreadful story, which she had heard Tommy Winters, a naughty boy, tell, and her mamma had forbidden her ever to repeat it; but she forgot that. She only wanted to see if Rose would scream as loud as she herself had screamed on hearing it.

Scream? Poor Rosie fairly shrieked.

"Stop! O, do stop," said Flaxie.

But Rose could not stop.

"There isn't any such woman," said Flaxie.

But Rose cried all the same.

"There never *was* such a woman! Now won't you stop?"

[122]

"O, dear, dear, dear!" sobbed Rose.

"There never *will* be such a woman, you darling. There, *now* won't you stop? I've told you so over and over, but still you keep crying," said Flaxie, in real dismay.

"What's the matter now?" asked Ninny, coming into the nursery, and finding Rose curled up in a little heap of misery in the corner.

"I don't know what to do with her. I s'pose it's me that's to blame," said Flaxie, rather sulkily,

though she was very sorry too. "I can't say a single thing but she cries."

"Well, you must be kind to her; she isn't used to cross words. Her sister Lucy is very different from you," said Ninny, taking Rose into her arms, in a motherly way. [123]

"You blame me, and everybody blames me," growled Flaxie; "but I can't say an *eeny-teeny* thing but she cries."

Flaxie kept telling herself Rose was a cry-baby; but in her heart she knew it was her own rudeness which had wounded her sensitive little cousin in the first place. She knew Rose was the sort of little girl who never could "get over" any thing in a minute, and so ought not to be teased.

"I'll make it up," thought Flaxie. "Maybe I *have* been naughty; but I'll make it up."

So, about supper-time, she came along to Rose, and very sweetly offered to cut some paper dolls for her.

"Now 'twill be all right," thought Flaxie; but by that time even paper dolls had lost their charm for Rose. There was a settled pain in the little girl's forehead, and her cheeks kept flushing and flushing till they were a deep crimson. [124]

"Come, sit in auntie's lap," said Mrs. Gray, putting down the baby, and a little startled by Rosie's quick breathing. "Come and tell auntie if darling feels sick anywhere."

"I don't know," moaned little Rose; but she seemed very glad to lay her hot face against her aunt's shoulder; and it was not two minutes before she was fast asleep.

"I don't feel quite easy about her," said Mrs. Gray to her husband, when he came home to supper.

Dr. Gray felt the child's pulse, and said,—

"Perhaps she has taken a sudden cold." He did not like to tell his wife that he was afraid of scarlet fever. But before long she knew it for herself: the symptoms were not to be mistaken. [125]

It was thought at first that Flaxie and the baby, who had neither of them had the fever, must be sent away. But the doctor said, "No, there would be danger of their carrying the dreadful disease to others.

"It is better that they should stay at home," said he: "only Flaxie must be very sure never to see her sick cousin or go into her room."

"Never see Rosie! Yes, that was what Dr. Papa said," sobbed Flaxie. "O Dodo, did he mean *never*?"

How could Dodo tell? How could even poor, white-faced Aunt Jane tell, who came at once to nurse her darling daughter. She had to wait like all the rest.

Do you know how hard it is to wait? Do you know how long that week was to Flaxie, with the dreary days coming and going, and still no change for the better? [126]

No: you do not know, unless you, too, have had a friend who was very sick.

And the aching that was at Flaxie's heart, the yearning she felt to throw her arms round her little cousin's neck and beg forgiveness!

Ah! you can not even guess at that unless you, too, have been unkind to a dear friend who may possibly be going to die.

IX. [127]

THE WEE WHITE ROSE.

No need now to caution Flaxie not to make a noise. She crept about the house as still as a shadow, with an old, heartbroken look on her childish face, pitiful to see.

And, far away in the east chamber, lay dear little Rose, flushed with fever.

O, if you had only known what a darling it was that lay there!

From her sweet babyhood she had always been a sunbeam in her father's house; and, after her father died, a year ago, it had really seemed as if she thought she must try to comfort her poor mamma.

Aunt Jane, her mamma, was very delicate; and, when Dr. Gray came to see her once, he said to little Rose,— [128]

"You're mamma's little nurse. Don't forget to take good care of her."

And Rose did not forget. After that, she often said,—

"Unker Docker, I *do* take care o' mamma."

If Mrs. Abbott dressed to go out, the little daughter would say,—

"Why, mamma, you must have your *yubbers*. I'll go get your yubbers and warm 'em this minute."

Lucy never thought of warming the rubbers, and she was a good girl too.

When Mrs. Abbott stepped into the cold hall, Rose followed with a little white lambswool shawl, begging her to put it over her shoulders.

She did not like to give her beautiful sick mother any trouble, so she dressed and undressed herself, though scarcely five years old; and every day, after dinner, went to her little room, lay down on the bed, and took her nap without being told. [129]

Mrs. Abbott had been in New Jersey only three days, when Dr. Gray telegraphed to her that Rosie was ill, and she hurried home as fast as she could.

The morning after she returned was little Rosie's birthday, and that morning a present had come from her dear, good "Unker Willum,"—a lovely muff and tippet, such as she had long been wishing to have. Mamma brought them and laid them beside her on the bed.

"Wasn't it beautiful?" mamma said. "And see the squirrel's head on the muff, and the cunning *porte-monnaie* inside."

"Yes, pretty, pretty," said little Rosie; for her head was thumping so hard that it did not please her very much, after all. [130]

Once she had told dear "Unker Willum" that, if she had a lot of money, she should be "perfickly happy."

"How much money would make you perfickly happy?" he asked.

"Three hundred and three thousand and thirty-six cents," said Rose; and, every time he asked her, she gave the same answer.

So now there was a neat little note inside the muff, and it told Rosie that, when next Christmas came, "Unker Willum would send her three hundred and three thousand and thirty-six cents and make his darling niece 'perfickly happy.'"

Rosie did not clap her hands or laugh at this letter as "Unker Willum" had expected; she only smiled faintly, and by-and-bye began to cry softly to herself. Mamma said,— [131]

"Is it your head, darling?"

