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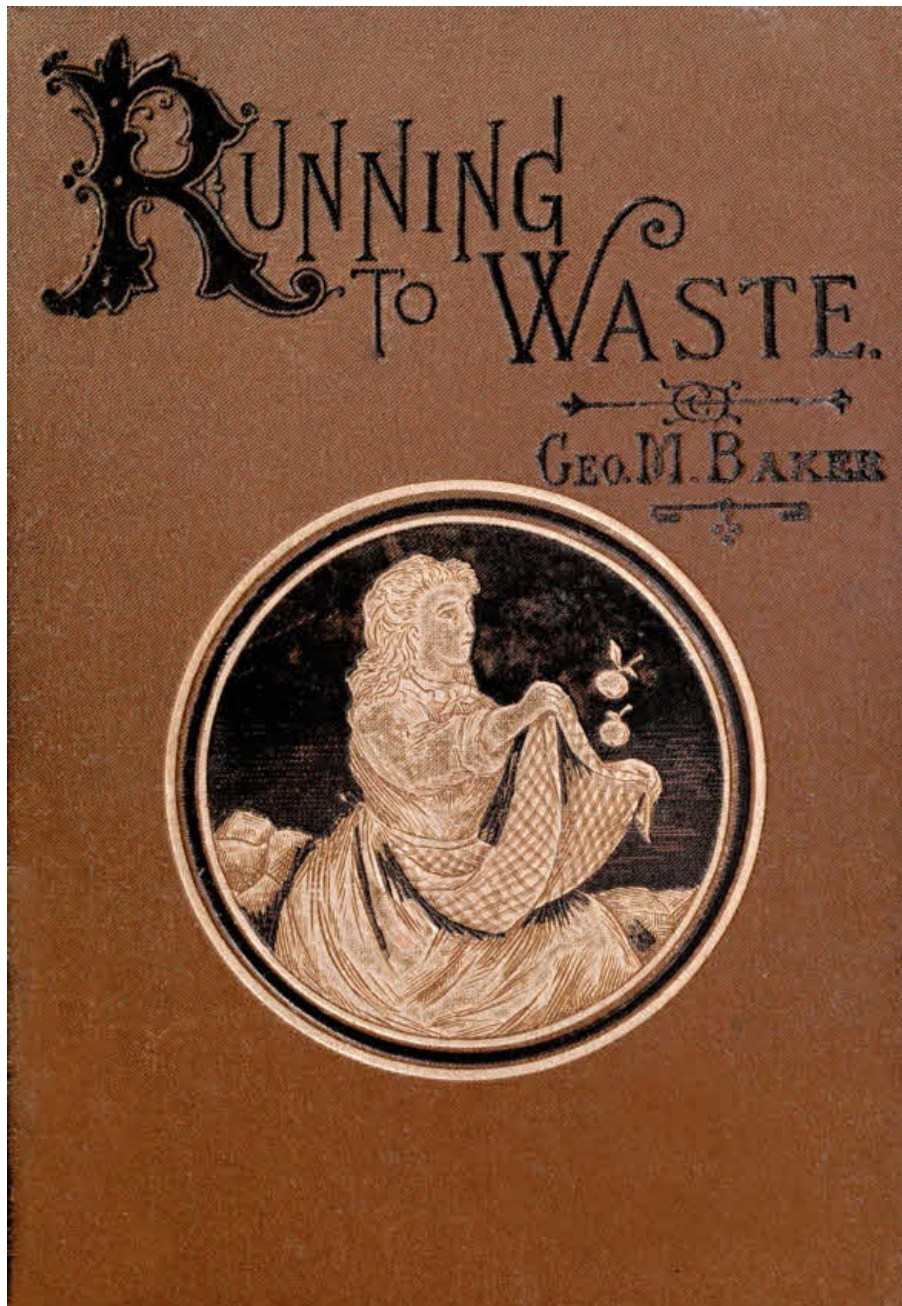
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BECKY'S LEAP. [Page 89.](#)

THE MAIDENHOOD SERIES.

[1]

RUNNING TO WASTE.

THE STORY OF A TOMBOY.

BY

GEORGE M. BAKER,

AUTHOR OF "AMATEUR DRAMAS," "DRAWING ROOM STAGE,"
"SOCIAL STAGE," "MIMIC STAGE,"
ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED.

BOSTON:
LEE AND SHEPARD, PUBLISHERS.
NEW YORK:
LEE, SHEPARD AND DILLINGHAM.

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[2]

MRS. RACHEL E. BOLES,

A PATIENT INVALID, WHO WOULD HAVE ME BELIEVE
THAT A FEW OF HER WEARY HOURS HAVE
BEEN LIGHTENED BY THE READING OF
"THE STORY OF A TOMBOY,"

I Dedicate this Book,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP,
AND IN GRATITUDE FOR MANY
KIND ACTS.

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[6]

CHAPTER I.

STOLEN SWEETS.



ouncers, Teddy! the roundest and the rosiest. Drop them, quick! My apron's all ready for the darlings."

"It's very well to say drop *them*; but it's just as much as I can do to keep from falling myself. Don't you see I'm holding on with both hands?"

"What a fuss you do make! Come down, and let me try. I never saw a tree yet big enough to scare me."

"Who's scart, Becky Sleeper? I ain't—not by a long chalk. When a feller's holdin' on with both hands, he can't be expected to pick very quick—can he?"

"Wind your arm round that branch over your head. There; now you're all right, Teddy."

[8]

"That's so. What a hand you are to contrive! Now look sharp—they're coming!"

Becky Sleeper, in imitation of famed "Humpty Dumpty," sat upon a wall, where she had no business to be, for the wall was the boundary of Captain Thompson's orchard. But there she sat, her feet dangling, her hair flying, and her hands holding her apron by its corners, intent on catching the apples which her brother was plucking from the tree above her head.

An active, wide-awake little body was the girl who was acting as accessory to the crime—a very common one—of robbing an orchard. Every movement of her sprightly figure belied the family name. Perched upon the wall, that cool October morning, she might have sat as a model for the Spirit of Mischief. A plump, round, rosy face, with a color in the cheeks that rivaled in brightness the coveted fruit above her, blue eyes full of laughter, a pretty mouth, with dissolving views of flashing teeth, teasing smiles, and a tongue never at rest; a queer little pug nose, that had a habit of twitching a mirthful accompaniment to the merriment of eyes and mouth, a profusion of light hair, tossed to and fro by the quick motions of the head,—all these combined to make a head-piece which would have delighted an artist, brightened as it was by a few straggling rays of sunshine, that darted through convenient openings in the mass of foliage above her head.

[9]

Miss Becky's costume, however, did not furnish a fitting finish to her face and figure, but, on the contrary, seemed much the worse for wear. A high-neck, blue-check apron showed unmistakable signs of familiarity with grape and berry juices; the rusty brown dress which peeped out beneath it was plentifully "sown with tares," and had a rough fringe at the bottom never placed there by the dress-maker; a pair of stockings, once white, had the appearance of having recently been dyed in a mud-puddle, and a pair of stringless boots, which completed her attire, were only prevented from dropping off by an elevation of the toes.

With her diminutive figure, her mischievous face, and her eager interest in the apple raid, she might have been taken for a thoughtless, giddy child. No stranger would have dreamed she was a maiden with an undoubted right to affix to her name, age sixteen.

Her companion was a year younger, but greatly her superior in weight and measure, not much taller, but remarkably round at the waist and plentifully supplied with flesh. He lacked the activity of his sister, but was ambitious to emulate her achievements, and to that end panted and puffed with remarkable vigor.

[10]

Becky was an adept in all *boyish* sports. She could climb a tree with the activity of a squirrel, ride a horse without saddle or bridle, pull a boat against the swift current of the river, "follow my leader" on the roughest trail, take a hand at base ball, play cricket, and was considered a valuable acquisition to either side in a game of football.

Teddy admired the vigor of his sister, was not jealous of her superior abilities, although he was unlucky in his pursuit of manly sports. He had to be helped up a tree, and very often lay at the foot, when the helper thought he had successfully accomplished his task. Horses generally dropped him when he attempted to ride; he always "caught crabs" in boats; was a "muffer" at base ball, and in everybody's way in all sorts of games.

These two were companions in roguery, and were a terror to all respectable people in Cleverly who possessed orchards which they valued highly, or melon patches which they watched with anxious care; for, no matter how high the value, or how strict the watch, this pair of marauders had excellent taste in selection, and managed to appropriate the choicest and best without leave or license.

[11]

Cleverly is a very staid, respectable, triangular township on the coast of Maine, its southern, or sea line about six miles in length, forming the base of the triangle, with a small village—Foxtown—at its eastern point, and a somewhat more pretentious town—Geeseville—at its western point. From these two places the division lines ran, one north-east, the other north-west, meeting on Rogue's River, where a bridge makes the apex of the triangle. The roads, however, do not traverse these boundary lines. There is a straight road from Foxtown to Geeseville, passing over a bridge which spans the river where it empties into the harbor. South of this highway is known as the fore side, and here may be found Captain Thompson's shipyard, a short, chunky wharf, where occasionally a packet lies, and a blacksmith's shop.

A few rods west of the river another road breaks from the highway and goes straight north. This is the main street of Cleverly. Climbing a hill from the fore side, the traveller, on entering this street, will find on the left a tailor's shop, a country store, the post-office, then a dozen houses, white, attractive, and roomy. On the right, a row of neat and tidy houses, four in number; then a carpenter's shop, the church, a small school-house, a more expansive "academy," several fine dwellings, then a long hill, at the foot of which is a brick-yard, and, a few rods farther, another settlement known as the "Corner." The distance between the fore side and the Corner is about a mile, and between these two points may be found the wealth, culture, and respectability of the township. [12]

There is abundance of thrift, with very little "brag" about Cleverly. Rogue's River turns a paper mill, a woollen mill, and a nail factory. Every season a vessel is launched from the ship-yard, and every winter the academy is well filled with students; every Friday night, winter and summer, the vestry of the church is crowded with an attentive audience, and every Sunday the church is surrounded with horses and vehicles of all sizes, varieties, and conditions; yet the quiet of the place seems never broken. There is much beauty, with little attempt at display, about the town. Trees line the street, vines climb about the houses, shrubs peep out at the palings, and flowers bloom everywhere without any seeming special assistance from the inhabitants. [13]

There is very little change in the Cleverly of to-day from the Cleverly of twenty years ago. Then Captain Thompson's house stood directly opposite the church, a large, square, two-story front, as grand as any in the place. At the rear, a lower building, used as a kitchen, ran out to one still lower, used as a wood-shed; this, in turn, stretched out to another building, used as a carriage-house, while the barn, of larger proportions, swung at the end of all; so that, approaching it from the side, the structure had the appearance of a kite with a very long tail to it. At the end of the stable was the kitchen garden; beyond that, the orchard, and on the stone wall which separates it from the lane, which in its turn separates the whole place from the woods, patiently sits Miss Becky during this long description.

"Quick, Teddy! Three more will make a dozen; and that's as many as I can hold, they're such whoppers. O, dear! my arms ache now," said Becky, after Teddy had employed more time than seemed necessary in plucking the captain's mammoth Baldwins. [14]

"Don't ache any more than mine do, I guess," grumbled Teddy; "and I'm all cramped up, too. Don't believe I'll ever git down agin."

"O, yes, you will Teddy. You're famous for quick descents, you know. You always come down quicker than you go up; and such graceful somersets as you do make! It's better than the circus, any time, to see you;" and a merry peal of laughter broke from Miss Becky's lips.

"Becky, Becky! don't do that!" cried Teddy; "they'll hear you up at the house. I wouldn't have Cap'n Thompson catch me in this tree for a good deal, I tell you. He's promised me a whaling if he ever catches me on his place."

"Don't be scart, Teddy. He won't catch you this time. I can see the house, and there is not a soul stirring; and, besides, the cap'n's not at home."

"I tell you, Becky, somebody's comin'. I can feel it in my bones. I'm comin' down;" and Teddy made a frantic effort to free himself from the crotch of the tree, into which he was snugly fitted. [15]

"Not until you make up the dozen, Teddy. Don't be a goose! I haven't watched this tree a week for nothin'. Cap'n Thompson's gone to the ship-yard. I saw him ride off an hour ago on 'Uncle Ned;' and he never gets back till dinner time when he goes there."

"Don't be too sure of that, Tomboy!"

With a slight scream, Becky turned her eyes from the camp of the enemy to the lane. Not ten feet from her stood a white horse, and on his back sat the dreaded enemy—Captain Thompson. A lively trembling of the branches overhead gave evidence that another party was aware of the startling interruption to a projected fruit banquet.

Becky looked at the captain. He had a very red face; he seemed to be in a towering passion, and was, evidently, searching his short, stout body for a tone deep and terrible enough with which to continue the conversation. She looked at him with a smile on her face; but, at the flash of his angry eyes, dropped hers to the apron which contained the proofs of guilt, then stole a glance at her trembling accomplice, straightened her little body, and looked defiantly at the horseman. [16]

"So, Tomboy, I have caught you in the act—have I?" thundered the captain.

"Yes, cap'n, you certainly have, this time, and no mistake," saucily answered the tomboy. "S'pose we've got to catch it now. What's the penalty? Going to put us in the pound, or lock us up in the barn?"

"Neither, Miss Impudence," thundered the captain. "I'll horsewhip you both. Here, you, Master Ned, come out of that tree, quick! D'ye hear?"

That the delinquent did hear, and that he was inclined to obey, was made manifest by a rustling among the leaves, and the dull thud of a heavy body as it struck the ground, for Master Teddy, terrified at the angry voice of the captain, had let go, and landed in a heap outside the wall.

"Run, Teddy, run! Don't let him catch you!" cried Becky, in excitement, dropping her apron.



STOLEN SWEETS. [Page 7.](#)

The round and rosy spoils, being freed, followed the law of gravitation, and plumped one after another on to the head of the prostrate Teddy, who was groaning and rubbing his elbows, with a very lugubrious face. [17]

"If you stir a step, you imp of mischief, I'll break every bone in your body," cried the captain, hastily dismounting, and approaching Teddy, with a long riding-whip in his hand.

"Don't you touch my brother! Don't you dare to touch my brother!" cried Becky from her perch. "It's a shame to make such a fuss about a few apples!"

"It's a great shame that a girl of your age should be caught stealing apples," replied the captain.

"Tain't my fault. We shouldn't have been caught if you'd only staid at the yard."

The captain almost smiled; the audacity of the young depredator's attempt to shift the responsibility of the theft upon him, really tickled him. Nevertheless, he approached Teddy, who, having rubbed himself comfortable, now sat calmly awaiting his fate.

"Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself? Haven't I told you to keep off my place? Haven't I given you sufficient warning? Haven't I promised you a thrashing if I caught you here—hey?" [18] roared the captain.

"Yes, cap'n, you did. But I couldn't help it. I—I—I didn't want the apples; b—b—but I wanted to climb the tree for fun; its such a hard climb, and—and—" stammered Teddy, eyeing the whip.

"Don't lie, you imp. There's my apples all round you. You shall sweat for this, I promise you. Off with your jacket, quick! D'ye hear?"

"Don't strike him, cap'n; please don't. He's not to blame;" and Becky plunged from the wall, and stood between the captain and her brother. "He didn't want the apples—indeed, he didn't. He don't like apples—do you, Teddy?"

Teddy shook his head energetically, with a contemptuous look at the fruit.

"I helped him up the tree, and I'm to blame for it all. You oughtn't to strike a boy for doing all he can to please his sister. If you must whip somebody, take me."

"Stand out of the way, Tomboy. Your time will come soon enough—never fear." And he pushed her from the path. "Off with that jacket. D'ye hear?"

Teddy coolly unbuttoned his jacket, and threw it on the grass. [19]

"Don't tease him, Becky. I'm not afraid of his whip. If it's any fun for him, let him lay on. I guess I can stand it as long as he can;" and Teddy looked defiantly at his adversary.

Becky ran to her brother, and threw her arms about his neck, to shield him from the whip.

"He shan't strike you, Teddy. It's all my fault. He shan't touch you."

Captain Thompson was an obstinate man. When he made up his mind to the doing of an act, nothing could stand in his way. Perhaps this accounted for the coolness of Teddy in the trying situation in which he was placed, who, remembering his promise, knew it must be fulfilled, and so offered no resistance.

"Don't, Becky. D'ye want to smother a feller? Don't be a ninny. It's got to come. Go home—do."

"I won't. He shall kill me before he strikes you."

Becky's devotion was blighted in an instant, for the angry man seized her by the arm and flung her across the lane. She fell to the ground unhurt, for the grass was thick and soft.

"I'll teach you to meddle. Don't come near me till I've done with him. Mind that." [20]

Becky sprang to her feet, fire flashing from her eyes. She was as angry now as her tormentor. She picked up a stone, and despite his warning, approached the captain. He should not strike her brother, she looked at the house; no one in sight. Down the lane; no one—yes, there stood Uncle Ned, cropping the grass, unmindful of the group. Ah, the horse! There was a chance yet to save her brother.

“Now, you scamp, I’ll teach you to rob orchards!” and the whip was raised.

Spry as a cat, Becky was at the captain’s back in an instant. She jumped and caught the whip from his hand, then ran for the horse. The captain quickly turned; but too late. Becky sprang to the saddle, caught up the rein, lashed the horse, turned, and shouted, “Good by, Teddy! Good by, cap’n!” and galloped down the lane.

“Come back, come back, you imp of mischief! Come back, I say,” shouted the captain, running after her.

“Some other time, cap’n; can’t stop now. Good by;” and the saucy girl turned, waved her hand to the maddened and baffled owner of the Baldwins, plied the whip briskly, and was out of sight. [21]

The captain, with a muttered “Hang it!”—which was the extent of his swearing, for he was a deacon,—followed at as rapid a pace as he could command, leaving Teddy solitary and alone.

The fat boy looked after his persecutor a moment, with a smile upon his face, then rose, picked up his jacket, put it on, buttoned it at the bottom, then coolly picked up the trophies of victory, tucked them into his jacket and his pockets, crossed the lane, crept through a hedge, and disappeared.

FALLEN FORTUNES.



stern chase is a long chase;" so, leaving Captain Thompson in pursuit of the fugitive, we will take the liberty of passing through his premises to the main street. At the left of the church, opposite his house, another road ran down a steep hill, crossed Rogue's River, by a bridge, ran up another hill, and wound round into the Foxtown road. At the top of the second hill stood a small brown house, by no means attractive in appearance, being destitute of paint, climbing vine, flowers, or other ornamentation. It had not even the virtue of neatness to recommend it. The gate was off its hinges, and lay in the road. A crazy barn close by had a pitch towards the river, as though from sheer weakness it was inclined to lie down for rest, while the scanty patch of cabbages and beets, the potato hills, few and far between, and the rickety bean-poles, all had a starved and neglected appearance. [23]

This was known as the "Sleeper Place," being occupied by Mrs. Sleeper and the young people, Rebecca and Edward, better known as Becky and Teddy. Inside, the house was not much more attractive than the outside. On the lower floor were four rooms, separated by the entry, from which a flight of stairs, hidden by a door, led to the garret above. On one side was a kitchen, with a door leading into Mrs. Sleeper's bed-room at the back. On the other side was a sitting-room, with a door leading to a bed-room back of that, known as Becky's room. Teddy's quarters were above, under the roof. The house was scantily furnished with old-fashioned furniture and home-made carpets, all of which had seen their best many years before, and now showed veteran scars of long service.

In the kitchen were two females—Mrs. Sleeper and Hulda Prime. Mrs. Sleeper was a small, slender woman, with a face from which much beauty had faded out, a face which bore but one expression at all times—that of anxious expectation. All else had died out five years before. Then she was a bright, cheerful, active wife, merrily singing over her household cares. Now she was waiting, for time to determine whether she was a wife or a widow. [23]

In '49, when the California gold fever attacked so many New England towns, Captain Cyrus Sleeper was returning from the West Indies with a cargo of sugar and molasses, in the new ship "Bounding Billow," the joint property of himself and Captain Paul Thompson. Touching at Havana, he was made acquainted with the startling news of gold discoveries; and, always impetuous, at once turned the bow of his ship towards California.

A year passed, and Captain Thompson also received startling news. His runaway partner had reached California, disposed of his cargo at fabulous prices, and sent the ship home in charge of his mate, and had started for the mines. To his partner he remitted the whole amount received for his cargo,—enough to build two ships like the Bounding Billow,—one half of which, being his own, was to be held by his partner for the support of his family until his return.

The captain was astounded. The conduct of his partner was so strange, he believed he must have lost his reason, and never expected to hear any intelligence of him again. Mrs. Sleeper also received a message from her eccentric husband, full of glowing descriptions of quick fortunes made in El Dorado, hopes of speedy return, and bright pictures of the high life they would lead when "his ship came in." Since that time nothing had been heard of Captain Cyrus Sleeper or his fortunes. [24]

The ship was fitted for a second voyage to the West Indies, Mrs. Sleeper, by Thompson's advice, going shares with him in the venture. But it proved disastrous. The ship was wrecked on her return, and Mrs. Sleeper found herself obliged to live on a very small income. Of a very romantic nature, her sailor husband always a hero in her eyes, for a little while she had high hopes of his quick return with an ample fortune, and chatted gaily of the good time coming "when her ship came in." But as time passed, and no message came from over the sea, the smile forsook her lips, the brightness her cheek, and the hope-light of her eyes changed to an eager, searching glance, that told of an unquiet mind and an aching, breaking heart.

She went about her household duties, cooked, scrubbed, and mended, quietly and silently, but took no pride in her home, no comfort in her children. The house soon showed evidences of neglect. The children, without a mother's sympathy and guidance, were rapidly running to waste. [26]

Just when the money began to give out, Hulda Prime "came to help." Hulda was a distant relative of Cyrus Sleeper, by her own showing, as she was a distant relative of almost everybody in Cleverly. She was somewhere between forty and sixty: it was hard telling her age. It could not be told by her hair, for she had none; nor yet by her teeth, for they were false, or her cheeks, for they were always bright, and had a natural color which some people were wicked enough to say was not natural. She was long-favored, long and lean in body, had a very long face, long nose, and a long chin. She wore a "front," with two auburn ringlets dangling at either end, a very tall white cap, carried herself very erect, and had altogether a solemn and serious demeanor. She left a "relative" to come and help "dear Delia in her troubles;" though in what her help consisted was a puzzle which the good people of Cleverly had never been able to solve. She got her living by "helping." She had no money, but she had a large stock of complaints, so many, that they might have been calendared thus: Monday, rheumatism; Tuesday, cancer; Wednesday, dyspepsia; Thursday, heart disease; Friday, lumbago; Saturday, "spine;" Sunday, neuralgia. Or to vary the monotony, she would start off Monday with "cancer," or some other disease; but the week would contain the whole programme. She was very regular in her habits—of complaining, and was always taken bad just when she might be of assistance. [27]

This day she was crouched by the fire, her head tied up in a towel, her body slowly rocking to and fro. It was her neuralgia day.

Mrs. Sleeper stood at her wash-tub near the window, her hands busy in the suds, her eyes fixed on the distant waters of the bay, her thoughts away with the ship that never came in. So absorbed was she in her "waiting" dream, that she did not see Captain Thompson, who for the last ten minutes had been puffing up the hill in sight of the window; was not aware of his approach until he stood in the kitchen doorway, with both hands braced against the sides, breathing very hard. [28]

"So, so! Pur—pur—purty capers those young ones of yours are cutting up, Delia Sleeper!"

Mrs. Sleeper turned with a start; Aunt Hulda straightened up with a groan.

"Do you mean Rebecca and Edward, captain? Have they been making any trouble?" said Mrs. Sleeper, with the faintest sign of interest in her voice.

"Trouble, trouble!" shouted the captain, so loud that Aunt Hulda gave a groan, and held her head very hard; "did they ever make anything else? Ain't they the pests of the town? Who or what is safe when they are about? I tell you what it is, Delia, I'm a patient man, a very patient man. I've endured this sort of thing just as long as I mean to. I tell you something's got to be done." And the captain looked very red, very angry, and very determined.

"I'm sure I try to keep the children out of mischief," faltered Mrs. Sleeper.

"No, you don't. That's just what's the matter. You've no control over them. You don't want to control them. You just let them loose in the town, like a couple of wildcats, seeking whom they may devour. What's the consequence? Look at Brown's melon patch! He couldn't find a sound melon there. Look at my orchard! Despoiled by those barbarians! Here's a sample. To-day I caught them at one of my trees, loaded with plunder; caught them in the act!" [29]

"O, captain! you did not punish them!"

"Punish eels! No; they were too sharp for me. One ran off with my horse, and a purty chase I've had for nothing. The other marched away with my fruit. But I will punish them; be sure of that. Now, Delia, this thing must be stopped; it shall be stopped. I'm a man of my word, and when I say a thing's to be done, it is done."

"I'm sure I'm willing to do anything I can to keep them orderly," began Mrs. Sleeper.

"Now what's the use of your talking so? You know you're not willing to do anything of the kind. You're all bound up in your sorrows. You won't think of the matter again when I'm gone—you know you won't. If you cared for their bringing up, you'd have that boy at school, instead of letting him fatten on other folks's property, and bring that girl up to work, instead of lettin' her go galloping all over creation on other folks's horses. I tell you, Delia Sleeper, you don't know how to bring up young ones!" [30]

The captain, in his warmth, braced himself against the door sills so energetically that they cracked, and a catastrophe, something like that which occurred when Samson played with the pillars of the temple, seemed imminent.

"P'raps she'd better turn 'em over to you, Cap'n Thompson," growled Aunt Hulda; "you're such a grand hand at bringin' up!"

"Hulda Prime, you jest attend to your own affairs. This is none of your business; so shet up!" shouted the more plain than polite captain.

"Shut up!" retorted Aunt Hulda. "Wal, I never! Ain't you gettin' a leetle *obstropelous*, cap'n? This here's a free country, and nobody's to hinder anybody's freein' their mind to anybody, even if they are a little up in the world. Shut up, indeed!" And Aunt Hulda, in her indignation, rose from her chair, walked round it, and plumped down again in her old position.

"I don't want any of your interference, Hulda Prime." [31]

"I know you don't. But it's enough to make a horse laugh to see you comin' here tellin' about bringin' up young uns! Brought up your Harry well—didn't yer?"

"Hush, Aunt Hulda; don't bring up that matter now," said Mrs. Sleeper.

"Why not?" said Aunt Hulda, whose neuralgia was working her temper up to a high pitch. "When folks come to other folks's houses to tell 'em how to train up their children, it's high time they looked to home."

"I brought up my son to obey his father in everything, and there wasn't a better boy in the town."

"I want to know! He was dreadful nice when you had him under your thumb, for you was so strict with him he darsn't say his soul was his own; but he made up for it when he got loose. Sech capers! He made a tom-boy of our Becky, and was jest as full of mischief as he could stick."