"Yes, mamma, my head aches; but that isn't what makes me cry. I was s'posin' would you and Lucy and Bertie be very lonesome 'thout me, if I should go way off up to heaven?"

"Don't talk so, my precious child," said Mrs. Abbott. "God doesn't want you to die; He wants you to live to be mamma's dear little comfort."

"Does He?" asked Rosie, opening her sweet, blue eyes, and fixing them on her mother's face. Then she moved her head from side to side on the pillow, and said,—

"No, mamma, I think I'm going up to heaven velly soon."

Mrs. Abbott's heart throbbled with a quick pain at these words; and she began to tell Rosie some stories to take up her mind; such as "Little Bopeep has Lost her Sheep," and "Little Boy Blue, come, Blow your Horn!" [132]

"Mamma," said Rosie, "I'd ravver hear that pretty story 'bout Jesus—it's so much nicer. How he came down here, and put his hands on the little chillens."

Then Mrs. Abbott sang, in a trembling voice,—

"I think, when I read that sweet story of old,
When Jesus was here among men,
How he called little children as lambs to his fold,—
I should like to have been with them then."

"That's nice,—so nice," said little Rosie, smiling. "Now I'll go to sleep, mamma."

Next day her little head was worse. Flaxie had begged Aunt Jane to take her all her pretty playthings; but the sick child did not care for them now. There were Flaxie's wee chairs and sofas and pictures to furnish her baby-house, and dishes to set her baby-table. Rosie did not like them now; but she knew she *had* liked them when she was well. [133]

"Mamma," said she, "shall I have playfings up in heaven?"

"Yes, dear: prettier ones than these."

"O, I am so glad. And, mamma, must I take my best dresses when I go up?—my blue one with the pretty wuffles, you know, and my little pink *beauty* dress?"

"No, darling: God will give you nicer clothes than those to wear."

"Will he, mamma? O, that's very nice."

She lay quite still for a long time, and then called her mother to her bedside.

"Mamma, you 'member that sweet story you sung to me 'bout Jesus?"

"Yes, dear."

"And is it all truly true, mamma?"

"Yes: quite true, my child." [134]

"Well, that's all I want to know, mamma," said the blessed baby; and then, with a happy smile, she pressed her cheek against the pillow, and dropped off to sleep.

They were glad of that, for they thought the rest would do her good; but, ah! she slept so long, so very long! A week went by, and still she had not waked. Then she opened her eyes, and faintly said, "Mamma, mamma."

Mamma bent over her, very happy to hear her sweet voice once more; and the child placed one of her little arms about her dear mother's neck, and so fell asleep again.

Dr. and Mrs. Gray watched beside her with sad mamma; for they knew now that little Rose was going away from them.

She woke at last; and, O, how happy she was! for she found herself in a beautiful world,—more beautiful than any thing she had ever dreamed of,—and Some One was holding her in His arms. She was sure it was the dear Jesus; and she nestled close to His breast, too happy to speak. Her mother could not see this; but she *knew* the Lord had taken little Rosie; and, though her heart was very sad, she looked up through her tears, and said,— [135]

"It is well with the child."

But poor Flaxie! When they told her that little Rosie had gone away to play with the angels, she sobbed, bitterly,—

"O mamma, mamma, if I hadn't teased her, *if* I only hadn't! And now God has taken her away; and I can't tell her I'm sorry!"

Ah, it was a sad, sad lesson to little Flaxie. [136]

"I prayed as hard as I could, ever so long," wailed she. "God could have made her well if He had thought best; and then what a hugging I was going to give her! I wasn't *ever* going to plague her again!"

Weeks after this, Mrs. Gray saw Flaxie one day standing at the front door, with her hands clasped, looking straight upward into the sky.

"Dear God," she murmured, softly, "won't you please let me peek in a minute and see Rosie? If you can't let me peek in, won't you please tell Rosie I'm sorry?"

X.

[137]

PRESTON'S GOLD DOLLAR.

My eyes are so full of tears, as I think of dear little Rose that I am going to talk now about something very different. I think I shall tell you of one of Preston's mishaps.

I am afraid when you read it you will say to yourself, "Well, *he* isn't much of a boy!" But please remember, he was hardly ten years old when the affair happened; and boys are not as wise as Solomon until they are *at least* twelve or thirteen.

Preston was doing Aunt Jane's errands for her that week; he did them one week and Bert the next.

"I wonder why Preston doesn't come," said Aunt Jane, stirring some medicine with a spoon, and speaking to Grandpa Pressy, who had come visiting again, and was sitting in the corner reading a newspaper. [138]

Grandpa Pressy looked up with a pleasant smile, while the paper danced as if it would fly out of his hands; for he had palsy.

"Hark, Jane, there's his whistle, and he isn't generally far behind it."

In another moment the door opened, and in walked Preston, a bright, handsome boy, who did not look much like Flaxie, for he had dark eyes and black hair.

"Why, Preston," said Aunt Jane, patting his small face, "you'll be late to school. Here it is nine o'clock."

"Don't care if it's forty-nine. No school to-day."

"No school? O, it's Saturday; I forgot about that, and saved a turnover for you to take to school." [139]

"Well, I'd like it all the same," said Preston, looking laughingly toward the cellar door. "Had breakfast a good while ago."

Aunt Jane smiled, which was a rare thing for her. She had been very sad since Rose died.

"Very well, dear. Run to the store; and, when you come back, you shall have the turnover and a piece of sage cheese with it. I don't know what I should do without you, now Bertie's gone to New Jersey."

"A dear good boy he is," thought Aunt Jane, as the little fellow disappeared with the gallon jug; and Grandpa Pressy, as if he had heard her thought, answered,—

"Yes, Preston is a dear good boy, Jane. His mother worries for fear he'll fall into bad company; but it's my opinion she is over-anxious. Preston will come out all right." [140]

"O, yes, we all think so," responded Aunt Jane. "And who ever heard of such a child to do errands? He and Ninny are alike about that; they are both a great deal better than Lucy. Really,

I've a great mind to make the boy a little present; now wouldn't you, grandpa? You know he does all these things for nothing."