"No matter about my son, Hulda Prime; he's out of the way now."

"Yes; cos you wanted to put him to a trade after he'd been through the academy. He didn't like that, and started off to get a college education, and you shut the door agin him, and you locked up your money, and vowed he should starve afore you'd help him. But they do say he's been through Harvard College in spite of yer." [32]

"Hulda Prime, you're a meddlin' old woman," roared the captain, thoroughly enraged, "and it's a pity somebody didn't start you off years ago—hangin' round where you ain't wanted."

"I never hung round your house much—did I, cap'n?" cried Aunt Hulda, with a triumphant grin, which evidently started the neuralgic pains, for she sank back with a groan.

While this passage of tongues was going on inside the house, Miss Becky appeared in the road, mounted on Uncle Ned, who looked rather jaded, as though he had been put to a hard gallop. Flinging herself from his back she entered the door, when the form of Captain Thompson, braced in the kitchen door-way,—which position he had not forsaken even in the height of debate,—met her eyes. Her first thought was to regain the safe companionship of Uncle Ned; but a desire to know what was going on overcame her sense of danger, and she gently lifted the latch of the door which opened to the garret stairs, and stepped inside. The warlike parties in the kitchen covered her retreat with the clamor of their tongues. [33]

"Now, Delia, I want you to listen to reason," continued the captain, turning from the vanquished spinster to the silent woman, who had kept busily at work during the combat. "You're too easy with them children. They want a strong hand to keep them in line. Now you know I'm a good friend to you and yours; and though Cyrus Sleeper treated me rather shabbily—"

"My gracious! hear that man talk!" blurted out Aunt Hulda. "It's no such thing, and you know it. You made more money out of his Californy speculation with that air ship than you ever made afore in your life."

"Will you be quiet, woman?" roared the captain. "I ain't talkin' to you, and don't want any of your meddlin'."

"Aunt Hulda, don't interrupt, please," said Mrs. Sleeper; "let's hear what the captain has to say."

"Then let him talk sense. The idea of Cyrus Sleeper's ever treating anybody shabby! It's ridikerlous!" growled Aunt Hulda, as she returned to her neuralgic nursing. [34]

"The young ones want a strict hand over 'em," continued the captain, when quiet was restored again. "I'm willing to take part charge of them, if you'll let me. They must be sent to school."

"I can't afford it, captain. I couldn't send 'em last year. You know the money's most gone," said Mrs. Sleeper.

"I know its all gone, Delia. What you've been drawing the last year is from my own pocket. But no matter for that. Drinkwater opens the school Monday. I'll send the children there, and pay the bills. It's time something was done for their education; and I'll be a father to them, as they're not likely to have another very soon."

"Don't say that, don't say that! Cyrus will come back—I know he will."

"If he's alive. But don't be too hopeful. There's been a heap of mortality among the miners; and if he's alive, we should have heard from him afore this. Chances are agin him. So you'd better be resigned. Yes, you'd better give him up, put on mourning for a year, and then look round, for the money's gone."

"Give up my husband!" cried Mrs. Sleeper, with energy. "No, no. He will come back; I feel, I know he will. He would never desert me; and if he died,—O, Heaven, no, no!—if he died, he would find some way to send his last words to me. No, no, don't say give him up. I cannot, I cannot!" and the poor woman burst into tears. [35]

"Wal, I never!" cried Aunt Hulda. "Look round, indeed! Why, it's bigamy, rank bigamy!"

"Well, well," said the captain, quickly, anxious to avoid another battle, "do as you please about that; but let's give the children a good bringing up. They've got to earn their own living, and the sooner they get a little learning the better."

"The children should go to school, captain, I know," said Mrs. Sleeper; "but I'm afraid they will not take kindly to the change."

"I'll make 'em, then. It's time they were broke, and I flatter myself I'm able to bring 'em under control. But make no interference with my plans. Once begun, they must stick to school. It's for their good, you know."

"Very well, captain; I consent; only be easy with them at first."

"O, I'll be easy enough, never fear, if they mind me; if not, they must take the consequences. So, next Monday fix 'em up, and I'll take 'em over, and talk to Drinkwater." [36]

"I'll have them all ready, captain, and thank you for the trouble you're taking," said Mrs. Sleeper.

"Now, mind! no interference from you or Hulda. If there is—"

"Don't fret yourself about me, cap'n. Mercy knows I've trouble enough of my own. I declare, there's that lumbago comin' on agin," groaned Aunt Hulda.

The captain seemed highly delighted at the prospect of a change in the condition of his enemy, and, with a triumphant smile, backed into the entry.

"Hallo! there's my horse, reeking with sweat. Where is that imp of mischief?" thundered the exasperated captain. "If I catch her—"

"Here I am, cap'n. Clear the coast! Ha, ha, ha! Hooray!"

The voice came from the garret. There was a thundering racket on the stairs, a crash against the door, which flew open, and Becky, seated in an old cradle without rockers, burst into the entry. Tired of listening, she had searched the garret for sport, had dragged this old emblem of infancy from its hiding-place to the head of the stairs, seated herself in it, and, regardless of [37]

consequences, started for a slide.

It was a reckless act. As the door flew open, the cradle struck the captain's shins, throwing him backwards, and pitching Becky out of the front door on to the grass. The captain scrambled to his feet, furious with pain and choler. Becky regained hers quickly and started for the barn, the captain in hot pursuit. Another stern chase. The captain soon desisted, mounted his horse, and rode away, while Miss Becky perched herself on the rickety fence, and saluted the captain's ears, as he rode down the hill, with the refrain of the well-known song, "O, dear, what can the matter be?"

MRS. THOMPSON'S CROSS.



he captain cantered home in no enviable state of mind. His mission had been successful, in as much as he had gained Mrs. Sleeper's consent to his plan for "tying up" her children. Otherwise he felt unhappy regarding the events of the day. There were still stinging pains in his ankles and back to remind him of Miss Becky's exploit, and the shrill, sarcastic voice of Hulda Prime still rang in his ears. That so miserable a creature as he considered her should have dared to criticise his conduct was peculiarly mortifying to his pride. Aunt Hulda had, indeed, spoken boldly. He was, undoubtedly the greatest man in Cleverly. Senior deacon in the church, moderator at town meetings, referee in all disputes, and general adviser of his fellow-townsmen, he was a man to be treated with respect, a man who would brook no interference with his plans, a man whose opinions must not be combatted, and one whom people did not think it safe to thwart. And this poor old hanger-on at people's firesides had dared to criticise a proceeding which others had not the courage to mention in his presence. And he had not the power to punish her. Poor Aunt Hulda was never thought so much of before by a man as she was by the captain during his homeward ride.

[39]

Gloomily he rode into the yard, and consigned Uncle Ned to the care of Phil Hague, his man-of-all-work, who advanced smiling, to meet him, undeterred by the black looks of his master.

"By me sowl, cap'n, dear, it's a fine lather yez given owld Uncle Ned. Is it fur ye've rode?"

"No," shortly replied the captain.

"Is that so? Thin what's the matter wid the baste? Shure he's not looked so wary loike since—since Master Harry—"

"Shut up, you fool!" thundered the captain. "It's your business to take care of him, and not to ask impertinent questions." And he stamped into the house, muttering, "Am I never to hear the last of that boy?"

Phil scratched his head, and looked after the captain.

[40]

"Shure there's an aist wind blowin', an' we'll have to be afther scuddin' under bare poles, jist."

Gloomily the captain stalked through the various sections of his establishment, until he reached the front sitting-room, and found himself in the presence of his wife.

Mrs. Thompson was the queen of Cleverly society. The mention of her name in any company was enough to make the most silent tongue suddenly eloquent. She was plump in person and plump in virtues. Her face was just round and full enough to please everybody. No one had such rosy cheeks as Mrs. Thompson, "at her time of life too!" There was the kindest light in her grey eyes, and the jolliest puckers about her mouth; and the short gray curls that flourished all over her head formed a perfect crown of beauty—nothing else. Cleverly folks were proud of her, and well they might be. She was everybody's friend. She not only ministered to the wants of the needy, but she sought them out. She was the first at the bedside of the sick, and the last to give them up, for she was as well skilled in domestic medicine as she was in domestic cooking, and superior in both. She was a wondrous helper, for she knew just where to put her hands, and an enchanting talker, for she never spoke ill of anybody. She was a devout sister of the church, promulgating the true religious doctrines of faith, hope, and charity with no sanctimonious face, but purifying and warming with the incense of good deeds and the sunshine of a life cheerful, hopeful, and energetic. She had her cross to bear—who has not?—but she so enveloped it in the luxuriant branches of the tree of usefulness rooted in her own heart, that its burden lay easy on her broad, matronly shoulders.

[41]

On the captain's entrance she was seated in a low rocking-chair, darning one of her husband's socks. She looked up, with a smile upon her face.

"Ah, father! back early to-day!"

"Father!" snapped the captain, as he flung himself upon a sofa. "Why will you insist on calling me by that name? Haven't I repeatedly asked you not to?"

"So you have Paul, so you have; and I've repeatedly disobeyed you," cheerfully answered the good woman. "I didn't mean to; but women are so forgetful! I'll be more careful in future, fath—Dear me, there it is again!"

[42]

"There, there! what's the use of talking to you? But I won't have it. I tell you I'm no father. I won't be a father. When that boy took the reins in his own hands, I cut him out of my heart. I'll never, never own him!"

Mrs. Thompson bit her lips. Evidently the cross was bearing down hard upon her. Only an instant, and the smile came back.

"You rode up from the bridge. Been over to Delia's?"

"Yes, I've been over to Delia's. That woman, and that woman's young ones, will drive me crazy."

"Then I wouldn't go over there, if I were you. Let me be your messenger in future."

"No, marm. I've taken this case into my own hands, and I mean to finish it. When Sleeper disappeared, I told you not to go near them, for I knew that you would be just foolish enough to fix them up so comfortably, she would lead an idle life; and I wasn't going to have anything of the

kind going on. She's got to come to hard work, and she might as well commence first as last. Its a mystery to me how she's got along so well as she has." [43]

It was no mystery to Mrs. Thompson. She had been forbidden to go, but not to send; and many and heavy had been the burdens her messengers had carried across the river to the little brown house on the hill.

"But I've settled things now," continued the captain. "Next Monday the young ones go to school."

"Next Monday! No, no; don't send them then!" cried Mrs. Thompson, with a shade of alarm in her manner.

"And why not? I'd like to know. Next Monday the term begins."

"Yes; but—but hadn't you better wait a few days?"

"Wait? wait? I won't wait a moment after the doors open. Next Monday they go, bright and early."

"Just as you say, Paul," said Mrs. Thompson, with a sigh. "How is Delia? looking well?"

"No; she looks bad. Think she might, with that grumbling old crone fastened on to her."

"Old crone! Why, Paul, whom do you mean?"

"Hulda Prime. She's dropped in there to 'help!' Help make her miserable; that's all she'll do. Plaguy old busybody, meddling in other people's affairs! I wish the town was well rid of her." [44]

"She is rather an encumbrance—that's a fact," quietly replied Mrs. Thompson. "But we are never troubled with her."

"She knows better than to come near me," said the captain, with a wise shake of the head. "Why, she had the impudence to taunt me with having turned my own son out of doors!"

"Indeed!" said his wife, hardly able to conceal a smile.

"Yes, she did; and she'd heard that, spite of me, the boy had gone through college. Plague take her!"

"Indeed! Well, Aunt Hulda never picks her words. She is sometimes very aggravating."

"Aggravating! She's insolent. The idea of her daring to talk so to me! O, if there was only a law to shut the mouths of such meddling old tattlers, I'd spend every cent I have but what I'd lock her up where her voice could never be heard!"

The captain, unable longer to keep quiet, here rose, dashed about the room two or three times, then darted out, and his angry tirade died away in the distance as he made his way to the barn. [45]

Mrs Thompson sat quiet a moment, then burst into such a merry peal of laughter that the Canary in the cage above her head was inspired, and burst into a torrent of song. The audacity of Aunt Hulda seemed to affect Mrs. Thompson far less severely than it did her husband, for that was the cause of her mirth.

Had Captain Thompson really been a bad man, his frequent outbursts of passion might have terrified, and his fierce threats have pained her; but a long acquaintance with the defect in his otherwise good disposition had made these stormy passages too familiar to be dreaded. His one defect—Mrs. Thompson's cross—was obstinacy. Give the man his own way, and he was ready for any good act or work: thwart him in the slightest particular, and he was immovable. And so Mrs. Thompson, like a wise woman, never openly arrayed herself against his wishes or opinions. And yet the captain would have been astonished, had he calmly investigated the matter, to find how seldom he really had his own way. This shrewd woman knowing it was useless to combat his stubborn spirit, was continually setting up safety-rods to attract this destructive fluid where it could do no harm; contriving plans for him to combat, herself triumphing in their downfall, while he exulted in his supposed victory. [46]

Miss Becky's career was a case in point. She had been pained to see and hear of the girl's wild, mischievous pranks, and felt it was time she should be sent to school. She took occasion one day when, in sight of the window, Becky had climbed up the lightning-rod on the church, and seated herself in a window over the door, to call her husband's attention to the fact, with the remark that "such exercise must be excellent for a girl's constitution." The captain fired up at once, denounced such tomboy tricks, and declared the girl should go to school, or he'd know the reason why.

And so thanks to Mrs Thompson, and not her husband, Becky was to be turned from the error of her ways. The captain was a liberal man; his purse was always open to the demands of his wife. She might cover every bed in the parish with comforters, clothe the poor, and feed the hungry, to her heart's content; he would never stop to count the cost. And so she often managed to repair damages his temper had caused, out of his own purse. [47]

But the man's obstinacy had brought one serious disaster, which she found all her woman's wit necessary to repair. It had driven their only child from his home, and made a breach between father and son which might never be healed.

Harry Thompson, at the age of fifteen, was a leader among the boys of Cleverly. He was brave, skilful, and mischievous. He was looked upon as a hero by his playfellows, whom he could incite to the performance of wonderful gymnastic feats, or to the perpetration of boyish tricks hardly as creditable. Among his enthusiastic admirers was Becky Sleeper, then ten years of age, whom, being a special favorite of his, he took pains to train in all the sports with which he was familiar.

He was then attending the school; no interested student, but very quick and apt to learn, standing fair in his class. The next year he was sent to the academy; and a suddenly-acquired taste for learning so fired his ambitious spirit that at the end of the second year he graduated at the head of his class, with the reputation of being a remarkable scholar. Then, hungry for knowledge, he wanted to go to college. But Captain Thompson had already planned a course for his son. He had book-learning enough; he wanted him to be a practical man. He should go into the yard and learn the trade of a ship-carpenter; in time he could be a builder; and then the son could build, and the father would fit out and send his ships abroad.

[48]

The son demurred. The father's obstinacy asserted itself; he could not be made to listen to reason; and the matter ended by the boy's proclaiming his determination to go through college, if he had to scrub the floors to get through, and the father's threat that, if he left home, the doors should be closed against his return.

The boy went. The mention of his name was forbidden in his home by the angry father. He had been gone four years, and the captain seemed as insensible to his welfare as he did when he pronounced his dictum.

But the mother, she had not held her peace for four long years without knowledge of her boy. Snugly tucked away among her treasures were weekly records of her son's progress, in his own handwriting—tender, loving epistles, such as make a mother's heart warm and happy, telling of true growth in manhood's noblest attributes, and showing in every line the blessed power of a mother's influence.

[49]

Despite her cross, Mrs. Thompson was a happy woman, and the championship of her son by Aunt Hulda was a power to make her merry; for she knew how her Harry got through college. He didn't scrub the floors to get through. O, no! Captain Thompson's purse paved the way for a more stately march through the halls of learning.

And so, having had her laugh, Mrs. Thompson called, in a loud voice,—

"Silly!"

Silly, somewhere down in the tale of the kite, answered the summons with a shrill "Yes, marm," and in a few minutes entered the room.

Priscilla York was one of Mrs. Thompson's charity patients—a tall, ungainly, awkward girl, whom, from pity, the good woman had taken into her house, with a desire to teach her a few of the rudiments of housekeeping.

Silly was by no means a promising pupil, her "breaking in" requiring the breaking up of many dishes and the exercise of much patience.

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She was abrupt and jerking in her motion, except when she walked; then she seemed afraid of damaging carpets, not having been accustomed to them, and walked on tiptoe, which peculiar footfall caused the heels of her slip-shod shoes to drop with a "clap-clap-clap," as she crossed the oil-cloth on the floor of the dining-room. Her clothes hung loosely on her, and as she entered the room her arms were stuck stiff at her side, her mouth wide open, and her eyes staring as though she expected to hear some dreadful news.

"Silly," said Mrs. Thompson, "get the covered basket."

"Yes, marm," said Silly, and darted for the door.

"Stop, stop, child; I've not finished."

Silly darted back again.

"I want you to get the covered basket, and take some things over to Mrs. Sleeper."

"Yes marm;" and the girl darted for the door a second time.

"Silly, stop this instant! What in the world are you thinking of?"

"The covered basket, marm; it's in the pantry."

"Silly, when I have finished what I want to say, I will tell you to go."

[51]

"Then you don't want the covered basket, marm?"

"Get the covered basket, put in it the ham that was left at dinner, a pair of chickens I cooked this morning, a couple of mince pies, and a loaf of bread. Do you understand?"

"Yes marm. Basket, ham, chickens, mince pie, bread," said Silly, briskly.

"Very well. Those are for Mrs. Sleeper, with my compliments."

"Yes marm. Basket and all?"

"Bring back the basket, of course. Now go—"

"Yes, marm;" and Silly made a third dart doorward.

"Stop, stop, Silly!"

"You told me to go when you said go; and I was a going to go."

"That was my mistake, Silly. I want you to go to the pantry, get a bottle of currant wine, a jar of damson preserves, and a box of sardines. Can you find them all?"

"O, yes, marm. Currant wine, damson preserves, sardines."

"Very well. Be careful in handling things. Those are for Aunt Hulda, with my compliments. Make no mistake, and be sure to tell her I sent them. Now, Silly, go." [52]

Silly started at the word "go" so forcibly that she ran plump against the portly form of the captain, who just then entered.

"Hang it!" roared he; "why don't you see where you are going, stupid?"

"Stupid" stopped not to tell the reason why, but darted by the captain: and soon a commotion among the dishes in the pantry made it evident that Silly was "handling things" none to carefully.

"Where's that crazy thing going now?" muttered the captain, as he stalked to the window.

"On one of my errands, Paul; so don't be inquisitive."

Had he dreamed that Aunt Hulda's defence of his boy had turned his wife's sympathies in her direction, and that there was likely to be a shower of goodies poured into the spinster's lap, he might have been inquisitive, instead of shouting at that particular moment,—

"Hang it! there's that boy again! and with my apples, too! He shan't escape me this time. No, no." [53] And the captain darted from the room, and out into the road, bare-headed.

Teddy Sleeper had waited two hours, in the woods behind the orchard the return of Becky, supposing that, as she was the leader of the expedition, after decoying the captain to a safe distance, she would return to rescue her follower; for Teddy had not sufficient reliance on his own skill to venture either an attack or a retreat. At last, getting weary, he crept out into the lane, and from there into the main street, and started for home. But as he neared the church he was waylaid by a half a dozen of his cronies, just returning from a game of base ball, and, of course, very hungry. Catching sight of the fruit stowed away in Teddy's jacket, they set up a roar of delight, and surrounded him.

"Hooray! Ted's made a haul!"

"Divy's the thing—hey, Ted?"

"O, come, Ted, don't be mean."

"But they ain't mine; they're Becky's," said Teddy, warding off the snatches at his plunder as best he could with his elbows.

"Becky's—are they? Hooray! She won't care. Divy, Ted. She's the best fellow in town."

Teddy had about made up his mind to unbosom himself to his captors, when he caught sight of the bareheaded captain emerging from the door. A shiver ran through him. Hardly a chance for escape now. Nevertheless he darted round the corner at a lively pace, and down the hill. The disappointed boys, not having seen the captain, but supposing Teddy was attempting to escape from them, set up a yell, and started in pursuit. But Teddy had made a good start, and fear lent unwonted activity to his legs. So, down the hill they went, Teddy ahead, the boys close at his heels, and the captain dashing on behind. [54]

With such a load as he carried, Teddy could not long keep up his gallant pace, and his pursuers rapidly gained upon him. He was almost to the bridge, and there was Becky cheering and clapping her hands. If he could only reach her, he felt he was safe. With a quick impulse, he drew two apples from his bosom, and threw them over his head. The foremost boy stopped suddenly to pick them up. On a down grade, too! The result was appalling. In an instant he was on the ground, with his companions piled upon him. A pitfall in the path of the irate captain. His ponderous body launched itself upon the heap, and great was the fall thereof. Screams, groans, and dirt filled the air as Teddy reached the bridge. The vanquished picked themselves up as best they could, without a thought of further pursuit, while the conquering *heroes* marched up the hill, to make, in some secure retreat, a fair division of the spoils. [55]



ON THE BRIDGE. [Page 55.](#)

BECKY SLEEPER'S CHARITY.



remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," was a precept by no means religiously observed at the little brown house on the hill. Mrs. Sleeper had never been a regular attendant at divine service, even in her happiest days, and, since her peculiar misfortune, had almost entirely neglected the church. A part of the day was regularly spent in poring over the letters of her husband, the effect of which was to set her weeping for the balance. The young people, left to their own devices, amused themselves by pitching "quates" behind the house, playing tag in the barn, or by indulgence in other equally indecorous sports endeavored to wear out the long day. Aunt Hulda generally brought forth from their resting-place at the bottom of her trunk "The Family Physician," or "Every Woman her own Doctor," two standard works for the cure of all diseases, and faithfully consulting them for remedies to meet her infirmities, or, from old habit, took the ponderous family Bible into her lap, and in its pages sought consolation, the Book of Job, however, being the portion which really soothed her perturbed spirit. [57]

On the Sunday following the disaster on the hill, the afflicted spinster, in the sitting-room, was groaning over a treatise on cancer, in "The Family Physician," that disease being the order of the day in her system of complaints. It was near the middle of the afternoon, and Becky, having exhausted the supply of out-door sports, was lying upon the sofa, and, with a very dissatisfied look upon her face, was watching Aunt Hulda. Teddy, who seldom lost sight of his sister, was flattening his nose against the window-pane.

"Aunt Hulda," said Becky, suddenly, "don't you think Sunday is an awful long day?"

"I do, by hokey!" blurted out Teddy. "Can't get up no fun, nor nothin'. I'd like to go a fishin' first rate; but jest as you git a nibble, long comes some the meetin'-house folks, and begin to talk about breakin' the Sabbath. And that jest scares off all the fish."

"And the fishermen, too, Teddy. My sakes, how you did run last Sunday when Deacon Hill caught you fishing down at the fore side!" said Becky, with a laugh. [58]

"Plague take him! he jest marched off with my line and bait, too," growled Teddy. "It's none of his business, anyhow."

"All days are long to a poor, afflicted creeter," groaned Aunt Hulda. "But when I was a girl of your age, I did think Sunday was as long as six week-days beat into one; but then it's the Lord's day, and I s'pose, after all, we can make it long or short, just as we try to do what he wants us to."

"Well, I'd like to know what he wants me to do, for I can't find out any way to make it short. It's just hateful, and I wish there wasn't any such day," replied Becky, turning restlessly about.

"Why, Rebecca Sleeper, how can you talk so? One of the things he wants folks to do is to go to meetin' regular. You ought to know that well enough."

"Does he?" said Becky, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Seems to me, Aunt Hulda, you don't mind very well."

"Lor, child, I'm a poor, afflicted creeter. He don't expect me to do much but bear my troubles patiently; and I'm sure I do that," said Aunt Hulda, forcing a look of resignation into her face. [59]

"Don't think much of goin' to meetin' anyhow," said Teddy. "They always pokes us up in the gallery, and won't let us go to sleep; and if old Fox, the sexton, ketches a feller firin' spitballs, he jest whacks him on the head."

"Then there are other ways to make the day short—readin' the Bible and other good books."

"Yes; 'Family Physician,' I s'pose," said Teddy. "I jest wish I had Robinson Crusoe: that's a first rate one."

"Then a goin' to see sick folks, and carryin' 'em little dainties, is another; and that makes the day short, I tell you," continued Aunt Hulda. "When I was a helpin' Mrs. Lincoln, years and years ago, she used to say to me Sunday afternoons, 'Hulda, don't you want to clap on your bonnet and run over to the widder Starns with the basket?' or, 'Hulda, don't you want to carry this jelly round to Mr. Peters? He's terrible sick.' And I used to go and go, and never feel a bit tired, because it was charitable work; and Sundays used to go quicker than week-days, and I was glad when they come round again. Now there's poor Mr. York, Silly York's father; poor man, he's most gone with the consumption; now, if you only had a nice little bit of somethin' good to take over to him, you don't know how good you would feel, and how the time would fly! O, dear, if I was only strong and well! But what's the use of talkin'? Here I've got the rheumatics so I can't walk, and the neuralogy so I can't sit still, and I'm afraid there's a cancer comin' on the end of my tongue, and then I can't talk." [60]

Here Aunt Hulda ran out her tongue, and commenced exploring it with her finger to find a small pimple which had made its appearance that day. Becky lay very quiet on the sofa, watching Aunt Hulda, who, after the examination of her tongue, plunged into "The Family Physician" with anxious interest.

"Did she ever delight in doing good?" thought Becky, as she studied Aunt Hulda's face with renewed interest. "Everybody calls her a nuisance, and everybody laughs at her complaints. She take nice things to sick folks, and feel good in doing it! And she says this is the Lord's day—this long, weary day,—and can be made short and pleasant like the other six! Why, she talks like a [61]

minister!"

Aunt Hulda was a new being in the girl's eyes. She began to reverence the afflicted spinster. She lay there so quiet that Teddy looked round in astonishment. His sister had been lying perfectly still for fifteen minutes. Such an occurrence startled him.

"Becky, what's the matter? Sick—hey?"

"No, Teddy," replied Becky, startled in turn; "I'm thinking—that's all."

"Don't do it. 'Twill make you sick—see if it don't."

"I guess not, Teddy," replied Becky, jumping up. "I'm going into the kitchen."

Teddy followed her as she left the room.

"Teddy," said Becky, solemnly, after she had softly closed the kitchen door behind them, "I expect we're awful wicked."

"Do you, though?" said Teddy, with staring eyes. "What for?"

"Because Sunday's such a long day. Didn't you hear what Aunt Hulda said? It's the Lord's day, and we can make it short or long, just as we try to do what he wants us to."

"Well, what's he want us to do?"

[62]

"To go to church, and not stay at home and pitch quates."

"How are we goin' to church without clo'es? My elbows are all out; so's my knees. They'd send us home quick, I tell you."

"I suppose they would," replied Becky, thoughtfully. "Well, there's one thing we might do—carry something nice to sick folks."