"O, you wait. I've got just what he'll like," said Grandpa Pressy, putting his shaking hand into his pocket, and jerking out his leathern wallet,—"just what he'll like, Jane."

After a long and trembling search, during which the pieces of paper money rattled like dry leaves, out flew a little gold dollar, and danced upon the floor. [141]

"How that will please him!" said Aunt Jane. "I don't believe he ever saw one."

"Yes, I think it will please him, my dear. He's uncommonly good to his poor old grandpa; and I'm sure I don't grudge him a pretty little keepsake like this."

So, when Preston returned with the molasses, and had eaten his turnover and sage cheese, his eyes were feasted with a sight of the bit of gold.

"Why, grandpa, *all* this for me?"

"Yes, my boy; and your mother'd better lay it away somewhere, and keep it till you are older."

"Yes, I'll ask her to; for Flaxie or Phil will be sure to get hold of it. But now I'm a-going to tie it up in the corner of my handkerchief, and put it in my pocket."

"That's a good way," said Aunt Jane. [142]

"Good-bye, auntie, good-bye, grandpa. When you want any more molasses and things, I'm the boy to get 'em."

And off started Preston in gay spirits, sending a long, shrill whistle before him, and running to catch up with it. His first thought was to go home, and give the gold piece to his mother for safe keeping; but he lived half a mile down town, and it did seem too bad to spare the time from play.

"Hullo, Pres," called out a ringing voice, "what you smiling at down there?"

Preston stopped whistling, and looked up to see where the voice came from.

Tommy Winters was sitting on the bough of a horsechestnut-tree, eating gingerbread. Now Tommy was a naughty, reckless fellow, and Preston had been forbidden to play with him; but the sight of Tommy's face filled him with a vague longing, not for gingerbread, but for mischief. [143]

There really was a bad charm about Tommy—when he fixed his "glittering eye" upon you, he made you think of all sorts of delightful things you'd like to do, only they were apt to be naughty things. Did you ever see a boy who had a bad charm?

"What you up to down there?" repeated Tommy, as Preston finished tying up the gold piece, and put it in his pocket.

"O, I'm up to lots o' things," replied Preston, gaily. "Don't you wish you knew what I've got in my handkerchief?"

Tommy didn't know of course; but he instantly *guessed* there was money in the handkerchief: he could see the hard knot, and he could see the smile on Preston's face; and Tommy was not a fool by any means. [144]

"If that's money, I guess I can coax it out of him some way or other. Anyhow, I mean to get it, by hook or by crook," thought the bad boy.

But he pretended he didn't care two straws what was in the handkerchief. "Come," said he, "put your old rags in your pocket, and let's go swimming."

Now Preston had always longed to swim, chiefly, I suppose, because he didn't know how. It was a remarkably warm day in October; but the water was very cold: it was not proper for anybody to go into it; and both the boys knew this.

Preston looked up at Tommy; and that bad charm began to work. He saw a picture in his mind's eye of—

"A quiet nook in the running brook,
Where the school-boys went to swim." [145]

So, instead of running away, as he ought to have done, he kept staring up in the tree at Tommy, and said,—

"I can't go swimming; mother won't let me. But I should think you might come down here and give us a piece of your gingerbread."

Tommy dropped nimbly from the tree, and alighted on his head.

"What's that you say about your mother!"

"She won't let me go swimming."

"Won't let you?—of course not. Never heard of a woman that would. Women are always scared of the water."

"Father won't let me either."

"You don't say so. Here, take a bite of gingerbread."

Preston took a bite; but he saw Tommy was in earnest about swimming, and he caught himself by the left ear, as if that would keep him from going with him: yet, somehow, he felt as if he *should* [146]

go, in spite of his fears.

"Look here, Tommy."

"Well, I'm looking."

"Now, Tommy Winters."

"Yes, that's my name."

"You know that brook—"

"Yes, guess so. Prime place down there under the willer-tree."

"But, Tommy, that was where my sister Flaxie got 'most drowned."

"'Twas high water then; it's low water now. 'Twouldn't drown a grass'per."

"But, Tommy,—"

"Well, Pres, what you 'fraid of?"

"Ain't afraid of any thing; but my mother says—"

"O, 'fraid o' your ma'am!"

[147]

"And my father says—"

"O, 'fraid o' your pa!"

"Well, they both say—"

"O, 'fraid o' both of 'em!"

"No; but you see, Tommy, they think—"

"I know what they think; they think you're a good-for-nothing girl-baby;" and Tommy made up such a face that Preston couldn't help laughing. It didn't hurt his feelings to have *Tommy* call him names; for he did it in the funniest, pleasantest way. O, Tommy *was* a very fascinating boy!

"Come along, you little tip-end of a top-o-my-thumb."

"Tell you *no*, Tommy."

Preston was pretty firm now.

"Give you Turkish bath, all for nothing, Pres."

"But I told you, Tommy—"

[148]

"No, you didn't; you haven't told me a thing. You stutter so I can't understand a word."

At the idea of his stuttering, Preston laughed outright; and, during that moment of weakness, was picked up and set astride Tommy's shoulders.

"You set me down," cried Preston, struggling manfully, yet a little glad, perhaps, to think he couldn't possibly help himself.

"Ride away, ride away, *Preston* shall ride!" sang Tommy, the large, strong fellow, bouncing his burden up and down.

Preston felt like a dry leaf in a whirlpool. You know how it swings round and round; and, every time it swings, it gets nearer and nearer that hungry hole in the middle, where there is no getting out again.

"I can't help it, I *can't* help it," thought little Preston, as big Tommy jolted him up and down like a bag of meal on horseback. [149]

Well, it is good fun for little boys to go in swimming, I do suppose,—if their parents are willing, if they have somebody to hold them up, and if the water isn't too cold.

At first, Preston almost thought he was having good fun; but very soon it was any thing but that;—why, it was just frightful! for Tommy had actually gone off and left him, and snapped his fingers in his face. Preston couldn't swim any more than a fish-hook. What would become of him? Where *was* Tommy?

Tommy was on the bank, pretending to skip stones; but that was not what he had gone there for, I assure you. He had gone to look in Preston's pocket, and see what was tied up in the corner of his handkerchief. [150]

"Why don't you come, Tommy? Tom-*mee*! I'm drow—drow—drowning!"

"O, you hush up! I'll come in a minute."

"Come now—ow—ow! Flaxie got drow—ow—owned!"

Tommy came when he got ready. And, as he swam back to Preston, there was something under his tongue, which was a very sweet morsel to him, and about the size of a gold dollar.

"You *said* 'twouldn't drown a grasshopper; but 'twould drown a man—with his hat on," gurgled little Preston, indignantly.

Tommy tickled him under the arms, but didn't seem to feel much like talking.

"There," said he, when they had come out of the water, "now I'm going to dress you and send you home to your mother." [151]

"Dress *me*? Poh, guess I can dress myself!"

"Well, you better hurry then," said Tommy. "What makes you so slow? Your mother'll go into spasms."

"My mother? Why, she don't know I've been swimming!"

"O, I forgot; well, run home!"

"Don't want to," said Preston, squeezing his hair; "want to play ball. Come on!"

"Can't," said Tom; "have to get some coal."

"Do they make you work Saturdays?"

"Yes, all day, like a dog," muttered Tom, taking to his heels.

Everybody knew that Tom never worked, so this was absurd. Preston ran after him, and caught him by the sleeve.

"Come, let's play ball!"

[152]

Tom shook him off as if he had been a cobweb.

"Can't play to-day. Got an awful sore throat, and earache and toothache."

And away he ran. Preston was left staring after him, and wondering why he hadn't spoken of his sufferings before.

"He's queer, Tommy is. Don't see what he wanted to go swimming for if he's sick. Thought I should 'a' froze!"

A guilty feeling was upon Preston, which made him shiver more than the cold.

"Wish my hair wasn't so thick. Can't go home till it dries."

He played about with some boys for an hour or two, then went home. The family were all seated at dinner, and Flaxie would not eat till he came.

"I've got something you'll want to see, Flaxie. Come out here and show yourself, sir." This to his handkerchief, which he whipped out of his pocket. [153]

"What is it? I don't see any thing," said Flaxie.

"Why, where in the world? Why, what's this?" cried Preston, in dismay.

There was nothing in the end of the handkerchief, and the knot was untied.

"I tied it up in three knots, I know I did; and now where is it?"

"Where is what?" asked his mother.

"Why, my little gold dollar. Grandpa gave it to me this morning. You never *saw* any thing so cunning!"

"Are you sure you tied it hard?"

"Why, yes, indeed! I tied it so hard I had to hop up and down to get my breath! Three knots too!"

Dr. Gray looked up, and asked,—

"You haven't been with any bad boys, my son?"

[154]

Preston had forgotten the swimming, for the moment, and said,—

"O, no, sir; Eddie Potter and Jack Snow and those."

"They say Tommy Winters will steal; but of course you haven't been near *him*?"

Preston dropped his knife and fork suddenly, and blushed. His mother saw it; but his father did not, for he was hurrying out of the house to visit a patient.

All that afternoon poor Preston was in trouble. He told the boys about it, but nobody could help him; and, as for Tommy Winters, he was nowhere to be seen.

Finally, after tea, he stole up to his best friend, his mother, and exclaimed, shaking his fist,—

"Tommy Winters has got my gold dollar, mamma. Tell you what, he stole it out of my pocket when I was swimming." [155]

"Swimming, Preston?"

"Yes'm: you see he made me go."

"*Made* you, my son?"

Preston hung his head.

"Well, he marched me down to the brook, he did."

"He didn't throw you in?"

"Not ed-zackly."

"Then you went in yourself?"

"Yes, mamma; but, O, I won't do so again."

Mrs. Gray looked very sober. She was not thinking of the gold dollar, but of her son's disobedience.

"I'm sure he stole it, mamma; and now he has run off, and nobody can find him."

"Very likely," said Mrs. Gray.

"O mamma, won't you make him give back my gold dollar?"

"Do you deserve it, my son?"

[156]

"Well, but grandpa gave it to me."

"I'll talk with your father about it."

"O, don't talk with father: he'll think just what *you* think," cried Preston, in alarm.

His mother did not answer; and he ran out to the stable, threw himself into a bed of hay, and tried his best to hate her.

"She'll tell him I disobeyed, and he'll say, 'Good enough for him, then!'"

Dr. Gray did say exactly these words; still, he tried to make Tommy confess and give up the stolen gold. Do you suppose Tommy confessed?

O, no: he looked the doctor right in the eye, and said,—

"What *is* a gold dollar? I never heard of such a thing in my life!"

Preston never set eyes on his treasure again; but I suppose it has done him more good, after all, than a hundred gold dollars at compound interest for a hundred years.

[157]

You know why. It made him remember to keep out of bad company.

XI.

[158]

PRESTON KEEPING HOUSE.

Now I should not have told this bad story about Preston if I had not had a better one to tell after it, "to take the taste out," as Flaxie said about the orange.

Grandpa Pressy went home a little while after this, and took Ninny with him, because he was not very well, and wanted her to amuse him; but nobody felt alarmed about him, till, one day at noon, a message came for Dr. and Mrs. Gray, that he was very ill.

As it happened, Dora Whalen had gone away that morning in the cars to spend the day in Jersey City; and there was no one to take charge of the house.

[159]

"Just as if *I* couldn't do it," said Preston.

"Now, my son, do you really think you can be trusted?" said Mrs. Gray. "Will you watch Flaxie carefully, and keep her out of mischief? I don't want to take her to Aunt Jane's; for, if I take the baby there, that will be quite enough."