"We ain't got nothin' nice, and don't know any sick folks," replied matter-of-fact Teddy, who failed to see anything time-shortening in Becky's project.

"We know Mr. York, who's got the consumption."

"Well, we might go and catch some fish and take to him—only I've lost my line."

"No; something better than that, Teddy. Now you run and get a basket. I know what to take."

Teddy went into the wood-shed and soon returned with a very dilapidated basket.

"That will do nicely. Now let's see what we can find to put into it," said Becky, as she opened the door of the cupboard. "Here's a bottle of currant wine; I guess that's good for consumption; we'll take that. And here's a jar of preserves; they always give them to sick folks; we'll take that. And here's a box of sardines. I don't know about that. Well, we'll take it, any way."

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"Why, Becky, these things are what Mrs. Thompson sent to Aunt Hulda," said Teddy, a little alarmed at Becky's proceedings.

"So they are;" and Becky wavered a moment. "No matter; she'll send her some more, I guess. Besides, Aunt Hulda won't care, for we're going to do good with them. There's a pair of chickens, too; but I guess they're most too hearty for sick folks. Now let's be off."

With the basket between them, they crept into the wood-shed, from there into a pasture behind the house, crossed that, climbed a fence, and struck into the Foxtown road. The Yorks lived upon this road, a good mile and a half from Mrs. Sleeper's. The basket was a heavy, unwieldy affair, in which the "good things" bounced about in a very unsatisfactory manner; and the couple "changed hands" many times before they reached their destination.

In answer to Becky's knock, the door was opened by Mrs. York, a short, buxom woman with a very pleasant face.

"Becky Sleeper—of all things! What in the world brought you here? and what have you got there?"

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"Thought we'd come over and bring something to Mr. York. He's sick—ain't he?" answered Becky.

"Why, you good little soul! Come right in; my poor man will be dreadful glad to see you."

Becky and Teddy accepted the cordial invitation, and were ushered into the presence of the "poor man." Mr. York was by no means so far gone as people imagined. True, there were about him symptoms of the dread disease which New England makes a specialty; but he was a very lazy man, and took advantage of any slight cold to house himself and be nursed by his wife. Mrs. York was not an idle woman; she washed, ironed, and scrubbed in the neighborhood, when her husband worked at his trade; the moment he "felt bad" she dropped all outside labor, and gave her attention to him, magnifying his troubles by her sympathy, and thus making a "baby" of a man who was strong enough to support his family, had he the inclination. Of course, in this state of affairs, there was no income, and the active charity of Cleverly had a loud call in that direction.

The room was neat and tidy; the "poor man" lay upon a sofa; two of the five children with which this couple were blessed were playing about the room; two were at church; the eldest, Silly, was in the next room, putting away her things, having just returned from Mrs. Thompson's.

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"Only think, father, here's Becky and Teddy Sleeper come all the way alone to bring you something nice. Of all things! Why, Becky, I thought you didn't care for anything but getting into scrapes and out again. You've got a good heart, any way—ain't she father?"

Father raised himself on his elbow, with a faint "Yes, indeed," and fastened his eyes on the basket, somewhat more interested in the good things than in the good heart.

"Empty your basket right on to the table, Becky. Did your mother send 'em?"

"No; mother's sick," replied Becky, a little defiantly, for the allusion to scrapes had struck her as not exactly polite under the circumstances. "No, Mrs. York; I thought I'd pick up something myself. Here's a bottle of wine, a jar of preserves, and a box of sardines," placing them upon the table. "If they will do Mr. York any good, you're welcome to them."

"Why, they're real nice, and we're ever so much obliged to you, Becky. Where did you get them?" [66]

Becky was silent a moment. She had not expected such a question, was not prepared to tell the truth, and would not lie, lying being an infirmity which she detested; not, however, from any prompting of her moral nature, but because she thought it a cowardly way of getting out of a scrape.

"Do you think it polite, Mrs. York, to ask so many questions when people take the trouble to bring you things?" she said, at last, with an abused look in her eyes.

"No, I don't, Becky," replied Mrs. York, with a laugh. "It's real mean, and I'll say no more. You're a dear, good girl, and you deserve a better bringing up than you're getting now. Here's Silly,—Silly, do look here; see what these dear children have brought your father—wine, preserves, sardines! Ain't they kind?"

Silly stopped short in the doorway, and looked in astonishment first at the table then at Becky.

"Wine, preserves, sardines! Becky Sleeper, where did you get those things?"

"It's none of your business," replied Becky. "I didn't come here to be asked questions." [67]

"O, you didn't!" sneered Silly. "I know where you got 'em: you stole 'em!—Mother, they're the very things Mrs. Thompson sent over to Hulda Prime yesterday afternoon; and I took 'em."

"Land of liberty sakes! You don't mean it!" cried Mrs. York, with uplifted hands.

"Now, you young ones, take them things right back!" cried Silly, stamping her foot and jerking her arms about in an extraordinary manner.

"I wouldn't send them back, Silly," said her father, with a faint hope of retaining the delicacies, the sight of which had made his mouth water. "Perhaps Hulda Prime sent 'em!"

"Hulda Prime, indeed! Ketch her parting with her things; she's too mean. No; they shall go back, quick, too. What would Mrs. Thompson say? Don't you feel mean, Becky Sleeper?"

From the color of Becky's face it was evident she was not contented with the situation. As for Teddy, he was terrified, expecting every moment the swinging arms of Silly would be attracted to the vicinity of his ears.

"Now, off with you," continued Silly, tossing the articles into the basket; "and don't you ever show your faces here again. Purty capers you cut up, Becky Sleeper," picking up the basket. "Here, take hold of it," opening the door. "Now, start yourselves, quick, or I'll know the reason why." [68]

Bang went the door, and the charitable party were in the road, with the rejected offering still upon their hands. They stood a moment looking at each other and the closed door behind them, Becky's face crimson with shame, Teddy's eyes, now that he was out of danger, blazing with anger.

"Well, well," sputtered Teddy, "here's a purty kettle of fish. Nice scrape you've got us in now, Becky Sleeper! You ought to know better."

"Aunt Hulda said this was the Lord's work," answered Becky, meekly. "I was only trying to make the day short and pleasant."

"Well, if it's the Lord's work, you've made a botch of it; and if he sent you here, he made a mistake in the house."

"Don't talk so, Teddy; it's wicked."

"It's wickeder to have to lug that basket way round home again. I won't do it. Let's chuck it in the water." [69]

"No, no, Teddy; let's take it home. I wouldn't have believed Silly York could be so mean. Poor as they are, too!"

"I should think so! Folks don't get sardines and currant wine every day."

"Come, let's go the shortest way, Teddy."

They took up the basket, and started homeward. The shortest way was by the main street, and as they entered it they met the people coming from church. So, with down-cast faces, the disappointed almoners ran the gantlet of wondering eyes, attracted by the uncommon sight of two poorly-dressed youngsters lugging a heavy basket on Sunday.

For the first time in her life Becky was mortified at the condition in which she found herself. As she passed neatly-dressed girls of her own age, and heard the laughter which they took no pains to suppress, her old, defiant manner failed to assert itself, and she hung her head in shame. To add to her humiliation, when they reached the church, Captain Thompson was standing on the steps talking with the sexton.

"Heavens and earth! What new caper's this?" he shouted, making a dash at the culprits.

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Becky, having her head down, had not seen the captain, but she heard his voice and recognized it. She gave one startled look, dropped the basket, and ran. Teddy was not slow in following her example. The captain made a motion as if to follow them, but giving a thought to the day, and perhaps another to the steepness of the hill they were rapidly descending, changed his mind, picked up the basket, and entered his house.

Becky and her accomplice made no stops until they reached home. They dashed into the sitting-room, breathless and frightened.

"Massy sakes! do you want to take the house down?" cried Aunt Hulda. "What on airth's the matter now?"

"Aunt Hulda, I don't believe you know a thing about making Sunday short and pleasant," said Becky, indignantly. "I've tried it, and it's just as hateful a way of having a good time as ever I saw."

"Tried it! Tried what?" cried Aunt Hulda.

"Carrying nice things to sick folks, and getting snubbed for your pains," said Becky.

"Yes, and gittin' yer shins barked with plaguy big baskets," added Teddy.

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"Carrying things! What have you carried? Where have you been?"

"Currant wine, preserves and sardines!" sputtered Teddy.

"Yes, to Mr. York; and got turned out of doors," added Becky.

"Currant wine! Heavens and airth!" screamed Aunt Hulda, jumping up and darting into the kitchen with an activity she seldom displayed.

She flew to the cupboard, gave one look, uttered a dismal groan, and darted back to the sitting-room.

"You hateful young one, you've stolen my things! What do you mean?" she cried, seizing Becky by the shoulder, and shaking her. "Is that the way you rob a poor, afflicted creeter? What have you done with them? Where are they?"

"Don't care where they are! Wish they were at the bottom of the river! Quit shaking me!"

"Guess they're safe, Aunt Hulda," said Teddy, with a grin. "Cap'n Thompson's got 'em."

"Cap'n Thompson!" gasped Aunt Hulda, staring at Teddy. In his hands she felt they were indeed safe. It was too much. She dropped Becky, tottered to the sofa, and added a fit of hysterics to the catalogue of her numerous ailments.

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CHAPTER V. IN SCHOOL AND OUT.

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he dazzlingly white school-house opposite Captain Thompson's mansion was not used for the public school, which, under the state law, was necessarily kept in operation at least four months in the year, and for whose support the people of Cleverly were taxed. That institution was situated at a point nearer the fore side, a short distance from the main street, and was in rather a dilapidated condition. In those days country people had not that pride in handsome and commodious school-houses which is now eminently a characteristic of New England villages; and this crazy edifice was likely to serve the purpose for which it had been erected, years and years before, until it should crumble to pieces with age or be swept into a pile of kindling-wood by the fury of a March gale.

Captain Thompson, as a member of the school committee, had endeavored many times to have the old shell supplanted by a better building, or at least placed on a more secure footing; but in vain. His associates—Messrs. Pennywise and Poundfoolish—strictly opposed reconstruction in any form. [74]

"It was good enough for us; and what was good enough for us is good enough for our young ones," was not a very sound argument; but, as it satisfied the majority, the captain was obliged to give way. He then carried the matter before the town meeting, with no better success. There was a strong opposition to any measure he brought forward for the improvement of the school estate. Not even a bundle of shingles or a pound of nails could be had for repairs. The "good-enough" argument prevailed here; and the captain was vanquished.

Then his obstinacy asserted itself. He withdrew from the school committee, bought the land opposite his house, took men from his shipyard, hired all the carpenters he could find, and in less than two months had a very neat and commodious school-house of his own. This he leased to Rufus Drinkwater, the best teacher the public school ever had,—a man generally esteemed by the good folks of Cleverly,—and commenced a warfare against the ancient establishment. Drinkwater's term opened a month earlier than the public, the charge for tuition was very low, and the captain gave notice that he was prepared to pay the bills, if children wanted to come to "my school," and parents felt unable to incur further expense for schooling than that to which they were subjected by the state tax. [75]

The committee-men laughed when they saw "Thompson's Folly," as they styled the new edifice, going up. But when they saw the children going in,—and a very respectable procession they made,—and looked into their almost deserted quarters, they groaned in spirit, forgot the dignity of office, and railed in unbecoming terms at the "underhand tricks" of their successful opponent.

There was a satisfied look upon the captain's face as he stepped into the road Monday morning, followed by his man-of-all-work. About the door of the school-house were gathered a dozen or so of young people, awaiting the appearance of the teacher. It was only half past eight; and this assembly at so early an hour gave promise of a successful opening.

"Well, well, little folks, this looks well, this looks well," said the great man, good humoredly, as he entered the circle. "'It's the early bird that catches the worm,' and it's the early chicks that pick up the largest crumbs at the bountiful table of learning." [76]

The "chicks" looked a little crestfallen as the captain passed among them, patting a head here, and chucking a chin there; for to boys and girls ranging from ten to fifteen years of age, these babyish appellations and familiarities are not cordially welcome.

"Phil, unlock the door.—Everything's in order, nice and clean; and be sure you keep it so, little folks."

"And mind, darlin's, it's the captain that's done it all," put in Phil, as he unlocked the door. "Niver be ungrateful, for it is a warm heart has the captain, though he doesn't always show it in his face."

"Come, come, Phil, none of that," cried the captain, a flash of "ugliness" springing to his face to give color to Phil's remark. "Mind your own business, and open the door."

"There yez are," said Phil, throwing open the door. "In wid yez, and have a raal foine frolic afore the schoolmaster comes. Howld on a bit. Three cheers for yer binefactor—Captain Thompson. Now: one, two, three, and away you go!" [77]

Phil led off with a cheer, in which the young people heartily joined. The captain turned down the hill, followed by Phil and the continued cheers of the scholars, who, once started, were not contented with anything short of three times three, though whether the thought of their benefactor or the sound of their own voices contributed more to their enthusiasm, would have been no hard matter to decide.

The captain, evidently impressed with the idea that the young Sleepers were to be driven to school like unruly cattle, was armed with his whip, and, that there might be no defeat of his project, had furnished Phil with a stout stick, and bade him keep a sharp eye on the youngsters until they were safe in the school-house. Phil followed meekly, with his weapon under his arm and a broad grin on his face, for the comicality of the situation highly delighted the warm-hearted Hibernian, with whom the young people were such favorites that, had they meditated an escape, he would have managed, by some native blunder, to aid, and not impede, their attempt. [78]

To the utter astonishment of the captain, when they reached the house, a transformation had been accomplished. On a block in the yard sat Teddy, with a clean face, smoothly-brushed hair, clothes well patched, to be sure, but without a rent, and, strangest of all, shoes and stockings on his feet. Becky sat in the doorway, with an open book in her lap, hair well brushed and curled, frock mended, clean apron, polished shoes, and white stockings. All this was the work of Hulda Prime. Either in gratitude to Mrs. Thompson, who had quickly returned the purloined goodies, with the request that the children be made presentable, or from a desire to astonish her enemy, Hulda had risen at an early hour, aroused the sleepers, washed, brushed, and mended with an energy that surprised even the dreamy mother, and, after a lesson in good behaviour, had set her charge out to dry, until the arrival of the captain.

Becky had taken the matter very coolly. When told she was going to school that day, she said,—

“Why, Teddy and I were going up to the Basin to-day.”

“Yes, rafting,” said Teddy. “It’s plaguy mean to spoil a fellow’s fun.”

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“No matter,” replied Becky, with a knowing nod of the head; “guess we’ll go after school, any way.”

When thoroughly scoured and adorned, she took a large book, and sat in the doorway, where the captain found her.

“Well, young ones, what is it—peace or war? Will you go to school quietly, or must we drive you?” said the captain, when he had recovered from his surprise.

“You won’t drive us, captain,” said Becky, looking up, with a smile. “It would be too hard work. We’re going quietly—ain’t we, Teddy?”

“Yes, if we’re let alone. Ain’t going to be lugged like a calf to the slaughter-house, any way,” grumbled Teddy.

“You’d better,” growled the captain. “I ain’t forgot your capers in my orchard. I’m just itching to pay off that score. But I’ll call it square if you give me no trouble now.”

“All right, captain,” replied Becky; “We’ll go. I’ve been preparing myself for torture in this blessed book.”

“What book’s that—the Bible, hey?” said the captain.

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“It’s ‘Fox’s Book of Martyrs,’ captain; but I can’t find anything about school in it.”

“Pshaw!” said the captain; “let such books alone. Come, stir your stumps, or you’ll be late. Now, recollect, if you give me any trouble—”

“Cap’n Thompson, you needn’t be afraid of them young ones; they won’t eat you!” cried Aunt Hulda, sticking her head out of the kitchen doorway. “If you and that big Irish lubber can’t handle ‘em, better call on the committee; they’ll help you.”

The taunt was so bitter that the captain raised his whip; but, recollecting the sex of his opponent, he turned away, with a muttered “Hang it!” and strode into the road. Teddy and Becky followed, and Phil brought up the rear. The march schoolward was devoid of stirring incidents. Occasionally Becky, annoyed at the strict guard kept over them, would dart to the side of the road. The captain and Phil would run after her, only to find her picking a flower, or cutting a switch. The captain would stalk on again, and the captives would exchange mischievous glances, while Phil would grow red in the face with suppressed laughter.

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The captain had consumed more time than he intended in mustering his recruits; and it was past nine o’clock when he reached the school-house. His “chicks,” having exhausted their stock of cheers, had filed into the school-room, and not averse to Phil’s recommendation, had indulged in a noisy but good-humored frolic, in which they were joined by some twenty later arrivals. They were in the midst of an animated game of tag, when three distinct raps upon the teacher’s desk made them aware of the presence of a stranger. In an instant there was profound silence in the room, and all eyes were turned upon the new-comer. He was a young man, of medium height, broad-shouldered and full-chested, every movement of his person showing in its powerful grace the effects of physical culture and out-door exercise. His face was equally powerful; piercing black eyes, browned skin, and a determined lock of the under jaw, showed a strong will and a daring spirit. Yet an occasional comical quiver about his eyes, and a lifting of his slight moustache by a half smile, and a genial glow of good humor which beamed through its sternness, as the ruddy cheek glowed under the brown coating, gave token of the nobility of power, by its kinship to gentleness and good humor. To all this were added a high forehead and an abundance of short, curly locks, so that the person of the stranger was not only calculated to command respect, but admiration as well.

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“My young friends,” said he, “I bear a message from your teacher. He was taken suddenly ill last Friday night; he is somewhat better this morning, we think, but unable to be here with you. He has asked me to take his place, and wishes you to be patient with one who is a new hand at keeping school. That’s myself,” with a smile. “Will you take me?”

“O, yes, sir!” “Yes, sir!” in full chorus.

“Very well. I think we can agree. Take your places—boys on the left, girls on the right, as usual.”

There were three rows of forms on each side, for the scholars, with a broad open space between; there was a platform at the farther end, for recitations; the teacher’s desk faced this, on a corresponding platform at the left of the door, and behind his desk was a blackboard affixed to

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the wall. The room was lighted by three windows on each side, and one at the farther end.

The scholars quickly took their places, and Mr. Drinkwater's substitute seated himself at the desk, opened the record book, and commenced calling the names of the scholars of the last term in alphabetical order. He was among the D's, had reached the name of Hosea Davis, when the door was thrown open, and Captain Thompson stalked into the room, followed by Becky and Teddy.

"Here Drinkwater, here's a couple of eels that want training."

The substitute raised his head quickly.

"Harry Thompson!"

"Yes, sir, Harry Thompson," said the stranger, rising. "I hope I see you well, sir."

The captain did not look well. He turned pale, and stared at his son as though he could not believe his eyes.

"Wh-wh-what does this mean? Why are you here? Where's Drinkwater?"

"Mr. Drinkwater is ill, sir; taken suddenly last Friday. I have been stopping with him for a few days, and he requested me to open his school to-day."

"He's no business to do anything of the kind. This is my school; and I won't have it."

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The captain was getting angry.

"I understood him to say that the school-house was leased to him, and that he was expected to get a substitute when unable to attend himself."

"So he is; but not you, sir, not you. I don't want any of your teaching. S'pose you'll teach these young ones to disobey their fathers, and run off. No, sir. You are at liberty. I'll teach myself."

"That is a point you must settle with Mr. Drinkwater," said the young man, quietly. "I have taken command here, and, without meaning to be disrespectful, propose to hold my position until relieved by Mr. Drinkwater."

The captain absolutely foamed with rage.

"You're an impudent puppy. You've no business here, no business in the place. You've disgraced yourself. After what I've done for you, too!" And the captain went into particulars as to what he had done, commencing a long way back in the young man's history, and without giving his son a chance to speak, growing louder and fiercer as his tongue flew the faster. He was suddenly brought to a stop by a roar of laughter from the children. He turned to them in amazement, but not by him was their merriment caused.

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While the captain was giving vent to his troubles, Miss Becky had stepped upon the platform, picked up a crayon, and commenced operations on the blackboard. As she proceeded, all eyes, with the exception of those belonging to the captain and his son, were fastened upon her; and the completion of her picture had brought forth the interrupting roar.

Becky had one talent which had long been hid; she had a genius for drawing; but never before had this peculiar talent been paraded for public inspection.

But here, as skillfully executed as chalk would allow, was a drawing representing "Old Uncle Ned" at full gallop, Becky seated upon his back, and the captain in full pursuit—so well done, that the captain, following the direction of all eyes, instantly recognized it. Incensed he made a dart at Becky; but the nimble artist dodged him, and fled to the farther end of the room. This produced another roar from the scholars. The captain checked his pursuit, turned about, and fled from the room, banging the door behind him.

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Harry Thompson rapped the desk, and commanded silence.

"Miss Becky Sleeper, remove that drawing from the blackboard at once," he said sternly.

Becky looked up at him with a mischievous smile, which instantly disappeared, as she met his eye. She meekly obeyed, and the picture vanished.

"Now, take your place. You, too, Master Teddy."

Teddy went over among the boys, and Becky followed him. Another roar from the scholars.

"Silence!" from the teacher. "Miss Becky, you will take your place among the girls, where you belong."

Becky went the whole length of the room, scowling at the girls, who had laughed at her blunder, and took a seat by the window.

Harry concluded his record by affixing the names of Teddy and Becky, who were the only new scholars.

"The exercises will be very short this morning, and there will be but one session. I shall only call upon you to read; that concluded, you will be dismissed for the day."

He then commenced with the boy nearest him, calling upon them separately to read—first a boy, then a girl, in regular succession. They made their own selections, and with varied success. There were some good readers, none very bad, until they reached Teddy. He stepped upon the platform, and read "Casabianca" somewhat in this style:—

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“The boy stood on the—b-u-r-n-i-n-g—burning deck,
Whence—whence—whence all butim had sled—no, fled;
The flames that lit the batil wreck
Shine—shown—show—round him o’er the dead;”

which, of course, excited a laugh. It was now Becky’s turn, and she was called. She did not move. She could read no better than Teddy, and she was determined not to be laughed at.

“Becky Sleeper, take the platform!” said the teacher, in a stern voice.

“I won’t—there! I didn’t come to school to you: Mr. Drinkwater’s my teacher.”

Harry Thompson stepped from his desk. The lower jaw came up with an ominous snap. He went to where Becky sat kicking the form before her, and looked down at her. She appeared so little, that his anger at her sauciness vanished at once.

“Becky, you and I will have a private session after school. You will read to me then, I think, for old acquaintance’s sake,” he said, with a smile, and returned to his desk. “I am very much obliged to you all for your attention. School is dismissed. Becky Sleeper will remain.” [88]

There was a rush for out doors, and the school-room was quickly cleared of all but Becky and the teacher. Teddy had lingered a moment to exchange a word with Becky, in which “the Basin,” and “wait outside,” might be distinguished, and then had taken his leave.

“Now, Becky, let me hear you read.”

Becky arose, but instead of stepping to the platform, marched straight for the door. But not quite fast enough, for Harry stepped before her, closed the door, and locked it.

“Becky,” said he, “the first duty to be learned in school is obedience to the teacher. Go to the platform!”

Becky looked up at him with defiance in her glance.

“Harry Thompson, you’re just as mean as you can be. You let those boys and girls laugh at Teddy and now you want to laugh at me. I won’t read.”


“Go to the platform.”

Becky turned and went to the platform, and farther yet; she threw up the window, and jumped upon the sill, and all very quickly. Harry saw her intention at once. [89]

“Becky, Becky, don’t do that,” he cried, running towards her. “It’s ten feet. You’ll break your neck.”

“Don’t care. I won’t read;” and she leaped. There was a rustling and tearing among the foliage beneath the window; but when Harry reached it, Becky was invisible.

BECKY'S LAST FROLIC.

 eddy Sleeper obeyed Becky's injunction to wait outside, by passing round school-house, and down the hill, to the window at the end, that he might be in readiness should she desire to signal him during her confinement. He was just in time to witness her descent. She plumped into a cluster of bushes, and for a moment was lost to sight. Even this terrific leap did not surprise the phlegmatic Teddy, who had such an exalted opinion of his sister's prowess, that, had she jumped from the steeple of the church, he would have expected her to pick herself up as coolly as she did now, emerging from the bushes with ruffled plumage, but without a scratch or bruise.

"Well, Becky, got out sooner than I thought you would. Did he make you read?"

"No, he didn't," replied Becky, with a sneer. "It will take a smarter teacher than him to make me do what I don't want to. He's nothing but a boy." [91]

"What will the captain say now, Becky?"

"I don't care what he says. Guess he don't like the teacher any better than I do. Come, let's get away from here; he'll be after us."

"That's so. Where shall we go?"

"Where we were going this morning. We've got time to 'shoot the Basin' before dinner."

So saying, Becky, whose hasty exit from the school-room had not allowed her to gain possession of her hat, started off bareheaded, followed by Teddy, along the bank of the river, towards the Corner.

Harry Thompson inherited a streak of the obstinacy which was so apparent in his father. As Becky disappeared from one side of the window, he rushed from the other, caught up his hat, unlocked the door, and hastened down the hill, only to see his unruly pupil climbing a fence twenty rods away. This convinced him that no bones had been broken. But he was not inclined to let the matter drop here; so he returned to the school-room, made all secure, and then started in pursuit.

As he moved along the bank of the river, the leading event of the morning was uppermost in his thoughts. The appearance of his father in the school-room had not been unexpected, and the explanation he had given of his own presence there was perfectly true. Mr. Drinkwater was ill, and had sent him as a substitute. Harry, who was well acquainted with the new school-house affair, had, after consultation with his mother, who visited him daily at Mr. Drinkwater's residence, where he was domiciled for the express purpose of meeting her, accepted the position that he might try the temper of his father, and pave the way to a reconciliation, if that were possible. He was quietly awaiting the conclusion of the captain's vehement review of "what he had done for him," when he expected to have an opportunity to say a word in his own defence; but Miss Becky's exhibition of *chalkotype* art interrupted the contemplated plea, and sadly disarranged his plans. His only consolation was, that Mr. Drinkwater would not be able to take charge of the school for several days, and another meeting might be possible. [92]

Becky, in her turn, occupied a share of his thoughtful attention. He had looked forward with pleasure to the meeting with his little playmate, fully expecting that the years which had wrought so much change in his character, would have shaped the little maid, of whom he was so fond,—with her quick wit and active spirit,—into something better than the hoiden he found her. Her saucy movements, her rough appearance, and her rudeness, had startled him; but, remembering the influences by which she was surrounded at home, and the artistic touch displayed at the blackboard, he was convinced that in that little body were capabilities running to waste, which, trained aright, might blossom into usefulness. If his good mother only had the trailing of this wild vine, it would flourish in fruitfulness, and not cumber the ground. It was not yet too late. He would take his mother into his confidence. [93]

Full of thoughts like these, Harry went on, keeping a sharp lookout for the runaway, until he reached the paper-mill at the Corner. Here he was informed that the young Sleepers had gone farther up the river's bank. Undecided whether to go on or retrace his steps, he passed into the mill, and, meeting his old friend, Mark Small, went over the building with him, viewing the improvements, in which he became so much interested that he quite forgot the object of his expedition. [94]

In the mean time, Becky and Teddy had, after a long tramp, and with no small vaulting of fences and climbing of rocks, reached the Basin.