"Poh, yes'm: guess I'm ten years old!"

"Dora won't be back till the last train. Are you sure you won't be afraid to be left all alone in the house after dark, you two little folks?"

"Yes'm, certain sure. What are you smiling for, mother? To think you've got a boy that's smart enough to keep house?"

"Well, yes, it does make me happy to see my son so ready to please his father and mother."

Then she hesitated a moment, turned to her husband, and said,—

[160]

"If we only knew just *how* sick grandpa is, perhaps we could wait till to-morrow."

"They would not have telegraphed if they had not needed us," said Dr. Gray, decidedly.

"Yes, yes, I suppose you are right," said Mrs. Gray, looking thoughtful, as she put on her bonnet before the glass. "There, baby and I are ready. Have you charged Preston about locking up the house?"

"Yes; and Preston, my son, you must spend the evening in the kitchen: it won't do to have a fire in the sitting-room till Dora comes. And don't put a stick of wood in the stove after seven o'clock. Can you remember?"

"Yes, sir."

"You'd better both go to bed by eight," said Mrs. Gray. "Dora has a night-key, and can let herself in."

[161]

"O mother, mayn't I sit up till nine? I want to copy off my *compersition*."

"Well, yes, if Flaxie is willing, and it isn't too cold in the kitchen. But don't forget to tuck her into her little crib by eight. I've moved it close to my bed, where you are to sleep."

"And is Preston goin' to sleep in the downstairs room? O, goody!" cried Flaxie, crushing her mother's bonnet with a parting hug.

"Yes, darling; and you'll find your supper of baked apples and milk on the table, covered with a napkin, and something nice beside, I won't say what."

"I know—*squinch-perserve*," said Flaxie.

"Good-bye till to-morrow, my precious children. Don't give Dodo any trouble; and, Preston, don't forget what father said about the fires." [162]

It wasn't likely Preston would forget. He was one of those slow-brained, faithful little fellows, who can't learn a spelling-lesson, but who are pretty much at home with every thing except books.

"He was always so different from Flaxie. We shall never be able to leave Flaxie in charge of any thing; you might as well set a squirrel to watch a weasel," said Dr. Gray.

"I know it," replied his wife; "but I never saw a child six years old that *could* take charge of any thing, did you?"

Flaxie began to call for her supper the moment her father and mother and little Phil were out of sight.

"'Cause there's queam-cakes, too, I saw 'em. And then I guess I'd better go see Lucy; she's spectin' me."

"No, *ma'am*, Flaxie Frizzle," said Preston, firmly. "You're not going further than the weeping-willow this day; and I shan't let you do that if you don't behave." [163]

The new tone of command rather awed little Miss Frizzle; and, to Preston's surprise, she began to cry.

"I want to go to heaven," said she, throwing the kitten angrily across the room. "I've got tired o' waitin' to go to heaven."

Preston could not help laughing; for Flaxie looked very, very little like an angel.

"God won't let me peek in, and he won't take me up there," went on the child, sulkily. "You needn't laugh, Preston; you don't know what I want to do. I've got sumpin' for Rosa, and I want to carry it to her."

"Why, Rosa is dead."

"No; she's in heaven. Here's sumpin' I want her to have," said Flaxie, opening a little box, and displaying a China lamb. "I *'tended* it for her, and I'm *'terminated* she shall have it." [164]

Flaxie was crying still, but her anger was gone; she was crying for dear little Rosa.

"Won't you let me go and carry the lamb to Rosa?"

"Why, where do you want to go?"

"O, I want to go and put it side o' the flowers," replied Flaxie.

"Well, I'll go with you; only you act very queer, Flaxie."

He gave his little sister his hand; and she led him along Elm Street and up the hill to the cemetery.

"O, is that what you mean?" said he.

"Yes," replied Flaxie, kneeling and placing the white lamb on Rosa's grave, along with the myrtles and evergreens that had just been planted there. "That's for *you*, Rosa! I *'tended* it for you, when you's sick, and I'm *'terminated* you shall have it." [165]

"How will she get it up in heaven?" asked Preston, in a whisper.

"I don' know. God will see 'bout it. Isn't it a *beau*-ful little lamb?"

"O, yes."

"Well, I was cross to Rosa; and now I've made it all up," said Flaxie, skipping out of the burying-ground with a very light heart, while her brother followed her in silence.

Next minute she was laughing.

"O, I want to see your new steam-*nen*gine, Preston! May I, if I won't do any thing naughty?"

"Yes."

"And will you gi' me lots o' *cardinum* seeds?"

"Yes." [166]

"Then I'll be *just* as good," said Miss Flaxie.

At precisely seven o'clock, Preston put a large stick of wood in the kitchen stove; and, as little sister had been very obedient, he lighted the alcohol lamp in his steam-engine, and set the pretty machine puffing across the floor like a thing alive. Miss Frizzle, having eaten two suppers, was in a very quiet mood, and threw herself on her knees beside Preston, with her chin upon his shoulder, to watch the wonderful plaything.

"I'll tell you what it is, Flaxie," said Preston, with an air of wisdom that was not lost upon his listener; "I know how this engine is put together as well as father does; and I'll bet you I could make one, if I only had the tools, and knew how to use em!"

"S'pose you could, honest?" [167]

"Yes, to be sure. There, Flaxie, the clock is striking eight. Now you'll have to go to bed."

Flaxie's forehead began to pucker, and her elbows to jerk.

"Then you must go, too, Pres Gray."

"O, but I want to fix up my compersition, so I can play Saturday. Come, now, if you'll go to bed first, I'll give you all my fire-crackers."

Miss Frizzle's brows smoothed.

"And the pin-wheels too? Fire-crackers isn't much."

"Ye-es; and the pin-wheels too. I'll fire 'em for you. Only you'll have to go to bed as quick as scat, or I'll take it all back."

Flaxie went; but, as for lying still, that wasn't in the bargain. "Water! water!" called she, when snugly tucked in. "Please bring me some water, Preston, or I shall dry to death." [168]

Preston had seated himself at his work, and copied off in staring letters about three lines:—

"APPLES."