Rogue's River, the base of Becky's future operations, was dammed at three points. The lower dam was at the fore side, the middle dam just above the school-house, and the upper dam at the Corner. Here was located Small's paper-mill, not a very extensive affair, but which employed a dozen men and as many girls. In the middle of the river, about a quarter of a mile above this mill, was a small island, scarcely twenty feet in circumference, on which flourished a wild growth of unproductive bushes, with one solitary sentinel of a tree in their centre; and above this was the Basin. Into this basin, after a winding flow of ten or twelve miles, increased by several minor streams, the water poured with considerable power. It lay in the form of a heart, so often depicted on valentines, or moulded in sugar for the sweet-toothed. It was about thirty feet from bank to bank, and about the same distance from the point of entrance to the island, which [95]

shooting into it, gave it a resemblance to the emblem of affection. Divided by this island, the water swept along on either side in strong, swift currents. When Harry Thompson, as leader of the boys of Cleverly, had exhausted all the known means of amusement, his daring spirit suggested a difficult feat, calculated to carry dismay to the hearts of his followers, and cause uneasiness to those parents who had an interest in the safety of their children. He not only suggested it, but himself performed it, and succeeded in inducing a few of the boldest to follow his example. This feat was known as "shooting the Basin." Into the winding river he launched a log, of which there were many lying along the banks, a mill hand being employed at this point to draw them out of the stream. Upon this he stepped, with a long, narrow strip of board to serve as a rudder, with which to guide his craft. The force of the stream swiftly carried him into the Basin and towards the island. It was only necessary to keep "her head" straight, and the island was reached.

He accomplished the feat, well knowing the danger he incurred; for, had his craft swerved either to the right or left, he would have been capsized or carried down the river. Of course there could be no returning in the same manner. But, to prevent his becoming a Robinson Crusoe, a tree on the bank was felled so as to bridge the stream from the bank to the island; and there it had remained ever since. [96]

Becky Sleeper, having seen Harry perform this feat, had desired to undertake it; but Harry had strongly objected, and the tomboy, having accepted him as a leader, was obliged to postpone the attempt.

Some recent conversations on old sports between Teddy and herself had awakened a desire to attempt this feat, and a trip to the Basin had already been arranged for Monday, when the school programme was promulgated.

The short session, and Becky's escape, had made the old arrangement possible; and the young Amazon and her faithful squire were now on the banks of the upper stream, after a quick march, ready to launch their barks upon the tide, careless of consequences.

"Now, Teddy," said Becky, "I'll go first: you must watch me closely, and do just as I do. You ain't scared—are you?"

Teddy, to tell the truth, was looking rather anxiously at the rushing stream, the broad basin, and the two foaming channels beyond. The stream had been swollen by heavy rains, and the feat seemed more difficult than he had imagined before he set out. [97]

"N-o, of course not," he said slowly. "If you go, I'm bound to anyway."

"Because, if you are Teddy, you'd better not try it."

"I will try, Becky. I ain't a goin' to be stumped by a girl."

"All right. But don't you start until I reach the island; and be sure you keep your log pointed right straight at the tree."

While speaking, Becky had rolled a short, stout log into the water, picked up a light slab, and was ready for the dash. Stepping lightly and quickly upon the log, she pushed it into the middle of the stream, headed it for the tree, and, carefully guiding her craft, shot across the Basin, and struck the island fairly and squarely.

"Hurrah! I've done it Teddy!" she shouted, as she leaped upon the land.

"All right; I'm a comin'. Hooray!" answered Teddy, as he jumped upon his log, which darted down the stream, Teddy dancing rather lively to regain his equilibrium, which had sustained a shock by the sudden dart of his log. He was so busily engaged in this manœuvre that he failed to head his bark as he should, and, instead of going straight across the Basin, he swept to the right. [98]

"Teddy, Teddy, what are you about?" shouted Becky. "Turn her head! quick, quick!"

But Teddy was frightened; his log was rolling over and over, and he dropped his rudder, fell upon the log, and clasped it, with his legs in the water, and round into the swifter of the two currents it went, very near the island. Seeing his danger, Becky ran to the edge of the island, and attempted to rescue him. She leaned far over, lost her balance, and fell into the stream. Bungling Teddy clutched the bushes as he passed, let the log go, and pulled himself to land; but Becky was swept past the island, and went floating down the river.

Teddy, seeing the danger of his sister, shouted lustily for help. Two men, at work near the bank, ran down to the water, saw the struggling girl, but could afford no assistance; but they started off at a swift pace for the mill. Becky was an excellent swimmer; she was not a bit frightened, but struck out bravely in a vain attempt to reach the bank. The stream was strong and swift, and bore her on faster and faster towards the dam. Skillfully she kept her head above water, and struck out to reach Teddy's log, which was just ahead of her. Fast as she went, the men on the shore flew faster still. It was a case of life and death. They reached the mill. [99]

"Help, help! there's a girl in the water!"

Men came running out, women ran to the windows; there was wild commotion, but no attempt at rescue.

"We can't help her; she must go over the dam!"

"Throw her a rope—it's her only chance!"

"Mighty slim chance: she's too much frightened to catch it. She can't be saved!"

"She can be saved! Quick! a long, stout rope!"

It was a commanding voice that spoke, a commanding form that stepped forward—the school-master, Harry Thompson. Quickly a rope was placed in his hand.

"Now, three good, strong fellows, follow me!"

He threw off his coat, ran along the bank, winding the rope around his body, and tying it as he ran. Becky was coming down swiftly, when the roar of the dam reached her ears. For the first time she felt her danger. Instantly all power of exertion forsook her. The terrible dam! the jagged rocks beneath! There was death in the thought, and a shrill scream rang over the water. [100]

"Help, help! Don't let me drown! don't let me go over the dam!"

"Courage, Becky, courage. You shall be saved."

She recognized the voice, even in her agony. "O, Harry, Harry! save me, save me!"

Still on and on she swept, and the roar of the dam grew louder and louder. It seemed to sound in her ears like thunder.

"Now, quick, boys, quick! Give me plenty of rope, and hold on strong!"

Harry Thompson kicked off his shoes and threw away his hat. Becky was moving towards him, but ten feet from the bank. He measured the distance with his eye, stepped back a few paces, then ran quickly, and leaped into the water. The best jumper in the county had well calculated his distance. He struck the water close beside Becky. He clasped her quick, she threw her arms about his neck with a scream of joy, and both sank beneath the water. [101]

Then the good, strong fellows pulled with a will, and in a moment Becky and her preserver were safe on the bank. Such a shout as the good fellows sent up, then such a chorus of shouts as the people at the mill joined to theirs, was never before heard in Cleverly.

But the chorus of rejoicing was unheard by Becky, who lay upon the bank insensible. The girls from the mill gathered about her, rubbed her hands, bathed her temples, and used all the customary means of restoration; but yet she lay there cold and still.

Harry became alarmed. She must be taken home at once.

"Small, bring your wagon—quick! Send a man for the doctor—quick!"

Small's team was standing at the mill door. In a few moments Harry was in the wagon, with Becky in his arms, and one of the "good fellows" was racing down the road, horseback, for the doctor.

Mrs. Sleeper, weak and dispirited, was in the kitchen, standing at the table, washing the dinner dishes; Aunt Hulda, nursing an attack of lumbago, was groaning at the fireside. A wagon drove swiftly into the yard, a moment, and Harry Thompson stood in the doorway, bearing the insensible form of Becky. [102]

"Mrs. Sleeper, quick! your camphor bottle!"

Mrs. Sleeper dropped the dish in her hands; her eyes glared at the helpless girl. Her lips parted, but no sound came from them. Then her eyes closed, her hands clutched the air, and she fell heavily to the floor. Aunt Hulda ran to her and raised her head.

"Delia Sleeper, what on airth ails you?—Here, you, Henry Thompson, take that girl into the settin' room. That's just like you Thompsons—always a scarin' folks to death.—Delia, Delia! what ails you?"

Aunt Hulda rubbed her, and sprinkled water over her, scolding all the while. Harry carried Becky to the sitting-room, and laid her upon the lounge. As he did so, a sigh, and the opening of her eyes, gave assurance of returning animation; and when, in a few minutes, Dr. Allen entered, there was no occasion for his services, for Becky was sitting up, and inquiring for Teddy, who at that moment was coming down the road, between the mill and the school-house, feeling very wet and mean. [103]

Mrs. Sleeper was carried to her room, and laid upon the bed. Dr. Allen, finding Becky so comfortable, made the former a visit.

"Doctor, what ails her? Is it stericks?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Worse than that, worse than that!"

"You don't say so! Goodness gracious! it's purrellysis."

The doctor nodded. Aunt Hulda was right. The sudden shock, upon the long and weary straining for the ever-distant ship, had snapped the cords of action, and left her powerless.

MRS. THOMPSON DISOBEYS ORDERS.



hen that grim smith, Adversity, stalks unannounced and unwelcome into the abode, erects his forge, bares his strong arm, and sets himself to work among our affections, feeding his fire with earthly treasures, perhaps too fondly prized; or poisoning the air with unhealthy vapors, that blight with disease; or shaping upon his anvil the arrows of death, for instant use among the loved ones,—it is a hard task to meet him hospitably; to be patient under the agony of his blows; to realize, in his presence, that in his forge is the soul whitened and made pliable, that under the heavy hammer he relentlessly wields it is shaped to nearness of perfection.

“But when time has cooled the beaten soul, then it realizes how much stronger it has grown through that dread experience; how much better fitted it is to meet the ever-returning guest; then it recognizes in this hard-hitting smith, Adversity, an earnest worker for the universal good.” [105]

Thus preached Parson Arnold, the salaried fountain from which the good people of Cleverly drew the living waters for their spiritual needs. His auditors were Captain Thompson and his good wife, to whom the parson had just communicated the misfortunes of the Sleeper family, on the day of their occurrence, he having picked up the intelligence at the blacksmith’s shop, while awaiting the setting of a tooth into an iron rake, upon which he was now leaning in the sitting-room at Captain Thompson’s. Perhaps the skill of the agricultural dentist had suggested the illustration with which he seasoned his short discourse upon the uses of adversity, for he was an earnest worker both in his Master’s vineyard and his own, and used both logical and local arguments to drive home to the hearts of his people the great truth which he honestly believed.

“Poor soul! struck down in an instant! what will become of the children?” said Mrs. Thompson.

“The town will have to take care of ’em. After this caper I’ve done with ’em. I wash my hands of all responsibility,” growled the captain. “That young tomboy of theirs has kicked about until she’s broke her mother’s heart; and I hope she’ll have to suffer for it.” [106]

“Nay, nay, brother; we must be charitable. Remember her youth and inexperience,” the parson mildly remonstrated.

“Well, I ain’t likely to forget it. It’s been a dear experience to me; and I won’t have anything more to do with them.”

“Don’t say that, Paul,” said Mrs. Thompson, rising from her chair. “They need kindness more than ever. Their poor mother can no longer guide them: shall we desert them now?”

“Guide them! Stuff! She never did guide them. If she had, she’d have been saved all this trouble.”

“Well, well, they’re in the Lord’s hands,” said the parson; “in his hands who suffers not a sparrow to fall to the ground without his notice. Leave all to him.”

The parson put on his hat, shouldered his rake, and departed. Mrs. Thompson attended him to the door, returned, folded up her work, and left the room. The captain followed her motions with his eyes. Something was wrong. There was no *heart* in his obstinacy. He evidently felt ill at ease. He walked about the room rapidly, as though endeavoring to rouse up something like an angry spirit; but the fire would not kindle. Instead of the angry flash which should have shone in his eye, there was a tear, and the muscles of his mouth quivered with suppressed emotion. Mrs. Thompson entered the room, equipped in bonnet and shawl. [107]

“What! going out again, Rebecca?”

“Yes, Paul; I am going at once.” Mrs. Thompson looked almost defiantly at her husband, expecting the next question, and fully prepared to answer it. But the second question was indefinitely postponed. It trembled on the captain’s lips, but something in his wife’s face told him if he asked it his power to rule was gone forever.

“Well, don’t be gone long; it’s lonesome here without you.”

Mrs. Thompson seemed in turn disappointed, but she said nothing, and departed. The captain took a seat upon the sofa, whence he had a view of the road, and deliberately watched his wife.

“Hum! told you so,” soliloquized he; “there she goes—straight down the hill! There never was such a woman! Deliberately disobeying her husband. Bless her good heart! I knew she’d go. Never could stand that—never! It’s wrong. Obedience is a wife’s first duty. Won’t she make things fly over there! Poor Delia! She shan’t want for physic as long as I live; and those young ones—well, well, boys will be boys, and girls will be—tomboys, sometimes, I suppose. There she goes, up the hill, now. Disobedience,—rank disobedience! I can’t endure the sight of it, and I won’t! I’ll just saddle Uncle Ned, and go and see the doctor. She must have constant attendance; and my wife,—no, I won’t forgive her disobedience—never!” [108]

The captain now went to the window, and watched until his wife turned into the gate; then, heaving a sigh (more closely resembling satisfaction than regret), went in pursuit of Phil and Uncle Ned.

Lightning, that swift agent of destruction, has been known, in the midst of its vagaries, to smite gigantic rocks, and lay open veins of wealth never before discovered. When the bolt of misfortune struck the Sleeper house, it brought to light a much-needed treasure in the person of the forlorn, complaining Aunt Hulda. She seemed electrified by the stroke that paralyzed the languid mother, [109]

and all the powers of her being sprang into active life. All the theoretical knowledge she had acquired by her long, useless "helping" of other people, burst into fruitful bloom. From the moment Mrs. Sleeper was laid upon her bed, she was the careful, watchful nurse, quietly but hurriedly arranging everything for the comfort of the invalid, laying her plans for a long fit of sickness with all the skill of an old campaigner. Nor did her usefulness end here. From the chamber to the kitchen she flew, washed and put away the dishes, replenished the fire, swept and tidied up the kitchen, re-filled the kettle, made up a batch of bread and set it "rising," and back again to the bed-side of her patient, without one thought of her own magazine of combustible troubles ready to explode at a spark of complaint. All this with a feverish uneasiness, as though she feared the coming of somebody to take the power to do out of her hands. A gentle knock at the door of the sick chamber, and the entrance of Mrs. Thompson, told her the somebody she feared had come.

Mrs. Thompson gave her hand to Aunt Hulda with a quiet smile, and went to the bed. What there was left of life in the body of Delia Sleeper seemed concentrated in her face. She could not move foot or hand; but the same watchful glance was in her eyes, and the shadow of a smile played about her mouth, as her old friend bent over her and kissed her. [110]

"So kind! so good! I knew you'd come."

Faint and tremulous was the voice of the invalid.

"Yes, dear heart; I've come to nurse you, to make you strong and well again."

Aunt Hulda groaned. Her power was slipping from her.

"No, no. Aunt Hulda—so kind—she does everything. She will nurse me—thank you. Let me—see you often—that's all."

The eyes wandered to Aunt Hulda with a beseeching look that Mrs. Thompson divined at once.

"Bless you child! I'll not interfere with her. She shall be mistress in the house; and a good one she'll make."

This was said with a smile for Aunt Hulda that warmed the heart of the spinster towards the visitor. There was a pleased look in the eyes of the invalid, as those of Mrs. Thompson came back to her full of love and sympathy. [111]

"Thank you. Come closer. Becky—my Becky—don't let her believe she did this. I've brought it on myself—the doctor said so. Too much watching—you know—it's been wearing upon me. The ship—that never comes—never, never comes. But it will—I know it will."

"I wouldn't speak of that, Delia, now. The ship will come in God's good time," said Mrs. Thompson. "Remember the dear ones here, and trust the absent one to his care."

"Yes, yes; but I didn't," said the sick one, sighing. "I forgot my treasures here, hoping to clasp that other every day; and now I'm punished. Wasted life! Wasted life! Poor little girl! with her mother's heart shut against her, drifting away—running to waste; and so smart and apt to learn! God pity me! God pity me!"

"Leave all to me, Delia. Let no thought of Becky disturb you."

"I cannot help it. It seems to me as though I had wilfully neglected her."

"Not as I have, Delia. With all your household cares, my little namesake claimed some portion of my attention; and we have not met for years. Delia, you know the reason. I blame myself for this long neglect." [112]

"No, no; you were always a kind, good friend. But I suppose he thought it best. Becky is in the sitting-room; won't you see her and comfort her?"

"Now and always. With Aunt Hulda's permission, she shall be my especial charge hereafter."

"O, you are so good! No wonder people love you."

Mrs. Thompson kissed her friend, and passed out of the room. Aunt Hulda smoothed the bedclothes, and looked at her patient inquiringly.

"Yes, go, go," said Mrs. Sleeper. "But first kiss me, Aunt Hulda—won't you my best friend?"

Aunt Hulda made a dash at her lips, and a loud smack resounded through the room.

"You dear, dear, dear child! May the Lord give me strength to do for you as you deserve!"

With her apron to her eyes, Aunt Hulda left the room, leaving the invalid to her solitary vigil. [113] Already was adversity working in her for good. The mother-love so long repressed in her heart had, by one of those strange phases of illness, at once asserted itself the ruling power. Only a few hours had the active forces refused to obey the will; only a few hours had the brain caught this new power from the heart; yet it had travelled over years and years of neglect and wasted opportunity, with bitter regrets that might yet shape themselves into guiding forces, in the lonely vigils of the years to come.

Becky Sleeper, under the shadow of this sudden visitation, had in turn received a shock. The terrible sequel to her frolic had, upon her revival, produced such a nervous state, that for two hours she lay upon the sofa, trembling and weeping, in the presence of the astonished Teddy, who never before had seen a tear in the eyes of his volatile sister. Harry Thompson had, when he found her in no danger, consulted his own safety by driving to the house of Mr. Drinkwater for a change of raiment. Aunt Hulda's attention was required at the bed-side of her patient, and Miss

Becky was left to recover at her leisure. The period of lamentation having passed away, she lapsed into a state of dejection, so long and silent that Teddy, weary with waiting for her to break the silence, quietly fell asleep. [114]

Becky's thoughts ran over and over the recent events; but in the midst of them all this was uppermost: "I've killed mother." Again she swept across the Basin; again clutched at drifting Teddy; again fell splashing in the water; again glided down the stream, heard the roar of the dam, the voice of Harry; but all mixed with this one thought, "I've killed mother." And she buried her head in the sofa, shut her eyes hard, and thrust her fingers into her ears, in vain attempts to shut out the thought. What would become of her? Would she be locked up in jail—hanged? She must be, for it was murder!

Becky was not well skilled in reasoning. She could not have told why this feeling took possession of her; but there was a dim consciousness that she must be an awful wicked girl, and that it was somebody's duty to punish her for this, and a wild wish that somebody would be quick about it, and have it all over with. In this state she was conscious of the opening of the door, and the presence of some one in the room. There was a light step by her side; a soft hand was placed upon her head. [115]

"Becky, my child, you are making yourself miserable."

Becky knew that well enough. Why should she be told what she knew so well? It was nobody's business, any way. Why didn't people attend to their own affairs? She failed to recognize the voice, and, being in an ugly state of misery, snatched the soft hand from its resting-place, and flung it rudely from her, with her eyes defiantly closed.

Mrs. Thompson did not replace the hand, did not repeat the words. She stood looking at the girl a moment, then passed across the room, and took a seat by the window. This movement set Becky to thinking. Who could it be? It was a kind voice, a warm, soft hand. There was no feeling of punishment in either. Why didn't the visitor speak again? How rude she had been! Then there came a long pause. She was listening intently for some signs of her visitor's presence. Hush! No; that was Teddy, snoring. She recognized that; and then—yes, some one was breathing by the window. Who could it be? Some one quietly waiting for her to get over her ugly fit. She felt a pair of eyes were fastened upon her. Wondered if her hair was fit to be seen, if there were any rents in her dress, and—and—O, dear, this was terrible! She would know the worst. [116]

Suddenly she sprang up, and looking across the room, met the loving eyes of Mrs. Thompson; saw a smile wreathing about the lips; saw the arms of the good woman stretched out to her so invitingly, that, without further invitation, she ran into them, and nestled her head among the plaits of Mrs. Thompson's merino, as if she had an undoubted right there. Then of course, she fell to crying again.

"O, Aunt Rebecca! you're so good! and I'm so wicked!"

"No, no, pet. I'm a wicked woman for neglecting you so long. But it's all right now. I have you in my arms, just as I had you when you were a baby; and I don't mean to let you go. Now tell me what's the matter."

"Why, don't you know? I've killed my mother!"

"No, no, pet. Dismiss that fear from your mind. She is very ill; perhaps may never recover; but the doctor says her disease has been a long time coming on." [117]

"And that I tumbled into the water, got most drowned, and frightened the life out of her," burst out Becky. "O dear, dear! what will become of me?" And another deluge of tears swept over the placid bosom of Mrs. Thompson.

"Hush, hush, dear child! You were not to blame. Any sudden shock might have caused the disaster."

"Aunt Rebecca, do you mean to say I am not a bad, wicked girl?"

Becky straightened up with such an air of *injured guilt* that Mrs. Thompson looked at her in surprise.

"Becky, how old are you?"

"Sixteen, Aunt Rebecca."

"Quite a young lady, I declare. Now that mother is laid upon a sick bed, the care of the house devolves upon you. Girls of sixteen are usually fitted for that position. Do you feel prepared to attend to those duties?"

Becky hung her head.

"No, Becky, you are not a wicked girl. But it is time for some good friend to show you how you have wasted the powers God has given you. Had you given the same attention to learning to keep house that you have to playing ball and tag, to robbing orchards and shooting the Basin, you would have been ready to take your place at your mother's bed-side, or to take charge of cooking. You would have gained the good opinion of everybody, instead of being shunned as a tomboy; and you would not then have reproached yourself, as you do now, for being the cause of your mother's illness." [118]

"I know it, I know; 'tis all my fault, 'tis all my fault!" sobbed Becky.

"Not altogether your fault, pet. You have had no one to lead you aright. But 'tis time you learned a young woman's duties. You are quick, intelligent, apt to learn. Will you let me give you a few

lessons, Becky?"

"O, Aunt Rebecca, if you don't hate me, if you will try and make something of me, I'll never go out doors again as long as I live!"

Mrs. Thompson smiled.

"Plants will not thrive without air, Becky: you shall have plenty of it. Now, dry your eyes, and come with me to see mother."

"Not now, Aunt Rebecca; I'm not fit. I hope you'll make something of me; but it's an awful bad job. One thing I mean to do. I'll try just as hard as ever I can to do just what you tell me." [119]

"That's right, Miss Becky Sleeper; and if you do what that angel woman tells you, you are on the straight road to heaven, I can tell you."

Mr. Harry Thompson came running into the room.

"Don't scold, mother. I've been listening outside the door for the last five minutes. Let me congratulate you on your promising pupil."

"I think I can make something of her," said Mrs. Thompson looking with pride at her handsome son.

"Not without my help, mother. I know all the good points of that sportive genius, for, alas! I helped to train them in the wrong way. So, to make amends, employ me in the good work of training this wandering vine in the proper direction. What do you say, Miss Becky?"

"I don't know what you mean, Harry," said Becky, soberly. "Is it some new game you want to teach me? If it is, I can't learn it, for I've promised not to play any more."

Harry laughed. [120]

"Yes, Becky, 'tis a new game. We'll call it 'Excelsior,' a game which requires work, and not play."

"Don't puzzle the child, Harry," said Mrs. Thompson.

"Child!" echoed Harry. "Sweet sixteen; and yet she's but a child."

"You saved my life, Harry," said Becky, with tears in her eyes. "I don't know as I ought to thank you for doing it, for Aunt Rebecca says it's been a wasted life. But I do thank you all the same."

"Perhaps I've brought you into a new life, Becky. I hope I have—the life of usefulness we all should live."

"Look out, Becky! she's drifting!" shouted Teddy, in his sleep. "She's drifting! she drifting!"

He moved uneasily in his sleep, started, rolled off his chair, and *drifted* on to the floor, with a crash that shook the house.

"Teddy Sleeper, what ails you? Wake up!" cried Becky, running to him, and shaking him. "Don't you see we've got company?"

Teddy rolled over, sat up, and stared wildly about him.

"I don't care, Becky Sleeper. I ain't a goin' to be stumped by a girl, any way." [121]

Harry Thompson laughed so loud that Teddy sprang to his feet in confusion.

"Stick to that, Teddy, and we'll make a man of you."

BECKY'S NEW BIRTH.

Into the life thus accidentally opened to her, Becky dashed with the same vigor and determination which had characterized her dealings with the sports of tomboyhood.

On the departure of the Thompsons, she marched into the kitchen, and surprised Aunt Hulda by pulling the table into the middle of the floor, spreading the cloth, and arranging the dishes for supper.

"Goodness gracious, child! What's come to you?" cried the spinster, in astonishment.

"Don't say a word, Aunt Hulda. I've been a bad girl, but I mean to do better. I'm not going to let you do all the work in this house."

Aunt Hulda looked at the girl uneasily. Was this madcap endeavoring to take the reins out of her hands?

"Indeed! Praps you'd like to be mistress, and order me round."

[123]

"No, indeed, Aunt Hulda; you shall be mistress, and I'll be maid. It's little I know, shame on me! but I want to learn; and you know how to teach so well that I shan't bother you long with my clumsiness, I guess."

"Well, that's clever. You're real handy, too; only you've put the knives and forks on the wrong side of the plates."

"So I have," said Becky, quickly "changing sides." "Where are you going now, Aunt Hulda?"

"After wood; the fire's getting low. It's got to be chopped, too. But I can manage that."

"No, you must not.—Here, Teddy, bring in a good big armful of wood; and don't you never let Aunt Hulda bring another stick."

Teddy had been standing by the window, gazing, in open-mouthed astonishment, at Becky's proceedings. He roused himself at her sharp call, and obeyed.

"Guess Becky's a little out of head," he soliloquized, in the woodshed. "Got too much water on the brain in the dam."

Supper finished, Becky washed the dishes, cleared away, and swept the kitchen, under the direction of Aunt Hulda, and then insisted on making bread, after careful directions from the mistress. All this was faithfully reported to Mrs. Sleeper by Aunt Hulda.

[124]

"I tell you, Delia, there's the making of a smart woman in that girl; and it's coming out fast."

When bed time came, Becky went in to her mother with a sad face. The idea that she had caused her mother's illness was so strong upon her, that it could not be easily dissipated. Perhaps it was better so, if it only strengthened her in her determination to achieve success in the new life.