"Apples is the most frouit always youused. Apples is said to grow in almost any country."

His arm ached already.

"There," said he, carrying Flaxie a mug of water. "And you just lie still, little sister. If you speak again, it will cost you a pin-wheel."

Then he went on, with great labor.

"In some climates it is so warm it is said they have been discovered by the crab-apples; they was some men got the seed from the crab-apple, and planted it."

"Pres-tun!" cried Flaxie again. "You may take *one* pin-wheel. I've got to speak, 'cause it *unsleeps* me not to have you come to bed. Just *one* pin-wheel. So, there!" [169]

"Yes, yes," said Preston; "I'll be there in just sixteen minutes, if you don't speak again."

"Some takes the apples, and makes cider of them. Old cider is youused for vinegar."

"PRESTON S. GRAY."

This ended the "compersition;" but, in Preston's haste to keep his word and get to bed in just sixteen minutes, he made a mistake, and wrote on the back of it, "Potatoes."

He smiled to see Flaxie sound asleep already, then knelt down, and prayed, "Now I lay me," with a very solemn feeling. The house seemed strangely quiet. Where could Dodo be? Preston had heard the last train rush by a half-hour before.

"I think God *will* be sure to take care of me to-night, so I can take care of Flaxie," thought he, creeping into bed. "He must know father and mother have gone off, and Flaxie isn't much more'n a baby." And, with that, he fell asleep, holding little sister by the hand. [170]

About midnight, he was wakened by the smell of smoke. If he had not been downstairs, and if he had not felt, even in sleep, the care of the house, I dare say he would not have waked. "What's this? Why, what is it?" thought he, raising himself on his elbow, and sniffing.

The bedroom opened out of the sitting-room, and the kitchen was just beyond. That was where the smoke must come from; for it was the only room that had a fire in it.

Preston rose softly, and went into the kitchen. It was on fire!

Probably some coals had fallen out of the stove door when the last stick was put in, and had been smouldering on the floor ever since. Now the floor, the sink, the drop-table, and the sitting-room door were in flames. [171]

What should be done?

Preston reflected. He could not write a very deep "compersition;" but he was just the boy to have his wits about him when they were needed.

"The first thing is to get Flaxie out of the house," thought he. "The flames are spreading to the bedroom."

In a twinkling he had her in his arms, rolled her in a shawl, and set her on the front door-stone.

"Don't cry, Ducky Dilver," said he, locking her out. "I'll come after you if you'll be good."

Then, leaving the sleepy child sobbing in utter bewilderment, Preston rushed back, and dipped water from the barrel to put out the flames. [172]

It was a hard fight for a small boy. He could not help wondering at himself to feel how strong he was. Pailful after pailful he dashed on; and, when the barrel gave out, he turned to the pump in the sink. Ah, but the sink door was ablaze! As fast as the fire was quenched in one place, it broke out in another; but Preston mastered it after awhile.

"O, if it hadn't been for my nose," thought the brave little boy, wading across the floor; "if it *hadn't* been for my nose! Wonder if the fire has struck through to the cellar?"

It had not; but there seemed to be a smoky smell down there; and our hero went down boldly, and dashed water upon the ceiling, never minding that it ran back and wet him all over. [173]

Quite satisfied at last that all was right, he went to the front door, and let in tearful little Flaxie.

"What'd you put me out for? Say, what'd you put me out for?"

"So I could put out the fire, you little, good-for-nothing baby," replied Preston, kissing her

tenderly. "What if you'd burnt up, and I'd burnt up, too, Flaxie? I guess 'twould have been the last time mother'd have left *us* to keep house!"

And, when Dodo got home next morning, she found them fast asleep with the sun full in their eyes. "To think I should have missed the train last night for the first time in all my life," sobbed the faithful creature, on hearing the story. "If any harm had come to you children, I never could have forgiven myself."

XII.

[174]

MRS. PRIM'S STRAWBERRIES.

THE next summer after this, when Flaxie was "going on seven years old," she and sister Ninny and Lucy Abbott made a bargain with Mrs. Prim to pick strawberries for her at three cents a box. They were glad to do it, for they were saving money to buy a pretty white vase for Rosa's grave; and they wanted to earn it all themselves. Flaxie thought she helped as much as anybody; but, the truth was, she spent half the time talking and picking the dirt out of her shoes.

Now, though Mrs. Prim lived in a beautiful large house, and had the finest grounds in town, the children did not like her very well: they considered her cross. [175]

And, just here I must tell you what a time they had with her one day about the strawberries. It was a very warm morning; and they were all three stooping over the vines in the garden, with a great yellow basket before them.

"What a blazing hot sun," groaned Lucy, from the depths of her speckled shaker.

"O, dear, yes," responded Ninny; "and only three cents a box for picking!"

"I feel the sun on the end o' my nose," said Flaxie.

Just then a man went by, chanting musically,—

"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters." [176]

"How nice and cool that sounds," said Ninny, wiping her forehead.

"*Who* lied down in the pasture, Ninny?"

"David."

"Was David a cow?"

"O, what a silly child," cried Lucy.

"I wasn't talking to *you*, I was talking to Ninny," said Flaxie.

"Well, Flaxie, but you made fun of the Holy Bible!" exclaimed Lucy, shaking her head.

"I didn't either!"

"I don't believe you know what 'holy' means," persisted Lucy.

"Yes, I do; it means the whole of it. They call it the wholly Bible, because it's the *whole* of the Bible."

"Did you ever, ever see such a goosie?" laughed Lucy, provokingly.

"Now hush, children; it's too hot for you to be scolding," said Ninny. [177]

"Yes: O, dear, it's the hottest day I ever saw. I should think the sun would melt and drop right down out of the sky," said Lucy. "And there's Mrs. Prim, *she* don't care: she's in her nice, cool parlor, with the blinds all shut."