"How do you feel to-night, mother?" said Becky choking down a sob, and laying her hand on her mother's head, with a caress.

"Happy, Becky, very happy," said the mother, with a smile. "The light step of a little woman about the house has made me wonderfully contented."

The "little woman" blushed, then said, with a smile she found it hard to muster,—

"Sick people should not listen. But I'm glad it made you happy, mother. Shall I stay with you to-night?"

"No; Aunt Hulda will take care of me. Good night."

[125]

"Good night, mother" with a kiss. "Don't worry about me. I mean to try, O, so hard—"

She could say no more. The tears would come, spite of her efforts to repress them; and she ran from the room.

She slept little that night; the new tenant—thought—rambled strangely about in its unfamiliar quarters, as if uncertain at what task to set itself, in what corner of this little head to find a resting-place.

Mr. Drinkwater was no better the next morning, and Harry Thompson opened the school, as usual. He was gratified, on casting his eyes about the room, to see Becky and Teddy in the places assigned them the day before; and very much surprised, when the religious exercises were concluded, to see Becky rise from her place, and march to the centre of the room.

"Master Thompson, if you please, I was very rude to you yesterday. I want to beg your pardon before all the scholars."

"Very well, Miss Becky; you were somewhat rude; but this free confession amply atones for it. You are forgiven."

"I want all the scholars to know, if you please, that after school, when I was told to take my place upon the platform, I jumped out of the window."

[126]

Harry bit his lip. This was just what he didn't want the scholars to know; and they never would have known how he had been outwitted, but for Becky's confession. She was altogether too penitent.

"That will do, Miss Becky. You have said quite enough. I shall expect better conduct from you in the future."

"I mean to try, sir."

Becky returned to her seat. She did try hard that day; and not only that day, but every day, found her trying, and succeeding, too. She diligently applied herself to the studies assigned her, watched her conduct carefully, and in a very short time Harry Thompson had reason to be proud of his pupil. She gave Teddy a helping hand, also. She was pained to hear the laugh when Teddy blundered; so every night at home Teddy was carefully tutored by his sister for the next day's task; and in a short time he, too, accomplished wonders.

As soon as the brain was trained to systematized labor, Becky's sharp eyes traced the difference in her attire and that of the girls about her; and very soon improvement was noticed in this. Mrs. Thompson, whose visits to the brown house were now of daily occurrence, taught her to sew. Material was readily found among the stock of presents the sailor husband had been accustomed to bring his wife, and which had never been made up; and thus Becky was as neat and well dressed a girl as there was in the school. She made quick progress with her studies. In one branch she excelled all—that of drawing. Harry had introduced this as a pleasant study, with no idea that Becky had such a genius for it as she rapidly displayed. [127]

Mr. Drinkwater continued ill all the winter, and Harry kept the school, by his orders; for, contrary to his expectations, Captain Thompson did not come into the school. The shrewd proprietor evidently discovered the trick to bring about a reconciliation, and, with his usual obstinacy, defeated the well laid plan. And so, autumn gave place to winter, and the snow lay heavily on the ground. Winter, in turn, gave place to spring, with all its opening beauties; and school was over.

Harry Thompson stood upon the steps of the school-house, the door locked behind him for the last time, the key in his hand. His scholars had gone; up and down the road he could hear their merry voices, as they wended their ways homeward. But one was left to keep him company—Becky Sleeper. She stood beside him, anxiously watching his troubled face; for the master was looking across the road at the home of his childhood, where he could not now enter. He was bitterly disappointed in his labors; they had not brought about the reconciliation for which he had plotted, and which, for his mother's sake, he had so longed for. He turned, with a sigh, to Becky. [128]

"Well, little one, school is over."

"Yes, Harry. It's been a pleasant time for me. How can I thank you for having been so kind to me, for having taught me so much, and being such a dear, kind friend?"

"Yes, I have been able to do you some good, Becky. My labor has not been fruitless, after all."

Fruitless! No. One look at the thoughtful face beside him, one glance at the trim figure, might convince him of that. Six months ago a hoiden, to-day a woman; bright, young, beautiful, still; but strong, energetic, persevering, rapidly unfolding the intellectual graces of true womanhood. [129]

He was fond of his pupil; and to her he was a hero—always had been; but for the last six months they had been constantly in each other's company. Out of school, many of the old familiar ways had been revived. They had ridden, sailed, rowed, even indulged in an occasional game of cricket. At her home he was a constant visitor, that being the established rendezvous for meeting his mother; and mother and son had diligently wrought—quietly, but earnestly—a great change in her life. She knew it, and blessed them for it. These two were very dear to each other, and, without knowing it, were passing beyond the boundaries of friendship into the perplexing maze of love.

"Harry," said Becky, suddenly, "where does all the money come from?"

"Money, Becky! What money?"

"The money that gets us all we have at home. Mother's went long ago; and yet we are always well supplied with food and clothing. Does it come from your father?"

"I think it does, Becky. My angel mother possesses a key which unlocks all his treasures; and I suspect that some of them fly across the bridge to your home." [130]

"I thought so. It isn't right. Is there not some way in which I could earn money?"

"Well, I don't know of any. Stay. You might blow the bellows for Fox, the blacksmith, or get employment in the shipyard."

"O, stop. That's not what I want. Couldn't I work in one of the mills?"

"Yes, I suppose you could; but I wouldn't, at least until after we've had a consultation with my angel mother."

"Then let's have one, quick. I'm determined to earn money some way; and if you don't find me something better I *will* blow the bellows for Mr. Fox."

"Well, I'll come over to-night, and we'll have a grand council of war. Good by, Becky."

"Good by, Harry."

He turned up the road, and she stood and watched him as he stepped briskly along, swinging the key in his hand, and whistling merrily.

"He's just splendid! O, if I was only a man, to follow him into the world! For this life will not content him long. He's restless now, eager to be at work among men. And he'll go, too. And, O, dear! how lonesome it will be without him!" [131]

Even then Becky felt a lonesome shadow gliding into her heart with its oppressive weight, felt the tears gathering in her eyes. Then, when he was still in sight! How would it be when he should be far, far away?

Yet she stood and watched as he descended the hill, till he was out of sight; longer still, her eyes fixed upon the spot from which he had vanished, her thoughts shaping themselves into queer notions of the future, in girlhood's flattering mirror of romance, building bright pictures of renown for him,—her hero,—in which she bore no part.

From this sudden romantic attack she was aroused by the appearance of another figure in the place on which her eyes were fixed. Slowly toiling up the hill came a girl, pale-featured, poorly-clad, deformed, and crippled. With the aid of a crutch she stumped along the path until she reached the school-house; then, with a pleasant nod to Becky, and a sigh of relief, she seated herself upon the steps.

Becky returned the nod, and seated herself by the side of the cripple.

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"You seem to have a pretty hard time of it."

"Do I?" said the cripple, smiling. "Well, I suppose to you, who have two feet to run about on, it does seem hard. But it's the best I can do, the best I ever could do; and so I don't mind it a bit."

"You don't mean to say that you like being a cripple," said Becky, in astonishment. "I never could be contented in that way—never!"

"No, I don't think I like it; but I cannot help it. It must always be so. It's hip trouble. I only try to make the best of it. The hardest to bear are the hard, grinding pains that come sometimes. O, they are terrible! But they come and go; and after they're gone I'm real comfortable till—the next."

"Well, you're a brave girl, any way," said Becky. "What's your name, please?"

"Why, don't you know Jenny York? I thought everybody knew me. What's yours?"

"Becky Sleeper."

"What! the tomboy?"

A dark shadow passed across the face of Becky.

"I was the tomboy, Jenny; but I've outgrown that name. I think I'm something a little nearer what a girl of my age should be now."

[133]

"I beg your pardon for speaking so, Becky. I've never met you before; but I've always heard of you and your—your—"

"Capers, Jenny. Don't be afraid. I don't mind it a bit. Thank goodness, I've outgrown all that folly. But tell me, are you Silly York's sister?"

"Yes. She's number one, and I'm number two; then there's Johnny, three, and four and five. They're little tots, and don't count for much yet. Silly works for Mrs. Thompson, and I work at the mill."

"*You* work! At what mill?"

"The paper mill, sorting rags. It's profitable business, too. Some weeks I make five or six dollars."

What a strange meeting! A little cripple earning six dollars a week, and a great, strong, healthy girl, who never earned a cent. Becky could scarcely believe her ears.

"Why, Jenny York, you're worth a dozen girls like me. I never earned a cent in my life. I wish I could, though."

"It's easy enough. Mr. Small wants some help; he told me so to-day. The work is not very clean; there's plenty of dust to get down your throat, and up your nose, and into your ears. But it never gets into my eyes thick enough to prevent my seeing the wages every Saturday night."

[134]

Jenny York laughed merrily, making it evident that the dust had no effect on her good humor.

"There, I guess I've had a good rest. I must be going."

"Let me go with you," said Becky, springing up, and assisting Jenny to regain her feet.

"O, thank you! That will be nice. I can put my arm about your waist, if you'll let me, and you can shoulder the crutch, if you like, and 'twill be a pleasant change for me."

Warm-hearted Becky quickly adjusted herself to the requirements of her companion, and they started off down the road.

"Do you walk up and down every day, Jenny?"

"O, no. Almost always somebody comes along and gives me a ride. Everybody is very kind to me, and I get along famously."

Ah, Jenny, if everybody had your cheerful spirit, how much better and brighter the world would become! how pleasantly we should all get along! The hard, grinding times come to all, in different shapes, to be rightly borne in patience; but between the past and the coming are long reaches of level life which the sunshine of a contented spirit can make glad and happy.

[135]

That long walk opened a fresh path in the new life to Becky. For two years Jenny York had worked at the mill. She gave her companion a full description of her duties, and eagerly pressed her to come and try her luck. They parted at the door of Mr. York's house, sworn friends. Becky,

refusing an invitation to enter, remembering her charity visit, gave Jenny her promise that the next day should find her at the mill.

So homeward tripped Becky, thanking her lucky stars for this providential meeting, thinking how oddly it had come about that just at the right moment a weak, crippled girl had been able to point out to her the road to independence.

The "council of war" that night deliberated long and earnestly on the question which Becky laid before that body. Harry opposed, Mrs. Thompson hesitated, Becky was resolute.

"I hate to oppose you, Harry, who have been so good to me. But I can earn money there; and it's high time I did something for the support of the family." [136]

She had taken the precaution to win Aunt Hulda and her mother to her side before submitting her plan to the others. Aunt Hulda, whose admiration for Becky sometimes was unbounded, had been first consulted. This mark of confidence had won all that remained of Aunt Hulda's heart, and she readily acquiesced, as she would have done had Becky proposed to shingle the church. The mother had read in the sparkling eyes of her daughter, now so very dear to her, the earnest desire to work and earn, and could not, if she would, disappoint her. Thus thrice-armed in a just cause, Becky met her councillors, and bore off the victory at last.

With these stipulations: she should give just the time daily which had been occupied by her school duties to rag-picking—no more. She should perform her household labors as usual, and be ready at other times for out-door exercise at the will and pleasure of Harry Thompson. His consent could be gained on no other terms. Mrs. Thompson was doubtful of the influences which might be brought to bear upon Becky at the mill, yet could not but admire the spirit she displayed. She hesitated on Becky's account a while, then smilingly gave her vote in favor of Becky, and the field was won. [137]

The next morning found her at the mill equipped for dusty labor. Mr. Small received her kindly, made a satisfactory bargain with her, and she at once entered upon her duties.

The paper mill was composed of three buildings; the main section, comprising the business office, the machine-room, the pulp-vats, and the bleaching-tubs, was built of bricks. At right angles with this structure, and attached to it, was a flat-roofed wooden building. In the lower story of this were stored rags in bags; from this room they were hoisted to the second story, where they were sorted, then taken to the main building to be bleached. At the end of this building was a low, slant-roofed stable. In the sorting-room from ten to a dozen females were usually employed; and to this section of the paper mill Becky was assigned.

To no pleasant work did Becky set her hands; in no very pleasant companionship did she find herself. With the exception of Jenny York, the "girls" were middle aged and old women, loud-tongued, and very apt to be quarrelsome. At first Becky tried to make friends with all of them; but, finding her overtures met with rudeness, she desisted from further attempts, and drew the closer to the little cripple. [138]

As time passed on, and she grew familiar with her labor, stronger grew her friendship for Jenny. These two made a corner of their own, a little removed from the Babel of tongues. Jenny, rejoicing in the companionship of one so near her age, was always bright and happy. Becky, catching the inspiration of her cheerful spirit, overflowed with mirth and humor, and oft-repeated stories of tomboy adventures made them both merry over their work.

But Becky never lost sight of her independence. She worked gaily, but she worked with a will; and the sight of her wages when Saturday came was a reward of merit dearly prized. Steadily she worked through the hot months of summer, until she could count ninety dollars in her strong-box; and then a sad disaster befell the mill.

The machinery of a paper mill seldom stops, night or day, save for repairs. It was in the month of September that it was necessary to stop for the repair of a broken wheel. The sorting-room, however, was kept in operation. [139]

At twelve o'clock the "girls" repaired to their homes for dinner—all but Jenny York. Occasionally Becky staid to keep her company, but not often, the stipulations with the council requiring her to be punctual to her meals at home. Certainly Jenny fared all the better for this, for Becky's return always added something nice to her plain fare.

But one day Jenny had a fierce attack of her grinding pains, and all the forenoon she lay upon a couch of bags, and when dinner time came, spite of her wishes, Becky would not leave her. They were alone; Jenny, just recovering, was faint and ghostly white; Becky, bending over her, was bathing her temples, when, suddenly, outside, the cry of "Fire!" was raised. Becky sprang to her feet, to find the room thickening with smoke, coming up through the chinks in the floor. A too common accident in paper mills had occurred. A bag of cotton waste had burst into flames, and the store-room beneath was a furnace of fire. Her first thought was—no thought at all. The instinct of self-preservation took her into the machine-room very quick, and then she thought of Jenny. She ran back to the terrified girl, crying,— [140]

"Don't be frightened, Jenny. The mill's on fire; but I'll save you."

She stooped and lifted Jenny in her arms. All the "waste" of her early life served her well now. Exercise had made that small frame tough and muscular, and she easily bore Jenny towards the door. But suddenly the iron doors between the two buildings were closed with a crash. Some crazy operative, thinking only of the danger to the main building, had taken this precaution, without looking into the room. Becky dropped her burden, and flew to the doors. She screamed

for help; she beat the iron with her fists in vain. Then she ran to the windows on the sides; there were none at the end. But the thick, black smoke, rolling up outside, obscured the light. No escape there; they were walled in on every side. The smoke in the room was so thick it was with difficulty they could breathe.

No escape? Yes, one. Becky cast her eyes aloft. In the centre of the roof was a scuttle, ten feet above her. Lying along the side of the room was a ladder. Becky sprang for it. It was very heavy; but desperation nerved her arms, and it was raised. [141]

All this time Jenny lay upon the floor, watching with wishful eyes the movements of Becky. O, if she only had a little strength now! Becky came to her side, and raised her once more in her arms.

"Now clasp me close, and we'll soon reach the roof, and be out of this stifling smoke, any way."

With her heavy burden she toiled up the ladder, rested a moment at the top, then threw up the scuttle, and reached the roof. There she laid Jenny down and ran to the edge. Right and left the smoke was rising in dense volumes; but at the farther end all was clear, and beneath it was the steep roof of the stable. There was her chance for escape. She could drop easily; it was but ten feet. But Jenny! The poor girl would scarce escape without injury. Only a moment she pondered, then ran back to the scuttle, and descended the ladder, at the risk of her life. Near the iron doors the flames were shooting up through the floor, and dancing on the wall. The smoke was stifling. She caught up several empty bags, and quickly regained her place upon the roof.

"Quick, Jenny, quick! Help me to tear these bags to pieces. We must have a rope." [142]

They tore the bags apart, divided them, with the aid of their scissors, into long, narrow strips; then Becky's nimble fingers twisted them together.

"Now, Jenny, I'm going to lower you to the shed; and then we're safe."

She fastened the improvised rope about Jenny's waist, and bore her to the edge of the roof. She then passed the rope around the chimney.

"Once more, Jenny. Slide over the roof, and hold on to the rope."

The rope slid through Becky's hands, and Jenny was upon the roof below. Then the brave girl, casting loose the trusty cord, advanced to the edge of the roof, and, supporting herself a moment by her hands, dropped beside her friend. None too soon; for, while she clung there, up through the scuttle appeared the flaming head of the advancing column of fire.

It was still ten feet from the stable to the ground, and no time to be lost.

"Slide down the roof, Jenny, and drop again. I'll hold you; never fear."

She stretched herself flat upon the roof, with the rope in her hands. Jenny slid down, and dropped as directed. But now a new danger to Becky arose: the cord had become entangled in her dress; and, as Jenny descended, she found herself being dragged down the roof. But she held all the tighter to the rope, fearing the shock to Jenny, should she fall, more than the danger of being herself plunged headlong from the roof. Faster and faster they went; she was nearing the edge; she must go over. No. Suddenly the cord slacked. Jenny had touched the ground. She dropped the cord, clutched the gutter with all her strength, her body swung round, and she dropped to the ground, very ungracefully, but unhurt. [143]

"O, Becky, you've saved my life! Can I ever repay you?"

Jenny lay upon the ground, with clasped hands and streaming eyes. Becky stood by her side, looking ruefully at the burning building. No more work there.


"Yes, Jenny, I believe I've saved both our lives. But there's one thing I forgot; and it's just like me. Your crutch! I might have saved that too."

Not quite a thoughtful, earnest woman yet, Becky; but this day the climbing frolics of the tomboy days have enabled you to glorify humanity with its proudest triumph—an heroic act! [144]



THE BURNING MILL.—[Page 142.](#)

TEDDY SLEEPER DINES OUT.

ust before the breaking out of the fire in the paper mill Teddy Sleeper, sat on the door step awaiting the return of his sister. He was particularly uneasy on this occasion, having had a long spell of fishing with no luck, "not even a bite" and was very impatient at the delay in obtaining a "bite" at home, it being the invariable rule there, to wait for Becky. Teddy under the wise rule of his sister had lost much of his gaukiness and rough speech but had lost none of his rotundity of form and cool, phlegmatic disposition. With him everything was taken as a matter of course. Nothing ever surprised him into expressions of wonder, and seldom did he lose his temper. The sole disturber of his peace was hunger—the foe that has successfully assailed the good disposition of many wise and great men. Under its attacks Teddy grew restless and disorderly. He was in a fair way to do something rash, when his keen eye discovered smoke rolling up over the paper mill, and the cry of "Fire! fire! fire!" faintly reached his ears. He rolled off the step, took a long look in the direction of the smoke, then started down the hill. Reaching the church, he saw Phil Hague standing before the captain's house, shading his eyes and looking up the road. People were hurrying toward the fire. [146]

"Phil, Phil, it's the paper mill!"

"Is that so? Bedad, its foine kindlings they have there for a blaze."

"Come on. Let's get out the ingine."

"What for, I dunno?" said Phil, scratching his head.

"To put out the fire. Here, Jackson, the ingine. Hold on, Smith, help run her up. Come on, Phil."

Teddy run to the engine house, followed by Phil, and Smith and Jackson, who were on their way to the fire.

The engine was kept next door to the church. It was a heavy, old-fashioned affair, not much larger than a good-sized wash-tub, had not been moved for years, and it was very doubtful if it could be made to work. Of this Teddy took no thought. There was a fire, and the first thing to be done was to have it on the spot. So they pulled it out and started down the hill as fast as they could run. Not being experienced firemen, they did not use any "hold-back" measures, and the consequence was, half way down the hill they found the "ingine" close upon their heels, and themselves in danger of being crushed. With one accord they dropped the rope, and sprang to the sides of the road. "Cataract"—this was the name by which the extinguisher was known—being deserted by its leaders, went thundering down the hill and tipped over at the bottom. [147]

"By my sowl," said Phil Hague, "that's a quare way of putting out a fire. The contrary devil's laid down for a nap."

"Come on, it ain't hurt; let's set it up and lug it up the hill," said Teddy hurrying to the prostrate Cataract.

They managed to get it upon its wheels again, tugged up the hill with their heavy burden, and at last reached the fire. A hose was laid and the engine manned, but the rusty machine refused to work. All this time Teddy had been sweating and hurrying to get it in operation. It was a sore disappointment to him after all his trouble. [148]

Mark Small came along at that moment.

"It's no use, boys, there's been no washers on them pumps this five years."

There was a laugh from the crowd and Teddy turned away with a very red face.

"The best engine in the world would be of no use now. She's got to burn," said Small, looking at his buildings, now enveloped in flames. "Much obliged to you, Teddy, all the same. Tell you what you can do. There's little York frightened most to death. Becky got her out just in time. Just you take my team and get her home. That's a good fellow."

Teddy followed the direction of Small's pointing finger, and saw Jenny York crouching on the ground beside Becky. In a moment he was beside the girls.

"Hello, girls, had a narrow squeak of it. Say, Becky, Small says you got her out. Is that so?"

"Yes, I did, Teddy. Ain't you glad?" said Becky.

"Glad; you bet I am. Bully for you. Hurrah for Becky Sleeper."

The crowd took up the shout, and Becky received an ovation. Just then Small drove up in his wagon. [149]

"Come, Teddy, get the girls home, quick."

He leaped from his seat and took Jenny in his arms and placed her in the wagon.

"There's room for you, too, Becky. Jump in. God bless you, girl. It's hard to lose all I have in the world, but it would have been harder to bear had there been a life lost."

Becky climbed into the wagon followed by Teddy who took up the reins and drove away. As they moved off the excited crowd, who had witnessed Becky's valor, shouted until Becky was out of sight, "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!" As they flew down the road Jenny poured into the ears of Teddy Sleeper the exciting narrative of the escape.

"That's just like her, Jenny. Hi, lively, Spotty. She's a bouncer, I tell you. And she's my sister. Ain't I proud of her? Oh, no—get up, Spotty," cried Teddy, at the conclusion of the narrative. "And I lugged that plaguy old ingine up all for nothing. She does all the brave things, and I ain't no account. Don't care, she's my sister. Hi, there, Spotty, what are ye about? She's my sister."

Spotty was the name of Small's horse—an explanation rather necessary, in view of the manner in which Teddy mixed his sentences. [150]

Having safely deposited his sister at home, Teddy drove on to Jenny's house. Mrs. York was surprised at the appearance of Jenny in the middle of the day. The family had heard nothing about the fire, and were about sitting down to dinner when Teddy arrived with his charge.

"Bless the child, where did you come from? What's the matter?" cried Mrs. York, appearing in the doorway, as Teddy carefully deposited Jenny on the step.

"Been a fire! Mill's gone—clean gone!" said Teddy. "So I brought Jenny home."

"Mill's burned? Sakes alive! How on earth did you get out? Do you hear that, father? Mill's gone—clean gone."

"I got out because Becky Sleeper saved me, mother," said Jenny, quietly, as she took her mother's hand to get into the house. "Had it not been for her you'd have had no crippled daughter to care for more."

"My gracious! you don't mean it," cried Mrs. York, hastily closing the door, regardless of Teddy standing outside. Teddy turned away with a disappointed air. The grateful incense of a boiled dinner had been wafted to his hungry spirit, through the open door. He remembered the time, when on a charitable mission, that same door had been closed to him, and thought that if a little charity should be extended to him from the other side, hungry as he was he could not refuse it. He climbed to his seat, took up the reins, and was on the point of starting off when the door opened again. [151]

"Here, Teddy, Teddy Sleeper, don't go yet." It was the voice of Mrs. York. "You mustn't mind my shuttin' the door. I'm so flurried to think that our Jenny's come so near never comin' home again. Come in and have some dinner. We ain't got much, but what we have is good, for I cooked it myself. Don't be bashful. Come in, and welcome."

Teddy stopped not for further invitation, but quickly fastened Spotty and entered the house. The table was spread in the middle of the room, its centre embellished with a huge platter in which reposed a smoking piece of corned-beef, almost hidden by the surrounding accompaniment of turnips, carrots, parsnips, cabbage and potatoes. Near it was an enormous dish of squash. There was a plate of brown bread, another of white, a castor, a huge coffee pot, cups and saucers, plates, knives and forks. Teddy took it all in at a glance. There was enough for all, he should not be robbing the poor if he helped to dispose of the feast. Yet the supply of squash so far exceeded the usual provision made for such an occasion that he could not keep his eyes from it. [152]

"Father" York who was on the lounge, when he entered raised his eyes and said "How do you do?" in a very weak voice.

"Come, father, dinner's all on the table."

"Father" rose quickly, and took his place at the foot of the table. Mrs. York motioned Teddy to a seat next him. Jenny took her place, and the two younger Yorks, about four and six years old scrambled to their places.

"Why, where's Johnny?" said Mrs. York, about to do the honors at the head of the table.

"Oh, he'll be here afore we get through, I guess," said father York, "he never loses a meal."

There was a scrambling at the back door, it flew open, and Johnny York made his appearance. He was about eleven years old. A redheaded, freckled-faced boy, with eyes like a sculpin. With much haste he tossed his hat on the lounge, dragged a chair across the floor, jumped into his seat, and fastened his eyes upon the dish of squash. [153]

"Squash!" he ejaculated, lifting his plate.

"Wait, sonny, wait; don't you see we have company," said Mrs. York.

Johnny looked round the table, saw Teddy, grinned, then fastened his eyes on his favorite dish.

Mrs. York helped Teddy and Jenny and then looked at Johnny.

"Squash," answered Johnny to the look.

Into his plate Mrs. York heaped the yellow vegetable in such profusion that Teddy stared. The youngster seemed not a bit discouraged by the supply but attacked it at once. The two smaller children were also helped from the same dish, paying no attention to the contents of the principal platter. With a great many groans Mr. York supplied his own plate bountifully, and set to work like a man ravenously hungry. Teddy kept him company—he had fasted long and he was tempted by a favorite dinner.

"Teddy," said Mrs. York, "we can never be grateful enough to that dear sister of yours, and only think, we turned her away from our doors." [154]

"Yes," sighed Mr. York, "and refused her bounty. It was cruel, and if ever there was a thing a poor sick man hankered for, it was what she brought."

"Squash!" burst out Johnny, raising his empty plate.

Teddy stopped eating and looked at Johnny. The boy's eyes stood out hungrier than ever. Mrs. York quietly refilled his plate.

"Oh, she's the dearest girl, mother, you ever saw. If you'd only seen her in the loft," said Jenny, "tugging away at that great ladder, and then carrying me up in her arms, and so gay about it, as though she did it every day. I was frightened almost to death, but when I saw how calm she was, it made me quiet. I thought if I must die, it would not be alone. And then I thought that was selfish and wanted her to go and leave me to my fate. Oh, mother, it was a happy day for me when she came to the mill."

"It was a happy day for us all, Jenny," said Mrs. York. "What should we do without our singing Jenny? Have some more beef, Teddy. I declare you're not eating anything." [155]

Teddy looked up to see if she was not making fun of him for he had already made away with two generous supplies. But, no, there was no fun in her eye, and he passed his plate.

"Yes," sighed Mr. York, "we have much to be grateful for. Poor health is an awful pullback to a man who's willin' to do all he can, but to lose children after they've begun to earn something, is a special dispensation of Providence that goes agin' the grain. I always told Small that mill of his would end in—"

"Squash!" sung out Johnny, lifting an empty plate again.

"Squash!" echoed number four.

"Squash!" chimed in number five.

Teddy saw three uplifted plates and ceased to wonder at the enormous provision. Without a murmur Mrs. York plied the big iron spoon once more, and the youngsters again set to work.

"And to think that girl should turn out so well after all," said Mrs. York. "She was the most harum scarum thing I ever saw when she was a young girl."

"Ah, we must never judge by appearances," sighed Mr. York. "That's what I tell Mason when I have my bad spells come on. 'York,' he says, 'don't be a fool. You're tough enough if you only keep to work. You're as strong and healthy a looking man as I am.' Ah, he little knows what a sinking there is my stomach and how weak I get, and don't have the least bit of appetite. Ah, I'm slowly but surely fading away, fading away." [156]

"Don't, father, don't talk so. You make me feel miserable," said Mrs. York, laying down her knife and looking at the sufferer with real distress in her face.

"Well, I won't," sighed York, taking up his knife and fork, and dashing at his plate with vigor. "I know its wrong to distress you, but what can a man do who feels the all-devouring worm continually crying—"

"Squash!" interrupted Johnny.

"No, sir, no more," said Mrs. York, firmly. "Mercy sakes, do you want to turn into a squash vine, and have squashes grow out all over you? No more."

Johnny said not a word, but pushed back his chair, grabbed his cap, and slid out of the back door. The little Yorks who were on the point of joining their petitions with that of their brother, awed by the stern tone of their mother, or frightened at the probable result of too much indulgence, dropped their plates and were silent. Teddy, having fully appeased his appetite, thought of Spotty. [157]

"I believe I must be goin'. Hadn't ought to have stopped so long. Mr. Small will be wanting his horse."

"Oh, don't be in a hurry, Teddy. Well, if you must go—come again, we'll be glad to see you any time, won't we, father?"

"Yes, indeed; and your sister, too, and she shan't be turned out of doors, if she ever feels like bringing something nice to a poor sick man," said Mr. York.

"Don't, father, speak of such a thing," cried Jenny. "She's done enough for us. Don't take such a message as that, Teddy, but tell her we all love her dearly, and will never think of her but as the best girl in Cleverly."

"That's so, Jenny. I knew folks would find out how clever she is," said Teddy, "and she's my sister. Good by. I really must be going," and he started for the door. Outside he found Spotty impatiently pulling at his tether, and jumping into the wagon he started off. As he drove into the main street he found a group of men and boys discussing the fire, and by their motions enacting the scene in which Becky had taken a prominent part. Further on another group with the same subject under consideration, and a third were on the steps of the church. As he passed he could hear his sister's name spoken by one and another. In a cheerful spirit, with his hungry foe completely vanquished, it is no wonder that Teddy's heart glowed at the praises he heard, and felt proud of its connection with the heroine of the day. [158]

And Becky; how bore she her triumph? Quietly she entered the house and took her place at her mother's side.

"No more work to-day, mother, or for many days. The mill is burned to the ground."

"Nobody hurt, Becky?" with an anxious look, said the mother.

"No, all safe and sound. Nobody lost anything but Mr. Small."

Aunt Hulda entered the room at that moment.

"What's that, Becky? Where have you been? Dinner's cold as a stone."

"Jenny was very sick and I couldn't leave her, and then the mill took fire and burnt to the ground." [159]

"Mark Small's mill burnt. You don't mean it. Why, it will ruin him," gasped Aunt Hulda.

"Yes, I'm afraid he's lost everything."

"Oh dear, dear, dear! It's the Lord's doin's and I 'spose we must be resigned," cried Aunt Hulda. "And Mark Small's lost everything," and she sat down and rocked briskly, wringing her hands.

"Why, Aunt Hulda, what ails you? You'll lose nothing. Come, give me my dinner, I'm as hungry as a bear. I can't wait; come along," and Becky seized Aunt Hulda by main force and dragged her to the kitchen. Not a word about her adventure to Aunt Hulda, not a word to her mother on her return. They were left in ignorance until Teddy puffing with haste burst into the room. He ran at Becky and seized her in his arms.

"It's all over town. I tell you, everybody's talking about you. You're a heroine, Becky, and I'm your brother."

"What on airth ails the boy?" shrieked Aunt Hulda. "Is he mad? What's Becky done now?"

"What has she done, Aunt Hulda? She dragged Jenny York up on the roof, tore up the bags and let her down to the ground, when the building was blazing like fury. D'ye hear that, mother? Our Becky did it. Ain't you proud of her? I am." [160]

Becky freed herself from Teddy's embrace, wondering what could have started him to such a proceeding, he always so cool and undemonstrative. She looked at her mother. The face of the invalid was flushed, the lips moved yet no words escaped them, but in the eyes Becky read the rich reward, "Well done, daughter." She ran to her mother's side and put her arms about her neck.

"Poor Jenny York, mother, she must have died without me. Thank Heaven, I was there, mother. Thank Him that I knew how to save her."

THE ROMANCE OF A POOR OLD MAID.

If ever a man had reason to be disappointed at the ways of Providence, that man was Mark Small, owner of the mill, whose earthly possessions had vanished in fire and smoke. Twenty years before, he had wandered over from Foxtown, a sunburnt lad, with all his wardrobe—a cotton shirt, homespun pants, and a straw hat, stuck loosely upon his thin frame,—and the sad recollection of the death-bed of his father, a dissipated laborer, firmly fixed in his memory. In search of a job he stumbled into Capt. Thompson's kitchen, where he was treated to a good, warm meal, and afterwards given charge of the captain's "cattle;" *i. e.* a lively young horse, and a quiet, orderly cow,—for the captain's domestic establishment was then on a very small scale. This work contented him for five years; when a desire to become a tin-peddler, induced the captain to equip him with a horse and wagon, and to set him off upon his travels. A very promising year at this business was ended by the disappearance of his whole stock from the breaking of a bridge; and the bankruptcy of that concern was the consequence. Then he tried book-peddling with considerable success, until one night the barn, in which he and his library had taken shelter from a storm, was struck by lightning and burned; he barely escaping with his life. Then he took to farming;—cut his leg with a scythe, and was laid up all winter. So fast failures followed all his attempts to rise in the world, that he jestingly asserted he must have been named Mark, that misfortune might make no mistake in marking him for its victim. At length he sought employment at the paper mill, where he prospered; and in time, by careful saving and shrewd management, was able to purchase the whole concern. And now fire had again made him penniless. Yet he sat there, lounging on a stone, humming a tune, and whittling a stick, as the twilight was gathering, and the flickering flames dying out of all that remained of his earthly possessions. He was a tall, thin man, with hollow cheeks, a ring of grizzled beard encircling his throat, a long, sharp nose, and a pair of rambling, piercing eyes, which were now fastened upon the fast blackening heap before him. So deeply was he interested in the last flashes of his expiring treasures, that he was unconscious of the approach of footsteps, until a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"Mark, if it wasn't the Lord's doings, I should say that you're the worst treated man in Cleverly."

Mark started, and turned to see the sharp eyes of Hulda Prime looking into his eagerly. He was not quite sure, but he thought they looked moist and watery.

"Yes, Hulda, the old tune's struck up again,"—by which Mark meant his old follower, misfortune—"I'd kinder lost the hang of it, so long since I've heeded it, but now it seems jist as natral as 'auld lang syne.'"

"Mark, I'm real sorry for you. I don't know as I'm welcome, but I couldn't help putting on my bunnet and coming over to see you, if 'twas only for the sake of 'auld lang syne' you tell about."

"Well, it's real kind of you, Hulda; something I couldn't expect; for I hain't treated you jest right, nohow."

Aunt Hulda shivered; it couldn't be with cold, for the warmth of the failing embers was still powerful.

"Seems queer you should drop down on me jest then, Hulda; for I've been kinder lookin' back, and jest when you put your hand on my shoulder, I was thinkin' of that day when horse, wagon, tin-ware and peddler, went through the bridge together."

Aunt Hulda shivered again, and somehow managed to slip down by Small's side. He took no notice of the circumstance, but went on.

"Yes, you were stopping with Mrs. Johnson, helping her with her thanksgiving. You were a smart girl those days. Not handsome, but kinder good, wholesome lookin'. Don't you remember my coming round to the kitchen and jokin' you about Cyrus Cheever, who was kinder makin' up to you; and I sung out to you, 'Don't have him, Hulda, wait for me. I'll call when I come back, and pop the question.' But I drove off and popped through the bridge. Don't you remember it?"

Hulda Prime answered not. Her elbows were on her knees, her chin in her hand, her eyes looking into the gleaming ruins, where broken walls and twisted machinery, stood as monuments of destruction.

Remember it! had she not waited for that return? had she not taken to heart those playful words? And out of them woven a bright dream, and built upon it year by year, the only romance of her solitary life.

"I meant it, Hulda, true as gospel I meant it."

Hulda's old heart gave a bound. It was no jest after all.

"Yes, if it hadn't been for that accident, I should have come back and asked you Hulda, true as preaching. But the old tune struck up, and 'twas no use trying to get up a wedding-dance to such music as that. And then when I got in luck again, somehow, I kinder got stuck up, and got used to being my own master; but I did keep kinder thinkin' on you. But what's the use of my tellin' you all this? we've got by, all that nonsense, and I'm flat on by back agin, and as 'poor as a puddock.' I don't s'pose it's very manly in me to go confessing this thing now; but I've kinder felt mean about it, and your comin', so cleverly and neighborly like, when I've nobody to feel sorry for me, has sorter made me do it."

Mark Small shifted about uneasily in his seat, and whittled very briskly, and tried to whistle; but

he found it hard to “pucker,” and could not muster a note.

Aunt Hulda shivered, and looked off into the ruins; and nursed her chin in her hand, and thought, “‘We’ve got by all that nonsense,’ have we?” Perhaps he had. She had not. No! Mark Small had been the idol of her younger days—her hero—by no means a handsome one; neither brave or gifted; yet she had loved him dearly, without any hope of being his wife, and now to find that he had thought of her, had wished to marry her, was happiness enough to pay for all the waiting, though they might never come any nearer to each other,—though, as he said, “they had got by all that nonsense.”

She spoke at last.

“Mark, I’m glad you told me this. You needn’t be ashamed of it, neither. It’s a manly thing for you to do. It’s wiped out some hard thoughts I’ve had of you; for I want you to understand that if you’d come back then, Cyrus Cheever, or any other man, would have been no consequence at all.”

And because all that nonsense had died out, Hulda’s hand fell upon Mark’s, and the ruined paper maker dropped his knife, and clasped it; and both gazed wistfully into the ruins, as the twilight darkened, and the fires burned dimmer. [167]

“Mark, I am so sorry for you. What will you do now? Your mill is ruined. ‘Twill take a heap of money to build it up again.”

“I don’t know, Hulda; but I ain’t a bit scart. I’ve begun too many times at the bottom of the ladder, to give up now.”

“Trust in the Lord, Mark, trust in the Lord.”

“That’s good, pious doctrine, Hulda, but I’m kinder unsteady on religious pints, and I think the Lord does the handsome thing, when he gives us this world, with all its fruits and products, and store of materials to work and weave, and brains to think, and arms to work; and we serve him best when we take all this, on trust, and turn it over, and work it up, and do the very best we can, givin’ him the glory. That’s my religion, Hulda, and I mean to live by it. And if I can do that, I ain’t afraid it won’t carry me over the river. I ain’t agoin’ to trouble him to set me goin’, but jest look ‘round, find suthin’ to do, and then pitch in with a will.”

Hulda groaned in spirit, but kept her lips fast closed. This was not exactly what Parson Arnold preached, and the self-reliant religion of Mark Small, had a shade of blasphemy to her orthodox ears. [168]

“Hulda, I wouldn’t sit here any longer if I were you. It’s getting dark and cold. I’ll walk down the road with you. It’s good of you to come, and I think I feel better for getting to be good friends with you again. I thought the old feelin’ had died out, but it hain’t, and if ever I get on my feet agen,—”

“Is that you, Mark Small?”

A burly form came between them and the light. Hulda recognized it, and sprang to her feet. Captain Thompson, the last man she expected to meet stood before them. She darted back of Mark Small, out of the light. The captain took no notice of her, supposing her one of the employees of the mill.

“Yes, Captain, here I am, watching the remains. The old mill’s done for—and so am I.”

The captain came forward with outstretched hands.

“Mark, I am sorry for you. If it had been one of my ships, I couldn’t have felt worse. I’ve been out of town all day. Just heard of it. Swept clean away, hey?”

“Yes, Captain, all gone. Some of the machinery might be saved, but it can do no good. What’s the use of a horse, if you can’t get a stable for him?” [169]

“Well, the first thing to do is to build a stable for your iron horses.”

“It’s easy enough to talk, but where’s the money coming from?”

“How much will it take to set the mill agoing again?”

“Ten thousand dollars,” said Mark, with a very faint whistle.

“Ten thousand dollars!” echoed the captain, with a louder whistle. “Any insurance?”

“Not a cent’s worth!” said Mark; “it’s too risky. You see a little combustible cotton has swept away my fortune in a couple of hours.”

“Nobody hurt, was there?” queried the captain.

“No. Thanks to brave little Becky Sleeper, even the little cripple was got out. That’s a brave girl, Captain. She’ll be the town talk to-morrow. Her skill in climbing and lifting stood her friend today. She’s a wide-awake Sleeper. Pity we hadn’t more tomboys like her about.”

“She of any use? you surprise me, Mark.”

Hulda drew a step nearer. With her pet for a subject, the conversation was becoming interesting. [170]

“Yes, while the building was in flames, she dragged Jenny York to the roof, and lowered her to the ground;” and Small related the adventure, painting in glowing colors the heroism of Becky Sleeper.

“Well, well,” said the captain at the close of the narrative, “I’m glad she’s done something to

redeem her bad character.”

Hulda Prime took another step forward, and clenched her fist. The captain never knew how narrowly he escaped an assault. “The ugly brute!” she thought, “he should repent that speech.” But remembering she had no right to interfere in that place, she smothered her ruffled feelings, and listened.

“And you say ten thousand dollars would be required to rebuild the mill. A big sum, a very big sum;” and the captain rubbed his hand thoughtfully.

“Yes, the stock’s gone clean; but my agent in Boston would fill me up, if I could only get the mill on its legs again.”

“Hem! pays good profit, hey?” asked the captain.

“Splendid! I had a customer for all I could make. Might rebuild on shares with my agents. I guess they’d come down with five thousand, if I could show the other five.” [171]

“Would they,” said the captain, lighting up, “then you’re all right, Small. All right! build it up and set it agoing.”

“Yes, but where’s my five thousand coming from?”

“Out of my pocket, Small. ’Tain’t the first time I’ve set you up in business. And though you’ve failed many times, I’ve never lost a cent. You’ve paid me up principal and interest. And the money’s yours, when you want it to set things agoing. And if your agents won’t go in with you, why, I will; though where so much money’s coming from, I can’t exactly see.”

Small sprang to his feet, with eyes full of tears.

“Captain Thompson, you’re a friend worth having; you’ve put new life into me. I thought my best friend was gone when the old mill burnt; but I’m all right now.” And he seized Captain Thompson’s hand and shook it warmly.

“That’s all right, Small. Don’t say any more about it. And don’t let it leak out; I don’t like to have my doings known.”

“But they shall be known, you ugly old angel,” cried Hulda Prime, pouncing upon the Captain, and shaking his hand with energy. [172]

“Hulda Prime, you here!” cried the astonished Captain; backing away and endeavoring to release his hand,—

“Yes, and I bless the Lord I am here, to see such a noble spirit. Captain Thompson, I’ve said hard things about you, and to your face, too; but I take ’em all back,—except about Harry—that I will stick to.”

Remembering what had been said about Harry, the Captain was not well pleased at the reservation.

“Miss Prime, I am surprised to find you here,” began he, sternly.

“Well, you needn’t be. Mark Small and I are old friends, and so I ran over to console him and bid him trust in the Lord. And I guess he did, after all, for nobody else could have sent you here just in the nick of time. You’re just splendid. Folks round here pity Miss Thompson because she’s got such a brute of a husband. But they needn’t. You’re just as good as you can be, and I’ve a great mind to hug you.”

The Captain grew red, and the Captain grew pale. He never felt in such deadly peril before. [173]

“Come, Captain, shake hands and forgive me.”

She stretched out her hand. The Captain hesitated—then took it.

“You’ll never regret this night’s work as long as you live,—never! And I’ll never go to sleep at night without a prayer for Captain Thompson.”

“Pray as much as you please, Hulda; I shall need it all. But if we are to be friends, not a word of what has been said to-night, in Cleverly. You understand?”

“If you insist on hiding your light under a bushel, I’m not mean enough to kick it over without your consent. But it’s a shame. Everybody ought to know what a good man you are.”

The Captain turned on his heel. “Good night, Hulda! Good night, Mark! I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Good night, Captain! You’ve made my sleep hearty to-night,” cried Small.

“Good night, Captain. God bless you!” cried Hulda. And so they parted.

The Captain laughed to himself, as he marched into the road; but there he met his son Harry. He pulled his hat over his eyes, and without recognition passed him by as he would a stranger. [174]

“The Lord sent him, Mark, to-night, you believe that?” said Hulda, as the Captain disappeared.

“The Lord put a noble heart in his breast, and it turned him toward the old mill. It’s the same thing, Hulda; but you and I look at it in a different light. Now I’ll beau you home. You don’t get a beau every night, Hulda.”

“I never wanted but one, and he never happened along until to-night.”

They laughed merrily and started off, arm in arm, only a few steps, and they came plump upon

Harry Thompson.

"Hullo! Small, is that you? I came up to offer a little friendly consolation, but you seem in good spirits. What, Aunt Hulda, you here! What's the meaning of this?" and Harry for once, looked very sober.

"The fire is all out, Harry," said Small, confused.

"Is it?" said Harry, "There's no danger of its rekindling." He looked hard at Aunt Hulda. He could not understand the situation. Until now, he supposed the two were strangers. Their confused manner was a puzzle, too.

"There's no vestige of a flame there," said Small, "not a spark. All dead and gone."

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Harry looked as though there was a flame very near to Small, but said nothing about it.

"I just ran up to look after you, Small, to see that you did not get down in the mouth, and to say for my mother, that if you need help, there's money in her purse at your command. Good night! Look out for the sparks, Aunt Hulda." And with a laugh he turned on his heel and walked away.

"Wonder if the Lord sent him?" growled Mark. Aunt Hulda said nothing. The situation in which she found herself, was very awkward, and she trudged along with her arm in Mark's, very much like a lamb led to slaughter. This could not continue long however, and e'er they reached the Sleeper place, their tongues were loosened, and they found themselves building castles as airy and fleecy as lovers are accustomed to shape in the years allotted to youth and romance.

BECKY BEARDS THE LION IN HIS DEN.



With the burning of the mill, Becky's march towards independence was stayed for a while by the failure of supplies. There was a disposition on the part of Cleverly folks to lionize the young girl for the brave deed she had accomplished. Much to her surprise, people who had before shunned her took particular pains to call and thank her for the heroism she had displayed. Deacon Procter's wife—a woman who, in the tomboy days, had caught her among the melons, who had told her she was on the broad road to destruction—smiled upon her kindly, patted her cheek, and called her a brave, good girl, and the pride of the town. Parson Arnold, who before had pulled his hat over his eyes, and stepped one side, when he met her, now benevolently laid his hand upon her head, with a blessing. Even the boys—Teddy's cronies—gathered about the house, and, on her appearance at the door or the window, testified their approbation of her conduct by loud and prolonged cheering; while buxom Mrs. York visited the house regularly every day for a week, to clasp Becky in her arms with such a strength of gratitude that the girl really feared the breath would be driven from her body.

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All this was a source of wonder to her. She had felt a glow of pleasure when she saw the flush on her mother's cheek, the tears standing in her eyes, and a faint smile upon her lips. There was something very warming to her heart, when Aunt Hulda said, with a shake of the head,—

"What did I tell you? She's a brave, good girl; and I knew she'd come out strong when she did come;" with a defiant glance at an invisible somebody, who might be inclined to doubt her.

Mrs. Thompson's warm kiss of approval; Harry's loud "Well done, pet! I'm proud of you!" all these were very gratifying to her. But these outward demonstrations seemed to her something to which she was not entitled, and so dismayed her that she took every opportunity possible to hide herself on the appearance of visitors.

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The destruction of the mill was a bitter disappointment to her. She had set her heart on earning a hundred dollars. She had reached ninety, and the opportunity had vanished in fire and smoke. Not all the praise of Cleverly could compensate her for this loss. But though disappointed, she was not disheartened; and leaving the ninety safely locked, like the good woman in the Scriptures, she went searching about to discover the missing ten.

October came, and school opened once more, Mr. Drinkwater in his place, and Becky and Teddy among his pupils. For a time the young master, with his lively interest in their studies and outdoor pastimes, his original way of making the most laborious duties pleasant, was missed; but Mr. Drinkwater was an earnest teacher, a kind and honorable man, methodical in his course of training, and under his charge the school prospered.

Harry Thompson was still an inmate of Mr. Drinkwater's house, chafing under the restraint of inaction, yet obedient to the wishes of the mother to whom he owed his education, whose loving heart could not harbor the thought of a long absence, and whose faith in the reconciliation that would place her son in his home was still strong. How it was to be brought about, she knew not; but this separation was unnatural; it must have an end. Only have patience, and the perfect worker, in God's good time, would mend the broken threads.

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One cold November afternoon, Mrs. Thompson, with her knitting needles busily plying, sat in the sitting-room of the little brown house, now made very comfortable by the zealous workers. A miniature bonfire crackled and blazed in the broad fireplace, bountifully supplied by Harry Thompson, who lazily lounged in a rocking-chair before it, and divided his attention between a frequent piling of sticks and the contents of a portfolio in his lap.

Into this cosy retreat, with a rush of cold air, burst Becky Sleeper, in her usual dashing style, flinging her books on the sofa, her hat in one corner, her cloak in another, her gloves on the mantel-piece, and herself into a chair.

"There, Aunt Rebecca! I've stood this just as long as I'm a going to. I must earn money somehow. That hateful ten got into two of my sums to-day, and completely ruined them. It haunts me. Master Drinkwater asked me how many straight lines there were in a dollar mark, and I said ten; how many senses there were, and I said ten; and I got well laughed at. It's no use. I never can succeed in anything more until I earn that ten dollars. So don't oppose me, for I'm determined to get work at the woolen mill."

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Having emphatically launched this alarming threat, Becky applied herself to the task of raising the temperature of that truthful thermometer,—her nose,—which indicated a state of the weather but little above zero. This she did by a brisk application of her hand, with her eyes fastened upon her companions.

"Take care, Becky; you'll rub it off. It's very tender, and there's but little of it," said Harry, with a laugh. "Woolen mill, indeed! You can't get up a blaze there; it's brick."

"Don't think of such a thing, child. There's no necessity for your earning money," said Mrs. Thompson.

"Necessity or not, I mean to try. To-morrow morning I shall go there, and ask for work," replied Becky; "so don't try to stop me, for I know it's right for me to do all I can for the support of the family."

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"Earn money in the woolen mill! Nonsense! Why, there's talent enough in this portfolio to give

you a handsome living, independent of the dust and dirt of an ugly, noisy mill."

"In that portfolio?" said Becky. "What do you mean, Harry?"

"Why, didn't you know, Becky, that men have made fortunes by their skill with the pencil and brush?"

"Men! Men can do anything; but girls can't."

"Don't be so sure of that Becky. I know a young lady who earns twice as much as you ever did in the paper mill, by the use of a pencil."

"You know a young lady?" said Becky, with a flush. "Who—where? What's her name?"

Harry laughed.

"Ah, now you're getting inquisitive, Miss Becky."

"I know who it is, Becky," said Mrs. Thompson. "He's told me all about it, and I'll tell you."

"Mother, mother," said Harry, with much sternness, "secrets are sacred. You must not tell."

Becky began to feel decidedly uncomfortable. Here was a young lady she had never heard of. There was a secret, and it must not be told. O, dear! somebody was coming between Harry and herself. She covered her eyes with her hand; her face was burning. [182]

"What a silly goose!" she thought, and fell to rubbing her nose again, which now indicated a very high degree of temperature.

"No matter, Becky," said Harry, noticing her confusion; "I'll make a clean breast of it, and let you into the secret. When I was at Cambridge, I boarded with a widow who had one daughter. She was about your age, and her name was Alice. Nice name—isn't it!"

"I don't know. Yes—yes," said Becky; "of course. Didn't she have any other name?"

"Certainly—Alice Parks. But Alice is such a pretty name, it's a pity it didn't stand alone, and have no parks about it. Alice—Alice. I do like that name!"

"Why, Harry, what are you thinking of?" asked Mrs. Thompson, in surprise.

"Thinking of Alice, of course," said Becky, with a little snap of temper. "I don't see what that's got to do with a pencil."

"Then we'll come to the point—of the story, not the pencil," said Harry, who was evidently enjoying the confusion of Becky. "Well, you must know, I took a great fancy to this girl, she was so pretty, and so gentle and obliging. They were poor people, and found it hard to keep up a respectable appearance, and make their home comfortable, and table inviting. But they did it; and it was just the nicest, cosiest place in all the world, except home." Harry sobered here, and looked at his mother. "Well, Alice had a talent for painting and drawing, and amused herself in her leisure moments with making sketches and water colors, with which to adorn their rooms. I was very grateful to them for their kindness to me; and one day I purloined some of Alice's drawings, and took them into Boston. I had often played cricket with an Englishman,—John Woodfern,—who, I knew, was one of the best engravers in America. I took the sketches to him, told my story, and asked him to do something for the girl. He took a fancy to the drawings at once. He had a fancy for me already; and, fortunately, he had just taken a contract to supply a children's magazine, then in successful operation. He sent for Alice, took a fancy to her, too, and at once set her to work. She is now a successful artist. So you see, Becky, what a young girl can do, when she has a smart, enterprising man to help her. Ahem!" [184]

"Do you think I could do that too?" asked Becky, with sparkling eyes.

"Of course you could. John Woodfern could never refuse such convincing proofs as are packed away in this portfolio."

"O, isn't that splendid! I know I should like that work," cried Becky, jumping up and clapping her hands. "I'll go to Boston at once!"