"Eating i-scream, I s'pose," put in Flaxie.

"Yes," said Lucy; "and gets fifty cents a box for these strawberries, and wouldn't give us more'n three cents if we should faint to pieces out here and be picked up dead."

"What awful scolds you children are," said Ninny, who kept up her spirits by laughing at them.

"Well, she did have some i-scream last night," said little Flaxie; "for I saw her through the door. Why didn't she say, 'Come in, dear, and *you* may have some?' *My* mamma would. My mamma's a great deal better'n Mrs. Prim." [178]

"O, well, lots of folks are better than Mrs. Prim," said Ninny, growing earnest. "Now, there's Mrs. Stillman; if she didn't live so far off we could pick for *her*. Why once she gave Eva Snow all she got on three boxes, and told her to keep it, for it was hard work to pick in such a broiling sun. Eva took the money, and bought her mother a great piece of salmon."

"O, my," cried Lucy; "why don't we take some of the money Mr. Potter pays us, and not give it to Mrs. Prim? I'd like to buy *my* mamma a great big piece of—something."

Thus spoke the rattle-brained child, with a heedless jerk of her elbow, which almost upset the basket.

"Why, Lucy Abbott!" whispered Ninny; "was that you stepping just behind me?" [179]

"Behind you? No: why, I'm right here."

"But I heard somebody," said Ninny, pushing back her shaker and looking around nervously.

Yes; and there, not far off, was Mrs. Prim, walking beside a row of currant-bushes. Could she be the one whose steps Ninny had just heard on the gravel path close by her side?

"Lucy," she whispered again, as the lady's figure disappeared behind a syringa-tree. "Lucy Abbott, she was right here a minute ago; and she must have heard what you said."

"Did she? What'd I say?"

"Don't you know, child, you asked me why I didn't steal some money? That's *just* what you said!"

Lucy only laughed, and little Flaxie pulled a pebble out of her shoe. Lucy and Flaxie were thoughtless children; they never took things to heart as Ninny did; and, as for that little speech, what if Mrs. Prim *had* heard it, wouldn't she know Lucy was in fun? [180]

But, when they went into the house, Lucy remembered what she had said; and her face was crimson. Somehow she could not raise her eyes for shame.

"Move your chairs up to the drop-table," said Mrs. Prim, "and help me take off the hulls."

That was what she always said; but Ninny fancied that her voice was sharper than usual. They all three hulled in silence (Flaxie was not allowed near the table); and then Mrs. Prim herself took the berries off the large white platters and arranged them in the boxes: she never let the children do that; and Ninny always observed that she was very sure to put the largest berries on top. [181]

"They are unusually nice to-day," said Mrs. Prim, as she placed the boxes carefully in a market-basket, and gave the basket to the little girls; "and you may tell Mr. Potter that I expect half a dollar a box for them, and am not willing to take a cent less."

"Yes'm," murmured Flaxie, as Lucy and Ninny trudged off down the dusty street, with the basket between them.

Mr. Potter was in a very pleasant mood, called them nice little girls, gave them all three some candy, and said he was perfectly willing to pay fifty cents for such strawberries as theirs. He took the eight boxes out of the market-basket, and, in their places, put back eight empty ones; then gave Ninny a two-dollar bill for Mrs. Prim. [182]

When they returned to Mrs. Prim's, there was no one at home but Kitty Maloney.

"The money is in one of those boxes, Kitty," said Ninny.

But Kitty did not hear; for she was just opening the oven door to look at the Sunderland pudding.

The children loitered along toward home. The sun was cooling his face behind a cloud, and there was really some comfort now in walking. Ninny forgot Lucy's unlucky speech in the garden, and only thought how glad she should be for some dinner.

In the afternoon, the sun came out of the cloud, and finished ripening some more strawberries; and, next morning, Ninny, Lucy, and Flaxie were again in the beautiful garden, picking into the same yellow basket. Afterward, they sat with Mrs. Prim beside the drop-table, and helped hull the berries as usual. [183]

"Wait a moment," said the sharp-voiced lady, as they were about to start off with the market-basket and the eight nice boxes. "Wait a moment. Where is the money Mr. Potter sent me yesterday?"

"Kate took it, ma'am," said Ninny; "it was in one of the boxes."

"No, mum, I niver," spoke up Kitty, turning round with a plate of fish in her hand. "Nothing was niver said to *me* about money, mum. I jist takes the boxes out of the basket, and sets 'em in a row on the pantry shelf, as ye bids me; but it's the first that iver I heerd about money."

"What does this mean?" said Mrs. Prim, turning round, and giving Lucy a severe look. "Are you sure Mr. Potter paid you yesterday?" [184]

"O, yes, ma'am: as sure as can be."

And Flaxie struck in with her favorite ditty,—

"O, yes'm: serious, truly, black and bluely; for *I* saw him do it."

"Kate, you may go up to the store, and find out what this means," said Mrs. Prim, without paying the least attention to Flaxie. She had perfect faith in Kitty; and well she might; for the girl had lived with her fifteen years, and never told her a lie. But what had become of the money? It was certainly a pretty serious question.

Kitty went to the store, and came back, saying Mr. Potter had given the two dollars to the children.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Prim, looking at Ninny and then at Lucy; "yes, yes." [185]

That was all she said; but the girls felt themselves trembling from head to foot.

"I don't know what's become of it then," murmured Ninny, twisting her handkerchief.

"Nor I don't," said Lucy.

"Nor me, neither," said Flaxie.

"Yes, yes," repeated Mrs. Prim, looking at Lucy again, and then at Ninny.

Ninny could bear it no longer, but rushed out of the kitchen door, crying, followed by Lucy and Flaxie, who tried to cry, too, but hardly knew what was the matter.

"O mamma, mamma," cried Ninny, throwing herself on her mother's neck the moment she got home; "I want you to go with me right straight to Aunt Jane Abbott's; for Mrs. Prim will come there to tell an awful story about us." [186]

"Why, child, I can't understand you," said Mrs. Gray, kissing Ninny's hot cheeks. "What awful story can she tell about my dear little daughter?"