"Hold on, hold on, aspiring genius!" exclaimed Harry. "You go to Boston—one hundred and twenty miles! Nonsense! You will stay at home, and go to school; and when the term is over, we'll see what can be done."

"But I can't wait. I must have work. O, let me go. I can find the way, and Mr. John Woodfern, too."

"No, no; I won't aid you unless you strictly conform to my wishes. Am I not right, mother?"

"Yes, Harry," said Mrs. Thompson; "it's best that Becky give her attention to home and school this winter. Be patient, Becky. Harry has opened an agreeable field of labor to you, where you shall work in good time." [185]

"Yes, Becky, I've discovered the mine where lie concealed treasures of wealth, which you shall pick with the point of a pencil. Only wait until I give you the word."

Discovered a mine? Ah, Master Harry, you've reared a mine of another sort, and laid a train, and put the match into the hands of a quick-witted girl. Look out for a speedy explosion.

This new idea so bewitched Becky, that the haunting figures ten were quickly rubbed out of existence in her day-dreams, to give place to the Utopian vision of fame and fortune, which Harry had conjured for her especial benefit. Mother and son departed. The girl sat and gazed into the fire, with mingled feelings of hope and disappointment. There was a bright prospect in the future

for her. Harry had said she had the talent; her own heart told her she had the power to accomplish this new undertaking. But he had put the attempt a long way off, and bade her be patient. Patience, indeed! Wait until the end of the term—six months. In that time what an immense sum could be added to her store! No; she would act at once. Patience, as yet, was no prominent quality in her volatile disposition; and now, when so easy a victory over the crushing despot, dependence she so loathed was at her will, she could not heed its voice. She would act at once. And then the thought of the dear friends she must disappoint by her disobedience checked her. But again the ambitious fever raged, and into her musings crept Miss Alice Parks; Alice, of whom Harry was so fond! She would go. She would see this paragon, and know why he raved so about her. And so, two desires mingled in her meditations, the one born of a healthy ambition to achieve independence, the other springing from a jealous affection, too mischievous to be the happy tenant of a young girl's heart. [186]

For three days duty and inclination struggled with Becky for the mastery. In the afternoon of the fourth day she took from her box the carefully hoarded sum she had earned at the paper mill, and set out for school.

That afternoon Captain Thompson, as was his usual custom, was seated at his desk in the corner of the sitting-room, making up his accounts for the day. He was alone; his good wife, as was *her* usual afternoon custom, was at Mrs. Sleeper's—a proceeding of which the peppery captain took not the least apparent notice. But he knew all that had happened during the year; knew what was happening now—the daily meetings of his wife and son; the reformation of Becky; his son's brave deed in the dam; the girl's heroism at the burning mill. But he never made any comments, and to all seemed an uninterested man, wrapped in ship-building and monetary speculations. [187]

But one single thread connected him with any interest in the Sleeper affairs. He and Teddy Sleeper had become warm friends. Teddy had wandered into the ship-yard one day, had watched the ship upon the stocks, and the men at work, and, desiring some information, had coolly walked up to Captain Thompson, and asked a question. The captain looked at him in surprise, then kindly answered him, found he was interested in the ship, and, to the astonishment of everybody, sat down, and told him all about it. From that time Teddy's out-door life was passed in the ship-yard. After school found him there, and the captain expecting him. They drove about town together; and people said the boy had got the right side of the captain, and his fortune would be made. [188]

But not a word of home dropped from Teddy's lips. The captain never asked questions in that direction; and Teddy was too shrewd to peril their friendship by treading on forbidden ground. This day Teddy had not put in an appearance, and for that or some other reason the captain was in his unhappiest mood. He blotted his ledger, spilled his ink, hitched about in his chair, and puffed and worried, until he worked himself into a steaming mood, that required frequent applications of his handkerchief. In his highest state of excitement came a knock at the front door.

"Here, you, Silly, you silly thing! where are you?" he shouted. "See who's at the door."

There was a "clap-clap-clap" in the next room, and Silly York made her appearance.

"Do you want me, captain?"

"No, I don't want you. Somebody's at the door. If they want you, they're welcome to you."

"Do you want me to go to the door?"

"Of course I do. What else are you here for? Start yourself, quick!"

Silly stepped across the room, and opened a door, and passed into the front entry. [189]

"Here, you! mind! I'm busy, and don't want to see anybody. Shut that door!"

Silly slammed the door after her. Then the captain heard a scream, and Silly's voice.

"O, you dear little thing! I must hug you! Come right in."

The door flew open.

"Didn't I tell you I wouldn't see anybody?" shouted the captain.

"You don't know who it is. You wouldn't shut her out—would you? She saved my sister!"

"Hang your sister! She—" And then he stopped, for in the room stood Silly, and the last one he ever expected to meet in his house—Becky Sleeper.

The captain looked at her in astonishment. He knew her well. They had never spoken to each other since that first day at school—but he had watched her since then—was well informed as to her progress. And yet, the bright, young, well-dressed, graceful girl, with a smile on her face, standing before him, took him by surprise, and made a *gentle* man of him at once.

"I hope I do not interrupt you, Captain Thompson," said Becky, very gently; "but I have a little business with you; and if you would kindly give me five minutes, I should be very much obliged." [190]

The captain got up from his chair, and made a low bow. It surprised him as soon as it was done; but he couldn't help it.

"Certainly, Miss Becky, if I can be of service to you,—Silly, you needn't stop."

"But I want to," said Silly. "She saved my sister."

Becky laughed.

"I'll come out and see you before I go," she said. "You're not afraid to trust me alone with the

captain—are you?”

Silly looked at the captain and then at Becky, evidently believing that it was her duty to stay and protect Becky.

“Here; you start your boots—quick!”

The captain mounted his high horse, and Silly started for the kitchen in a hurry.

“Now, Miss Becky, what have you to say?”

The captain sat at his desk, and motioned Becky to a chair. She did not obey his motion, but came to his side.

“Captain Thompson, I’ve been wanting to come to you, to thank you for being so kind to us all, for helping—no, not helping, for you have done everything. You have given us food and clothing; and without your aid I don’t know what would have become of us.” [191]

“O, pshaw!” said the captain. “Is that all you came for?”

“No. I came to beg your pardon for being so much trouble to you when I was a wild tomboy. I was young then; didn’t know how wrong it was. I’m older now, and see my error.”

The captain looked at her with increasing wonder. Could this be the tomboy who had snatched his whip from his hand, stolen his horse, and given him such a chase—this little woman, with her sweet voice and penitent air? Or was this some new trick?

“Well,” said he at last, gruffly; “is that all you came for?”

“No,” answered Becky. “When I found that we were indebted to you for food and clothing, when I began to be a better girl, I felt it was mean to let you do everything, and I, strong and active, doing nothing; so I went to work in the paper mill. You know how it was destroyed.” [192]

“Yes; and how a brave girl, at the risk of her own life, saved a weak and helpless companion,” burst out the captain. “O, I know it!”

“Yes,” said Becky, with heightened color, “the mill was burned. I had saved ninety dollars. O, I did so want to make it a hundred! But I couldn’t. I meant to bring it to you, to pay you in part for what you had done for me and mine. But I’ve brought you the ninety.” And Becky suddenly laid upon the desk before the eyes of the astonished captain her savings.

The captain started, then stared at the little pile of money very hard, then harder still at Becky, and back at the money again, until tears began to drop from his eyes, when, without any further ceremony, he pulled out his handkerchief, and blubbered like a big school-boy. It was now Becky’s turn to be surprised.

“O, captain, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. I only wanted to repay you just a little for your kindness. I didn’t mean any harm—indeed I didn’t.”

“Becky Sleeper, you’re a little angel, and I’m an ugly old brute. Pick up your money. I don’t want it. To think that I’ve been abusing you all this time, and you coming in this way to pour coals of fire on my head. I’m an old fool! Take your money—quick!” [193]

“No, captain, don’t ask me to do that. If you knew what a temptation that money has been to me, you would never ask me—never.”

“Temptation! What do you mean?”

“I’ll tell you, captain, a secret. You must not tell, not even Aunt Rebecca. You won’t—will you?” Becky smiled at the captain. “Honor bright.”

The captain smiled at Becky. It was a good-humored smile. They were getting on famously.

“I’ll keep your secret, Becky, when I get it.”

“Well, then, you must know that I’ve just learned of a very nice way to make money, one I should like very much. To get it in this nice way, it is necessary to make a journey to Boston, to see a certain man, and he would give me drawing, for engravings. Aunt Rebecca—no, Harry—told me of it; your Harry.”

The captain did not stop her at the mention of that name, a name forbidden to be spoken in that house. There was a little more color in his face; but he looked steadily at her.

“I had the money to take me there, and I was tempted to use it; tempted, O, so hard! till at last I remembered it was your money; and, to put the temptation from me, I brought it to you. I didn’t want to until I had the hundred. Now I’m glad I did. Had I gone, I should have disobeyed Aunt Rebecca, and—Harry.” [194]

“Why disobeyed Aunt Rebecca?” said the captain, quietly dropping the other party.

“Because *they*,” said Becky, not relishing the dropping game, “forbade my going until the expiration of the school term.”

“How? *She* forbid you! It’s a good idea; a nice way of earning money; and you want to go still?”

“O, indeed I do, if only it was right.”

“Right? Of course it’s right,” said the captain, roused at a chance for opposition. “*She’s* no right to prevent you, and I should like to see her do it. You want to go to Boston. You shall go.”

Becky flushed with pleasure.

"O, if could only go! I know I could succeed. But what would Aunt Rebecca and—"

"Hang Aunt Rebecca!" shouted the captain, cutting in to prevent the addition of the other name. [195]
"I've just as much right to direct your actions as she has. I'm going to Boston to-morrow morning. You shall go with me."

Before the appearance of Becky, the captain had no intention of taking a journey.

"O, that will be splendid—if I only could."

"You can, and shall. Go home, get ready, and to-morrow morning at five o'clock meet me at the school-house. Phil shall drive us over to Foxtown. We'll take the cars there, and be in Boston at one. Here, take your money;" and the captain swept it from the desk, and put it in her hand. "When I want it, I'll ask for it."

"But how can I ever pay you?"

"By shaking hands, and being friends with the old man. You may add a kiss if you like."

"A dozen!" cried Becky, throwing her arms about the captain's neck. "You dear, good, kind, noble old captain!"

"Now, good by, little one. Be sure and be on time to-morrow morning at five."

"When the clock strikes, you'll find me there. Good by."

Becky ran home with a happy heart, bounced into the sitting room, and told them all about it— [196]
Mrs. Thompson and Harry; then ran to her mother's room, and told her; then to the kitchen, and told Aunt Hulda. And such a surprised household it would be hard to find.

Harry Thompson frowned, and was inclined to put a stop to the journey; but his mother looked happy.

"Our little witch has caught the captain. Do not interfere, for out of this friendship I foresee a happy day for you and me. 'Let patience have her perfect work.'"

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG THE WOODPECKERS.

[197]



wenty years ago, in one of the busiest streets in bustling Boston, up three flights of stairs, sufficiently distant from the tumult of trade to escape its confusion, and near enough to the sun to receive the full benefit of its light, "John Woodfern, Designer and Engraver," plied his artistic trade, in the enjoyment of a large share of public patronage. He was a man who held the foremost place in his profession, renowned for his skill in fastening the fine points and delicate shades of a drawing upon wooden blocks, whence are produced those pictorial illustrations which often adorn, and sometimes disfigure, books, periodicals, and papers. He was also a man of good business habits, and his establishment was neatly arranged, and conducted in the most orderly manner.

An Englishman by birth, he brought to this country, besides a clear head and skilful hands, a love for the roast-beef and ale of Old England, a warm heart, and a jovial temper, the latter somewhat obscured by the characteristic fogs of gruffness and blunt speech, without which no Briton would be content to leave his native land. He was a large, handsome man of fifty, with light, curly hair, surrounding a polished pate, in whose centre flourished a single tuft of hair; blue eyes, and a long, flowing beard.

[198]

His establishment was divided into two sections—his own office at the head of the stairs, and his work-room, from which he was only separated by a partition, and which he could overlook, through the door, from his seat.

The office contained a handsome book-case, a desk, and his own work-table, where he did the finest work. Its walls were adorned with fine pictures and specimens of his work. Over the desk was displayed, on brackets, a polished champion cricket bat, ornamented with a silver plate, on which glistened his name and the match in which it was won. On his table were the usual implements of his craft—a small stand with a padded leather cushion, a frame in which was fitted an eye-glass, a fine assortment of "gravers," and blocks of wood in various stages of completion.

[199]

The work-room contained three tables, at which were seated three young men, with their eyes screwed down to eye-glasses, diligently pecking at drawings on wooden blocks. These young men, "woodpeckers" by trade, were Woodferns by name, being sons of the proprietor, and, like their father, all good fellows and skilful workmen. This room was plainly furnished with three tables and a transfer press, and above them a long shelf, on which were ranged a row of glass globes, filled with water, used to concentrate the light in night work.

Mr. Woodfern sat at his table, busily at work putting the finishing touches to a block, when unattended and unannounced, Miss Becky Sleeper marched into his presence.

Mr. Woodfern lifted his eye from the glass, and politely turned in his chair, with a nod to the visitor. The young Woodferns unscrewed their eyes from the wooden sockets in which they were imbedded, and very impolitely stared at the intruder.

"Good morning, sir," said Becky, in her sweetest tones. "Will you be kind enough to look at these drawings?"

Mr. Woodfern scowled. He had been pestered by an army of aspiring draughts*men*, of both sexes; and the London fog was on him. He answered shortly,—

[200]

"No, I don't want any drawings. Good morning," turned in his chair and applied his eye to its artificial socket.

A wave of confusion rolled over Becky's confident spirit. The gruff voice and the abrupt dismissal had not entered into her calculations. But she was not disposed to quit the field without a struggle, after so long a journey; so, gulping down her chagrin, she said,—

"But you don't understand. I've come a long way to get work. My friends tell me I am competent, and I have specimens of drawing. You'll surely look at them."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Woodfern, gruffly, not deigning to raise his eye. "I have all the draughtsmen I want; and I never employ girls."

"Why, you give Miss Alice Parks work—don't you?"

Caught. Mr. John Woodfern, how will you answer that question?

"I have given her work; and a precious sight of trouble she has made me."



BECKY MAKES A HIT. [Page 203.](#)

There was some comfort in that to Miss Becky's jealous heart. Miss Alice was not quite a paragon, after all. [201]

"Once for all, I don't want your drawings. I've no time to look at them. Good morning."

The tone was so chilling that a returning "good morning" trembled on Becky's lips. The tears sprang to her eyes. It seemed to her for a moment that all was lost. But, remembering the friends she must meet with the story of her defeat, remembering the captain patiently waiting in the street for her return, she yet lingered, hoping that a little reflection might produce a change in the temper of this gruff proprietor, and gain her a hearing. Profound silence; eyes glued to their sockets; not even the tools of the workmen broke the stillness, for these woodpeckers tapped no hollow oak tree, but pecked at solid boxwood, which emits no sound. Her eyes roved about the room until they fastened on the cricket-bat above the desk. They glistened at the sight.

"O, what a splendid cricket-bat!" she cried.

"Is that yours, sir? Did you win it?"

Mr. Woodfern raised his head, with a faint show of interest.

"Yes, I won it. What do you know about cricket?" [202]

"I know it's just the most splendid game I ever played," replied Becky, with enthusiasm.

"You play cricket!" said Mr. Woodfern, in surprise.

"Yes, indeed; but it was long ago. I was a famous hand at it, too, though I do say it. Please, sir, let me take it down. I won't hurt it."

"Certainly," said Mr. Woodfern, rising from his chair. "Handle it as much as you like."

He took it from its place, put it in Becky's hands, and resumed his seat, watching the girl with a lively interest, for cricket was a passion with him age could not smother. Becky took the bat and handled it like a true cricketer, placing herself in graceful positions, to display her knowledge of its use.

"Now, if we only had a ball!"

"If we had! We have," said Mr. Woodfern, opening a drawer in his table, and producing a cricket ball. "Now, what next?"

"Bowl me a ball, and you shall see," replied Becky, placing herself before an imaginary wicket.

The sight of a cricketer in position was enough to excite the enthusiastic sportsman; and when Becky shouted, "Play!" without a moment's thought he bowled a swift ball. Becky struck quick and hard; it flew across the room, into the work-shop, and struck a glass globe. There was a crash, and the imprisoned water poured on to the head of the youngest woodpecker in a miniature deluge. He sprang up, shouting, "Help, help!" [203]

"Gracious! what have I done?" faltered the terrified Becky.

Mr. Woodfern colored to the tuft of the oasis in the bald desert on his head, but quietly rose, shut the door between the two rooms, and resumed his seat.

"It's of no consequence. Let me see your drawings."

So out of the old life a second time had come her deliverance in time of trouble. Not altogether wasted, after all.

Mr. John Woodfern took the proffered portfolio and placed it in his lap. As he did so his eyes met Becky's, and the comical situation in which he had been placed overpowered him. He threw

himself back in his chair, and burst into a prolonged, loud and hearty peal of laughter. Having thus effectually dissipated the fog he opened the portfolio, and examined its contents. [204]

"So, so; this is your work—is it? Very good, fine, excellent! You had a good teacher, that's evident; but you have talent, that's still more evident. Who is your teacher?"

"Harry Thompson, sir," replied Becky.

"Harry Thompson of Harvard?" queried Mr. Woodfern.

"He was at Harvard, sir. He's now at Cleverly—Cleverly, Maine; that's where I live," said Becky.

"Indeed! It's my old friend. He's your teacher at cricket, too, I'll be bound. Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"If you'll be kind enough to remember, sir, you were very busy when I came in. You didn't give me a chance to tell you anything," said Becky, taking a mischievous pleasure in reminding the engraver of his brusque behavior.

"Hem, hem; that's so. I was busy, very busy, Miss—Miss—what's your name?"

"Rebecca Sleeper, sir. Harry calls me Becky."

"Well, Miss Becky, I like your drawings; but the fact is you've had no experience in drawing on wood." [205]

"But I could learn, sir," said Becky, quickly. "If you only knew how much need I have of money, you would give me a chance—I know you would."

At this moment the door opened, and a young lady made her appearance. She was taller than Becky, but young and graceful, with a bright, handsome face, lustrous black eyes, and a profusion of dark ringlets.

"Good morning, Miss Parks," said Mr. Woodfern, courteously.

Becky started, and stared at the visitor—Harry's paragon. It must be; it could be no other.

"Good morning, Mr. Woodfern," said Miss Parks, gayly. "It's the day after the fair, I know; but you will forgive me. I couldn't finish them in time."

The young lady unfastened her reticule, and produced three blocks, which she laid before the engraver.

"Forgive you?" said Mr. Woodfern. "I don't know about that. Five minutes more, and you would have been superceded by this young artist;" and he pointed to Becky.

Miss Parks looked at Becky, and Becky looked at Miss Parks. [206]

"Miss Parks," said Mr. Woodfern, "this is Miss Rebecca Sleeper, of Cleverly."

A flush of surprise overspread the features of Miss Parks.

"Miss Rebecca Sleeper of Cleverly! Why, it must be Harry's Becky. You dear little thing! how glad I am to meet you!" and she advanced with outstretched hands to Becky.

Becky met her advances with cordiality, though the appellation of "dear little thing" from a stranger somewhat surprised her.

"Harry has told me all about you. His letters are full of praises of you; and I know all about the adventure in the mill-dam, and the burning of the mill. We must be good friends."

So Harry wrote to her. She must be a very, very dear friend, then; too dear for her peace of mind. The old jealous feeling crept into Becky's heart, so heavy that she could scarcely hold back her tears; but she did, and answered nervously,—

"Yes; and I've heard a great deal about Miss Alice Parks. I'm glad I met you. It will please Harry to know that I met his dear friend."

Becky didn't mean to emphasize the "dear" so strongly; but she noticed it brought a flush to the face of Alice Parks. It was rather confusing, and the two young ladies stood looking at each other in silence. [207]

"Miss Sleeper wants work. She has brought me these sketches. Take a look at them," said Mr. Woodfern, handing the portfolio to Miss Parks.

The young lady took it, and, seating herself at the desk, immediately became interested in the drawings. Just then the door of the work-room opened, and Mr. George Woodfern entered the office. He was a tall, handsome fellow, the image of his father. On his entrance, Miss Alice Parks raised her head quickly.

"Good morning, George," she said, "come and look at these drawings, and confess I've found a rival at last."

George Woodfern crossed the office, with a quick step and a blushing face, and joined Miss Alice. The two put their heads together over the drawings, with such evident pleasure in each other's society, that had Alice not been such a *dear* friend of Harry's, Becky would have made a match on the spot. Their conference was long and earnest; and from their conversation Becky was convinced that they were pleased with her drawings. In the meantime Mr. Woodfern made himself agreeable to Becky, showed her how drawings were reversed on wood, and gave her many hints regarding "shading," "filling in," and the nice points of wood engravings. The young couple at the desk at last finished their examination. [208]

"Well, Miss Alice, what is the verdict?" asked Mr. Woodfern.

"Employ the young lady, by all means; though I fear 'Othello's occupation's gone,' as far as I am concerned. She can draw ever so much better than poor I."

Becky blushed with pleasure. So Harry's friend was her friend too. Mr. Woodfern took from his drawer the manuscript of two short stories and a poem. He then selected three blocks of boxwood from a row on his table, and placed the whole in Becky's hands.

"Miss Sleeper," he said, "on the recommendation of this talented young lady, I shall give you a trial. There are two stories for children, and a short 'baby' poem. The points to be illustrated are all marked. Take them, consult your friend Harry Thompson, and if you send me three satisfactory drawings within a fortnight, I will send you my check for fifteen dollars. If not satisfactory, I pay nothing." [209]

Becky's heart thrilled. How kind, how good of Mr. Woodfern! She thanked him warmly enough, but the words seemed a long way off from the thanksgiving that glowed in her heart. Mr. Woodfern turned away abruptly, and entered the work room.

"Now come over here and let me give you a few hints from an experienced hand. We shan't want you any more, George."

George Woodfern laughed, and in turn departed to the privacy of the work-room; and the two young ladies were left to their own deliberations.

All this time Captain Thompson was patiently sitting in a carriage at the entrance, awaiting the return of his charge. On the arrival of the train in Boston at one o'clock, he had taken a carriage and driven to the engraver's. He had been anxious to participate in the interview; but Becky, fearing his quick temper might cause trouble, had prevailed upon him to allow her to be the sole carver of her fortunes with the wood carver. Thus far the peppery captain had enjoyed this, to him, new sensation hugely. The bright, cheerful, happy demeanor of the girl, her intelligent and witty conversation, her delight in the fresh experience of the day, had made him really happy; and his warm heart bubbled up through its rough exterior with desires to still further gratify her wishes. [210]

And so he waited patiently a long hour for her return. She came bounding down the stairs, and leaped into the carriage, her face rosy, her eyes bright with triumph.

"It's a success, captain. I've conquered, and I'm carrying home lots of work."

"Of course you've conquered. I knew you would; and we've done it without *their*—her—help, too," said the captain, chuckling with triumph. "Now let's see—we've got two hours for dinner and a drive; and then back to Cleverly."

They drove to a hotel, had an excellent dinner, took the carriage again, and Becky was shown the Boston sights, all of which were new revelations to the country girl, whose delight made the old captain's heart glow and glow again.

In due time they took the train for Foxtown, and then Becky related her adventure, in the course of which Miss Alice Parks appeared upon the scene. [211]

"She's a dear friend of Harry's—your Harry, captain. I shouldn't wonder if one of these days she should become his wife."

Becky said this bravely. The captain could not know what a throb of pain darted through Becky's bosom at the thought.

"Become his wife! Nonsense! What are you thinking of, Becky?"

The captain looked fierce and angry, and Becky saw it.

"Well, all I know, he calls her his dear friend, and she calls him her dear friend, and they write to each other; and that's the way lovers do—don't they?"

The captain stared out of the window, moving uneasily in his seat, snapping his teeth together very often, all of which Becky saw and took advantage of. A wild scheme had crept into the girl's head. Harry and Harry's mother had done much for her; it was time she should repay it. The captain had a wilder scheme in his head, and was in exactly the right mood to combat the proposed alliance.

"He marry this girl! I'd like to see him attempt it! I'd like to see him attempt it!" [212]

This came involuntarily from the captain's mouth after a very long silence.

"Why, captain," said Becky, "she's a splendid girl, and so smart with her pencil! And if they love each other,"—here she gave a gulp,—"I'm sure it's only right that they should marry. And then Harry's so good! O, it would be wicked to prevent his happiness. You won't—will you, captain?"

The captain said nothing, but grew more and more uneasy; said nothing, but thought, thought hard. What could he do? He had cast the boy off; he was his own master. He had no power to accomplish the wish that was in his mind.

"O, if you only knew how good and kind Harry has been to me, you would never desire to break his heart."

Here Becky broke down, and commenced sobbing. The captain started, put his arm about Becky, and drew her head to his breast, still looking out of the window, and saying nothing.

Becky's weeping was of short duration; there was too much at stake; and so, still lying on the

captain's breast, with his arm about her, softly and gently she spoke of Harry; of his kindness to her; of his brave deeds; of the love he had gained from all who knew him; of his devotion to his mother; rehearsed incidents in his college life; brought out of his boyhood history little scraps of goodness so carefully treasured in her grateful heart. If she had been pleading for Harry's life, she could not have been more earnest and determined in the recital of his virtues. And the captain sat there, listening, saying nothing; and the little pleader babbled on, unaware that at the captain's heart the old obstinate roots were being plucked from their bed; that the warmth of his new love was flowing in thawing out the long-frozen channel of paternal affection. [213]

The cars reached Foxtown, and still the captain said nothing. The carriage was in waiting, and an hour's ride took them to Cleverly. The captain was silent all the way. Phil drove straight on to the Sleeper house. It was twelve o'clock. There was a light in the sitting-room. At the sound of wheels, Mrs. Thompson came to the door. The curtain was drawn aside, and Becky saw Harry peering out into the darkness. She jumped from the carriage.

"Won't you come in, captain?" said Becky. [214]

The captain shook his head.

"I shall come up to see you to-morrow, to thank you for being so kind to-day. O, I've had a splendid time. Good night."

She approached the carriage, and held out her hand. The captain grasped it.

"I shall come up to-morrow, captain. Shall I come alone?"


Becky's voice trembled. She had been trying hard for a triumph. She feared she had failed.

"No, Becky, no. God bless you, child! Bring him with you; bring Harry home!"

Phil Hague drove off down the hill at a lively rate, Uncle Ned being started into a gallop, by an Irish howl, which might have been heard a mile off.

"Bring Harry home!" Becky heard it; Mrs. Thompson heard it; Harry heard it. She had triumphed, after all—this little girl, whom Mrs. Thompson folded to her bosom, whom Harry clasped by the hand. Mother and son might well be happy. Reconciliation at last. But for Becky, happiness supreme. She had accomplished this, and hers was the hand commissioned to bring Harry home.