"O, come quick, mamma. She'll go to Aunt Jane's. She wouldn't dare come here, for papa wouldn't let her talk so; but she'll go to Aunt Jane's, for she thinks—she thinks—we've stolen some money."

Mrs. Gray did not wait for any thing more, but went at once with the children to Mrs. Abbott's.

There all three of the little girls talked so fast that Aunt Jane could hardly understand them.

"The money was in one of the boxes," said Ninny.

"Mr. Potter gave it to Ninny," said Lucy.

"And a stick of candy, too," cried Flaxie. [187]

"And now Mr. Potter thinks we stole the money. He thinks so in his heart," wailed Ninny. "Mr. Potter, that always liked us, and was going to take Lucy in his carriage to New York to see a vase he thought would be pretty for Rose."

In the midst of this talk, there was a quick, decided ring at the door-bell; and, next moment, Mrs. Prim walked in.

"I wish you'd tell me what this means," said Mrs. Abbott, so bewildered that she forgot to say, "How do you do?"

"Ask your little daughter what it means," replied Mrs. Prim, throwing her head back. She was a very straight, tall woman; and, when she did throw her head back, you felt a little afraid of her.

Mrs. Gray took a seat by the window, and said nothing.

"Is it about some money?" asked Mrs. Abbott. [188]

"Yes," said Mrs. Prim, "it *is* about some money. I suppose you can't believe a word against Lucy; but I must tell you what has happened.

"Yesterday morning, as I went into the garden to pick a few flowers, I overheard these three children talking together about me. They were not speaking in a very pleasant tone; but I shouldn't have minded that if one of them—and I am very sure it was Lucy—hadn't said,—

"O, my, why don't *we* take some of the money Mr. Potter pays us for the berries, and keep it ourselves?"

"Mrs. Prim!" cried Mrs. Abbott, her face turning very white.

"O mamma, I said it in fun; of course I said it in fun!" exclaimed poor little Lucy, running about the room, and crying. [189]

"In fun," echoed Mrs. Prim. "It didn't sound very funny to me; especially when you did keep the money, and then told me you had given it to Kitty."

"We certainly gave it to Kitty," said Ninny, clasping her hands together. "We certainly did!"

"Serious, truly, black and blue," put in Miss Frizzle.

Mrs. Abbott was too excited to speak. She was a good Christian, and meant to be patient; but she was entirely sure these little girls were innocent; and she thought Mrs. Prim was very unkind and unjust to come to her house and talk in this way.

At last she said quietly, looking straight at the stern lady,—

"Please remember, Mrs. Prim, Lucy is my own little daughter. It seems to me you ought to be very sure you are right before you tell a mother that her daughter will *steal*!" [190]

Mrs. Prim's face softened a little.

"I am sorry to hurt your feelings, Mrs. Abbott," said she. "Everybody knows you are a high-minded, good woman; but I always thought you were rather too easy with your children: you don't know how Bert and Lucy behave when they are out of your sight; and I felt it *my duty* to come and tell you about this! I—"

"O! O! O!" struck in Flaxie, distressed by the sad faces around her; "I wish I's dead! I wish we's all dead and gone to heaven!"

Of course Flaxie's tears were of no more consequence than so much rain-water; but her mother had to take her in her arms and soothe her, while Aunt Jane answered Mrs. Prim.

"This is a very strange affair, and I can't understand it; but, as for thinking my little Lucy would *steal*, why, you know Mrs. Prim, I can't for one moment believe it!" [191]

"Well, to be sure, I don't much wonder you can't. I shouldn't believe it myself, I dare say, if I were you. But then, Mrs. Abbott, you must confess things do look very dark," said Mrs. Prim.

"Darker things than this have been cleared up," said Mrs. Abbott.

Then Mrs. Gray thought *she* would speak.

"Well, suppose we wait awhile, and don't mention this to anybody, and see what happens, Mrs. Prim?"

"I will wait a week, if you wish it," answered Mrs. Prim, rising to go; "and, at the end of that time, I shall expect these little girls to tell us the truth about this money." [192]

Mrs. Prim did not mean to be unkind, but she was always sure she was right; she never thought she could make mistakes. As she walked in at her own gate, Kitty Maloney met her at the front door.

"Sure, mum, it's me that's glad you've got back," cried she, with a spoon in one hand and a strawberry-box in the other. "Mr. Potter jist sent up this box, and the money was in it all right."

She held up the spoon, and there was a two-dollar bill in it, dripping with red juice.

Mrs. Prim stared at it.

"It's yours, mum! Mr. Snow's folks got some of your strawb'ries, yesterday; and, when they turns 'em out in a dish for dinner, they sees this money a-laying under 'em, all soaked with the rid."

"So it WAS in the box, after all; and the children did give it to you," said Mrs. Prim, feeling dreadfully ashamed. [193]

"Yes, mum, I knew the nice children wouldn't lie. You see, mum, you must have done the mischief yourself; you must have went and put your strawb'ries in this box this morning, right a-top of the money, mum, and niver seen it!"

Mrs. Prim understood it all now. Yes, it must be so. Her spectacles had been troubling her lately, and she had opened the box without seeing the money!

As I have said, Mrs. Prim was dreadfully ashamed; but she was a woman who meant to do right; so she did not wait to take her bonnet off, but walked right back to Mrs. Abbott's, and showed her the red two-dollar bill—the most beautiful scrap of money that ever was seen! Mrs. Abbott could have kissed it for joy.

"Lucy must have it; I want Lucy to keep it and try to forgive me," said Mrs. Prim; and she actually had tears in her eyes. [194]

But, as Mrs. Abbott would not allow her daughter to keep it, Mrs. Prim resolved to make the children all a present. She begged some of little Rosie's hair, and went to New York that very afternoon and bought three gold locket, one for each of the girls.

So it all ended very pleasantly, after all; and this is as good a place as any to make an end of our book.

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