DELIA SLEEPER'S SHIP COMES IN.

ecky received the warm thanks and congratulations of the happy mother and son with a grateful heart. She had been enabled to repay, in some part, the love and care they had bestowed upon her. She had conquered the stubborn father, and lifted the cross from the shoulders of the patient wife. But she felt that she had been but an instrument shaped by their hands for the work, and to them she unselfishly gave the credit of her triumph. Not all, however; one other, who had been her counsellor and guide; one to whom all her thoughts and actions had been confessed; one who, with almost supernatural wisdom had taught her wayward feet to tread the path of duty; who out of her own needs, had sought peace in the boundless love of a heavenly Father, and had brought her child into the same tender embrace,—the stricken mother, who for two long years, helpless upon her bed, had borne all so meekly and patiently; to her the grateful daughter gave a generous share of the glory which surrounded this unexpected reconciliation. [216]

That night mother and daughter shared the same couch. Aunt Hulda, who had a great antipathy to strange beds, banished herself from her accustomed pillow without a word of complaint, glad to make the child, who had wound herself about the queer spinster as no other had ever been able to, happy at any cost. Alone with her mother, Becky's tongue flew fast and furious with the recital of her wanderings and workings, until the weariness of the long, strange day overpowered her nimble organ of speech. In the middle of a sentence, she dropped asleep, her mother's hand fast clasped in hers, all forgotten, even her accustomed prayer unspoken. But it lay there in the warm, beating, affectionate heart, and the mother's lips bore it to the heavenly throne, joined to her own earnest plea that blessings from the Unseen hand might strew the path of life with much of happiness for her own precious child.

Having eased his unhappy conscience of the heavy load it had borne so long, the conquered captain went home in a dazed sort of amazement at the act which he had committed. He could not regret it, would not have recalled his words had he the power. There was a warming up of his stubborn spirit when he thought of the girl who had so craftily spread for him the net in which he had been captured, but no desire to loose his bonds, and escape. It was all for the best; they would be a happy family after the first meeting. But the first meeting bothered the captain. What could he say to this son who had been shut out from home so many years? It was a serious question, and one he could not readily answer. He went home thinking about it: went to bed, still thinking; and at last fell asleep, to dream of it. [217]

Mrs. Thompson came home, escorted to her door by Harry; said "Good night," with a happy heart,—it was to be their last parting in this strange manner; was not surprised to find her husband missing when she entered the sitting-room, nor surprised to find him snoring when she entered the sleeping-room, but had a quiet laugh to herself as she thought how ashamed the captain tried to appear of his good actions. She would not disturb him for the world; said nothing to him of the last night's work, the next morning, as he fidgeted at the breakfast table, and looked everywhere but in her face. [218]

The captain did not leave the house, but gave his whole attention to the preparation of the speech with which he was to meet his long-absent son. On one thing he was determined—he would be a father still. He had been disobeyed; it was for the son to ask pardon. He would be cool, dignified, collected. He watched the bridge road uneasily. At half past eight he saw Becky leave the gate with her school-books in her hands, and after came Harry. He left the window at once. It was coming; it would soon be over. He sat on the sofa, covered his eyes with his hand, and waited. He did not need to look—he felt their coming. Now they were on the bridge; now they had passed the school-house, were crossing the road, were at the door. Yes, a ring! Mrs. Thompson rose from her chair, looked at her husband, with his face hidden, smiled, and passed into the entry. Be a man, captain; be a father, cool, dignified, collected! The door opened; the captain rose to his feet.

"Good morning, captain. Here I am, and here's Harry." Becky Sleeper's voice. [219]

He looked at her smiling face, beyond her to the manly form of his son, advancing with outstretched hand, then grasped that hand, and shook it with nervous energy.

"Harry, my boy, welcome home. I have been a poor father to you. Forgive and try me again!"

He burst into tears, and sobbed like a child. The hard heart was melted, and the cool, collected, dignified plans, on which he had so much depended, were dissipated at the touch of Nature.

Mrs. Thompson quietly drew Becky into the dining-room, and shut the door, leaving father and son to become better acquainted. The conference was so long that Becky slipped out of the side door, fearful of being late to school, after a promise given to Mrs. Thompson that she would come in and take tea with the reunited family. She kept her promise, and had the satisfaction of seeing Harry in his right place, the captain in a jovial fit of good nature, and Mrs. Thompson's handsome face radiant with the warm glow of a contented heart.

The captain was not quite content with this quiet reconciliation, but must kill the fatted calf in honor of his son's return; and three days afterwards the good people of Cleverly were surprised by the intelligence that the Thompsons were to give a party. [220]

And such a party! The Thompson mansion was lighted from bottom to top, and along the entire reach of the various outbuildings, the trees were hung with lanterns. A blaze of light outside, a scene of joyous festivity within. Nobody was forgotten. Parson Arnold, in clerical black and white,

with his wife in a new silk dress,—the gift of Mrs. Thompson,—benignly circulated among their flock. Mr. Drinkwater was there, crowding Deacon Proctor into a corner, with the discussion of a theological point. Poor Mr. York was there, with a feeble cough, and dilated nostrils eagerly sniffing the air, as the door of the dining-room occasionally opened, while his buxom wife was busily at work with Silly, in the kitchen; and little Jenny York was there, perched on the arm of a sofa, drinking in with rare delight all this flow of mirth, and light, and gay attire, and pleasant conversation. The scholars, dressed in their best, played and romped about the many-roomed mansion to their hearts' content. And Teddy, the captain's favorite, dressed in a new suit,—his patron's gift,—proudly moved among the company, with his sister on his arm. And Becky—light and joyous Becky—was the queen; everywhere she met smiles and kind words of congratulation, for, somehow, her share in the bringing about of this happy night had been noised abroad, and all were anxious to do her honor. A dozen times that night Captain Thompson had clasped her hand.

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"It's all your work, Becky!"

A dozen times the face of Harry Thompson had beamed upon her, "Thanks to you, Becky!" And every look of the happy mother, as she moved among her guests, was a silent prayer of thankfulness to Becky.

It was a gay night for Cleverly; and when the door of the dining-room was thrown open, and the guests assembled about the tables,—whose crooked legs seemed ready to snap under their burdens of good cheer,—a night of feasting such as Cleverly had never before witnessed.

At this stage of the proceedings, Teddy, dazzled by the tempting array of edibles, quite forgot his gallantry, and slipping from Becky's side, went in pursuit of a far-off frozen pudding. His place was quickly supplied by Harry Thompson.

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"Well, pet, enjoying yourself, I hope."

"Enjoying myself! Why, Harry, I never was so happy in all my life—never!"

"I have a message for you from a dear friend—Alice Parks."

"Indeed! Have you heard from her lately?"

"Yes, I received a letter from her to-day; and it's so full of praises of one Becky Sleeper, that I am really jealous."

Becky made no reply. Somehow, she did not feel quite so happy now. It seemed to her that they were getting along very pleasantly, without having this young lady added to their company. He was jealous, too, of her evident fondness for the little girl she had befriended. He must be very much in love with her, then. She looked up, and met such a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, that she laughed aloud at her own folly.

"O, Harry, you do like to torment me. I hope you won't plague her so, when you get her."

"When I get her? O, no, Becky, I shall be a different man, a very different man—when I get her."

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Still the same mischievous look. What could he mean? Was it all settled, then? Was he sure of her? She turned away, sick at heart, disappointed at she knew not what. She only wished she was at home.

"Here, Becky, come with me. I have purloined a big dish of goodies, and hidden it under the sofa in the sitting-room. Come with me; we shall be alone in there."

It was the voice of the captain; a welcome relief to her embarrassed position. Smilingly she took the arm of her friend, and soon they were comfortably snuggled together on the sofa, and the captain's teasing offspring forgotten.

"Ah, Becky, there's lots of young and gay fellows about to-night; but I know you will spare a few moments for the old man," said the captain, as he produced his "goodies" from beneath the sofa.

"Indeed I will. O, you are so kind to make Harry's coming home so pleasant to all of us!"

"Yes, chatterbox; and you were kind to give me the opportunity to do it. But tell me, what shall we do with him, now we've got him home?"

"Why keep him, of course. You don't think he'll run away—do you?"

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"I'm afraid he will. He's talking now of going to Boston to study law. It's all nonsense. He needn't do anything but just spend my money."

"He never would be satisfied with such a life as that. He'd make a splendid lawyer, I know."

"Yes; but he can study with Squire Barnes, here at home. There's few lawyers can beat him in an argument. If I could only find some way to keep him here! He's old enough to marry."

Becky winced.

"Perhaps he's thinking of that, and wants to be in Boston, near Alice Parks."

"Alice Fiddlesticks!" shouted the captain, upsetting his plate. "Don't talk nonsense, Becky."

"He had a letter from her to-day," said Becky, innocently unmindful of the fact that she might be betraying a secret.

"He did—did he?" said the captain, growing red in the face. "I'll put a stop to that. He shan't marry that girl; I won't have it. I'll just have him in here, and know what he means."

He jumped to his feet, dropping his plate.

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"O, captain, don't say anything to him to-night," cried Becky, seizing the captain's arm, and preventing his leaving the room. "He would hate me if I made trouble between him and you; and I love him so dearly! Don't captain, don't. You'll break my heart."

The little goose dropped the captain's arm, and fled to the sofa, covered her face with her hands, and sobbed aloud. The captain stared at her. It was evident to him she did love Harry; and his hatred of Miss Alice Parks grew stronger. But it was no time for a scene; and he sat himself down beside Becky, put his arm around her, and penitently promised to be quiet, and not interfere. He gradually succeeded in bringing Becky into a lighter mood; and as the refreshed company from the dining-room drifted that way, the party on the sofa were hugely enjoying a joke the captain had perpetrated for the benefit of his companion.

In due time the dining-room was cleared of the fragments of the feast, the tables rolled against the walls, and, with Harry as master of ceremonies, a succession of familiar in-door pastimes was inaugurated for the younger members of the company. "Fox and Geese," "Blind Man's Buff," and "Hunt the Slipper," gave pleasant entertainment to the light-hearted revellers. [226]

Nor did the happy occasion end here. Mr. Clairborn, the chorester, had been running about the room, watching Mr. Arnold with a feverish excitement he found hard to control. At last that worthy individual, to set a good example to his parishioners, tucked his good wife under his arm and departed. Then Mr. Clairborn ran to the sofa and from behind it took a long green bag, of peculiar shape, and from the bag he took—a fiddle, to the amazement of certain staid neighbors, who thought the man crazy. Of these people he took not the least notice, but, with his instrument in full view, marched to the head of the dining-room.

Instantly there was a shout, "A dance! a dance!" A dance in Deacon Thompson's house! He'd soon put a stop to that. Anxious looks were cast in his direction; but he was busy talking to Mrs. York, and took not the least notice of what was going on about him.

"Hull's Victory; take your partners!" shouted Mr. Clairborn.

The captain did not move; the company did. There was a moment's bustle, and then Mr. Clairborn's bow went dancing across his fiddle, and twenty happy couples danced up and down the dining-room. Then came "Virginia Reel." "Money Musk," "Fisher's Hornpipe," and a regular succession of good old contra dances, with a merry accompaniment of glib tongues and happy laughter. O, captain, you are laying yourself open to a severe reckoning at the next church meeting. Little cared the stubborn captain what might come of his folly. "Eat, drink, and be merry." The lost son was home again. They might make a bonfire of his old house; but they should never forget this night. [227]

In the height of their merriment, a strange figure dashed into their midst. It was Aunt Hulda.

"Stop, quick! Where's Becky Sleeper?"

The music ceased, and all gazed at the weird figure which, with glaring eyes and dishevelled hair, stood in their midst.

"Here, Aunt Hulda, what's the matter?" and Becky stepped from her place among the dancers.

"O, Becky! Becky! home, quick! Your mother's had another shock!"

Becky screamed, and ran after Aunt Hulda, who immediately turned and left the house. There was no more dancing: the company quietly dispersed. When the last guest had departed, Mrs. Thompson put on her shawl, and with Harry and the captain, started for the house across the bridge. The church clock struck eleven. [228]

At that very moment the train entered the depot at Foxtown, and from it jumped a stout, long-bearded weather-bronzed man.

Aunt Hulda was right. A second stroke of paralysis had fallen upon Delia Sleeper, sealing the lips that had so often of late uttered tender words of love to the heart-broken child, who now lay weeping upon her breast. There was no sign of life upon that pale face, save in the eyes that wandered from face to face, and sought the open door with a wishful look. They were all about her,—Aunt Hulda, Mrs. Thompson, Harry, the captain, Teddy,—all anxiously waiting the verdict of Dr. Allen. Soon the doctor made his appearance, soberly examined his patient, gave a few whispered instructions to Aunt Hulda, and left the room, followed by the captain.

"O, mother, speak to me! only speak to me!" sobbed Becky. "Tell me you forgive me for leaving you. I didn't know this was coming—indeed I didn't. Forgive me dear, dear mother!" [229]

No sound from the lips, but the eyes sought the dear face with a troubled look.

"Nay, Becky," said Mrs. Thompson, "you have done no wrong. It was your mother's wish that you should go to-night."

The roving eyes thanked the good woman for her interpretation of their language.

"No, no; it was wrong to leave her. She'll die, and leave me—I know she will."

"Hush, Becky," said Aunt Hulda. "The doctor said she'd rally. Great care is necessary. Another shock would be fatal."

Thus admonished, Becky grew very quiet, but knelt at the side of the bed, with her eyes fastened upon her mother's. Mrs. Thompson tried to take her from the room, but she waved her off. Notwithstanding the doctor's whispered hope, dread forebodings filled the hearts of all the watchers of that pale face, with its gleaming eyes. For an hour that room was as quiet as if beneath a spell. No one there could be of the least assistance; yet not one departed. So quiet,

that the far-off noise of wheels at that late hour startled them; and a sudden light dilated the watchful eyes upon the bed. They fastened upon the door, full of expectancy and hope. [230]

The wheels drew nearer, nearer yet; they stopped before the house. A moment after there came a hurried tread; the door was thrown open, and in the room stood the long-expected husband,—Cyrus Sleeper.

“Delia, wife! home, home at last!”

Those wishful eyes fastened upon his face an instant, gleamed brighter still, and then closed—closed forever. Their work was done.

Faithful eyes; let them be covered. They have watched and waited for the ship; it has come, freighted with treasure; but not to enrich that loving heart. The ship has come, to meet another leaving an earthly port—God’s invisible bark, bearing one more purified soul out into the sea of eternity, unto the haven of heavenly bliss. Speedy shall be thy voyage, gentle mother. Behind thee are tears and lamentations, and the memory of thy patient endurance of adversity’s long trial; before thee lies the new life. Freed from earthly bonds, eager to do thy Maker’s work in the great hereafter, loving spirits, with glad hosannas, shall welcome thy coming to the port of peace.

TWO YEARS AFTER.



he little brown house on the hill vanished; in its place stands a modern mansion, broad and high, attractively arrayed in white and green, with commodious out-buildings, broad walks and flower-beds about it; a wide and well-cultivated vegetable patch stretching to the water, with a young orchard, handsome and vigorous, away to the right. There are evidences of abundant means in its laying out, and of rare taste in its nurture. It is still the Sleeper place, and Captain Cyrus Sleeper is the head of its household. When the earthly remains of Delia Sleeper had been laid away in the quiet churchyard, and the serious faces of the gossips of Cleverly had resumed their wonted aspect, eager was the desire of these curious people to know the cause of the long absence of the captain; and the stricken household were not long left to the solitude they coveted. [232]

The captain's story was very brief. Generally a man of voluble tongue, the sad scene which had greeted his return home seemed to have so shocked him, that his communications were abrupt, often rude, and entirely unsatisfactory to the news-seekers.

He had been to California, among the first adventurers to the Golden State, had struck gold with the earliest, and at the end of a year's absence from home, returned to San Francisco well laden with treasure. Here a thirst for speculation took hold of him; and, without experience, he became the gull of a set of sharpers, and in less than three months was penniless. Back to the mines again, but with a sterner experience. The mines were overcrowded, gold was harder to find, and still harder to keep. Yet he worked away for eighteen months, recovered all he had lost, and came back to San Francisco, determined to start for home. But this time he had a partner; and before the division of the hard-won nuggets was made, his partner, thinking a whole loaf better than half a loaf, vanished with the joint stock, leaving Sleeper with barely enough to reach home.

At this time news of the gold discoveries in Australia reached California, and thirsty Sleeper started for the new fount, to fill his empty pitcher. His good luck returned to him, and, after long and patient delving, the coveted treasure was in his grasp. Taught wisdom by experience, he banked his gold as fast as gained, and when he reached Boston was worth at least three hundred thousand dollars. [233]

He reached home, a wealthy man, to find his wife dying of neglect; to find she had not heard from him for years. He could not understand it. Had he written? Certainly, often. But no letters had ever reached her. Yet when closely questioned, it appeared he had only written twice, being a man with whom penmanship was a most unmanageable craft, and had entrusted his epistles to the care of others. He was a fair type of too many sailors; the bonds of affection held strong at home; but away, the driving winds and tossing waves snapped them, and they were useless to guide the giddy rover.

Cyrus Sleeper mourned his wife deeply for a while, and then his bustling spirit set itself to work. He was proud of his daughter; gazed upon her with admiration; watched her quick steps and ready tact in household affairs, and swore a big sailor oath to himself that she should have the best home in Cleverly. He kept his word. He went to Captain Thompson, and asked him to take his child until he could build. The captain took them all—his friend, Becky, Teddy, even Aunt Hulda; and for a year they were the inhabitants of his house. [234]

Then the old house came down, and the new structure went up. With ready money and a pushing spirit, Cyrus Sleeper found men and materials ready at his command; and after a year's absence the family returned to the old spot, to find it entirely metamorphosed, as if by the hands of an enchanter.

During this year Becky had not been idle. Though the necessity for work had passed away, the spirit of independence still hovered about her. She had made a contract with Mr. Woodfern, and she determined to fulfil it. She found drawing on wood no easy matter; but she resolutely persevered, and in a fortnight sent her three blocks to Mr. Woodfern. Two were accepted; the third was returned, with the concise message, "Try again," and matter for three new illustrations. Emboldened by her success, she worked at her drawing through the winter, with a constantly growing love for her task, and ever increasing show of improvement, until no blocks were returned, and the engraver clamored for more. [235]

Nor did her usefulness end here. Eager to relieve Mrs. Thompson of a part of the burden which her large family entailed upon her, she dashed into domestic affairs with alacrity, and proved an able assistant, and a ready solver of the mysteries of housekeeping. Another loving and holy task—the care of her mother's grave—was never neglected. Daily the grave, which bore a white slab at its head, on which the name "Mother" was carved, was visited by her on whose heart that dear name was so indelibly engraved; and twining vines and fresh white flowers gave token of the fond affection of the motherless child.

Poor Aunt Hulda having thus unexpectedly become an inmate of Captain Thompson's house, where she was treated with the utmost respect, had a return of her old grumbling programme, to the dismay of Becky. Having no active employment to keep her mind off herself, it was no wonder that the appetite she had so long supplied should grow restive. But not until the spinster spoke of going over to "help" Parson Arnold's wife, did Becky hit upon a cure for her nervousness. Then it suddenly occurred to her that there were others who needed real "help," and so, taking Aunt Hulda to her chamber, she spread out a neat little campaign of charity, in which Aunt Hulda, furnished with a well-filled purse, and unlimited freedom to call upon her for supplies, was to [236]

enact the *role* of an angel of mercy, because Becky was "so busy." This dispelled the vapors at once. The homely angel took up her mission with alacrity; and many a poor creature in Cleverly blessed the dear old maid for her ministrations, with tears of gratitude.

When the new house was finished, and they had moved in, Cyrus Sleeper walked over to settle with Captain Thompson. He found this no easy matter. Captain Thompson would not listen to it. He had induced Delia Sleeper to embark with him in speculation; she had lost all, and it was his duty to care for her and her children. As for the living during the year, they had taken them as visitors; were glad to have them, and would take them again willingly.

Captain Sleeper was determined, and Captain Thompson obstinate; and they came to pretty high words, and parted, vowing they would never speak to each other again. Becky tried to reconcile them, and at last made them agree to leave the matter to a referee for settlement, she to name the party. To their surprise, she named Aunt Hulda. That distinguished character immediately locked herself in her room,—for she had an apartment in the new house. [237]

For a week she worked at accounts, partly drawn from her wise old head. At the end of that time she called the two captains before her, and placed in their hands a long bill. "Captain Sleeper debtor to Captain Thompson," in which every item of provisions and clothing, that Captain Thompson had paid for, figured, and the sum total of which amounted to seven hundred dollars, which Captain Sleeper must pay. Captain Sleeper wrote a check, payable to the order of Captain Thompson, for one thousand dollars—he wouldn't pay a cent less. Captain Thompson took the check, without a word, wrote across the back of it, "Pay to Hulda Prime," and handed it to the astonished woman.

"That's the fee for your work. Now don't let's hear any more about a settlement." [238]

The two captains shook hands; Becky hugged Aunt Hulda, and told her they had served her just right. The spinster tried to speak, but couldn't, for her tears. The matter was satisfactorily settled forever, and the hitherto penniless referee found herself no penniless bride, when the new mill being in successful operation, Mark Small took her to a home of her own, and the romantic episode in the life of an old maid became one of the chronicles of Cleverly.

Teddy Sleeper, by mutual consent of the two captains, was regularly apprenticed to the trade of ship carpentering—an occupation which soon reduced his weight, enlarged his muscles, and increased his appetite. Hard work dissipated his once sluggish disposition; a love for his trade aroused ambition; and Captain Thompson had the satisfaction of knowing his *protege* would in time become a successful ship-builder.

Harry Thompson entered the office of Squire Alden, to study law, to the delight of his father, and took to work so earnestly that the scheming captain could not find it in his heart to risk another rupture by opening his batteries for the purpose of defeating the alliance which he had many reasons for believing was at some future time to be completed between his son and Alice Parks. [239]

Two years after the death of her mother found Becky Sleeper mistress of her father's home, with unlimited means at her command, yet careful and prudent in its management, relying upon her tried friends—Aunt Hulda and Mrs. Thompson—for advice; always cheerful, yet ever earnest, doing her best for the comfort of all about her, moving easily in her exalted sphere, with all the roughness of her tomboy days quite worn away, and the graces of gentle, cultivated womanhood shining all about her.

Cleverly folks were prouder of the young housekeeper than they had been of the brave girl. Captain Sleeper was a social man, and would have a lively house, and many and brilliant were the gatherings over which Becky presided. Yet she liked the neighborly company of Captain Thompson, or Aunt Rebecca, or Harry best of all. The latter made himself quite at home there, and of course Cleverly people talked about it, and made a match at once.

Yet the young people spoken of hardly acted like lovers. They were not in the habit of secreting themselves among the window curtains, or wandering down the walks hand in hand, or conversing in that mysterious language of the eyes so tender and significant. And so at last the good people believed themselves mistaken, and the wife-seeking young fellows of the neighborhood took courage, and laid siege to the richly-endowed heart of Miss Becky Sleeper. [240]

One of the number—Herbert Arnold, son of the pastor, a slim, delicate young man—became a frequent visitor, and threw longing glances through the glasses of his gold-rimmed spectacles, and paid much attention to Aunt Hulda, whose pies were his exceeding delight, and listened to the captain's long yarns without a yawn, and went away firmly convinced he was making an impression upon the heart of Becky. But the young lady shut the door after him, with a smile, and turned away, to dream of somebody else.

The last rays of an October sun were decking the broad piazza of the house with a golden glow. It had been a busy day with Becky, and, a little weary, she threw open the door, to breathe the air, after her long season of labor. Sitting on the steps, tracing in the sand before him with a cane, was Harry Thompson, evidently busy with some problem. With a smile, she cautiously slipped behind him, and looked at his work. No difficult problem tasked his cane; only a name written in the sand—"Becky Sleeper." She started back, and a flush deeper than the sun could paint overspread her face. [241]



HARRY WRITES IN THE SAND. [Page 243.](#)

"Why, Harry! you here?"

The name quickly disappeared from the sands, and a flushed face turned towards her.

"Yes—O, yes—how do you do? Nice evening—isn't it?" answered Harry, hurriedly.

"Why, what in the world are you doing there? Why don't you come in?"

"Thank you; not just now. I'm very busy thinking."

"Indeed! Then perhaps I'd better retire. I wouldn't for the world interrupt your *new* occupation," said Becky; and a merry laugh rippled on her lips.

"That's right; laugh, Becky. It's an old occupation, that, very becoming to you," returned Harry. "It reminds me of the days when we were both so young and innocent. Ah, those good old days! We were great friends then, Becky."

"I hope we are good friends now, Harry."

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"Of course we are. But now you are quite a woman, full of cares; yet a brave, good, noble little woman, rich and courted."

"Thanks to those who trained the vine once running to waste, flatterer. What I am I owe to those who loved me; what I might have been without their aid, not all the riches in the world could have prevented."

"True, Becky. By the by, I have a letter from an old friend will interest you. Oh such startling news?"

Becky colored, yet compressed her lips resolutely. Always that old friend.

"From Alice Parks?" she said.

"Yes, from Alice Parks. You know what an interest I take in that young lady's welfare, and you shall share in my delight. Look at that."

He handed her a letter; she took it with a pang of uneasiness; mechanically unfolded it. There dropped from it two cards, fastened with white ribbon. Harry picked up the cards and handed them to her. She glanced at them.

"O, Harry! she's married!"

"Certainly. Mr. George Woodfern and Miss Alice Parks, after a long and patient courtship, have united their destinies. The *designing* young woman having *engraved* herself upon the heart of the young engraver, the new firm is ready for business."

[243]

"O, Harry, I'm so sorry!" faltered Becky.

"Sorry? for what, pray? They'll be very happy."

"Sorry for you, Harry. They will be happy; but you—you—you loved her so dearly—didn't you?"

"Sorry for me? Well, I like that!" And Harry indorsed his liking with a hearty laugh. "Loved her? Why, Becky, what put that into your head?"

Becky was confused. She thought of the uneasiness she had caused Captain Thompson by her suspicions, to say nothing of the uneasiness she had caused herself.

"Why, Harry, you wrote to her, and she wrote to you; and I told your father that I thought you were engaged."

"Indeed! that accounts for the old gentleman's fidgets when I received a letter. No, Becky, I admired, and do admire, that young lady; but love her! make her my wife! I never had the least idea of it. My heart is engaged elsewhere." [244]

"Indeed! I never heard of it."

"That's my misfortune, then. I have always loved a dear old playmate, one whom I have watched grow into a strong and beautiful woman; whom I would not wrong with the offer of my hand until I had fully proved my power to win my way in the world. Do you know her, Becky?"

He still sat there, looking up into her face, with eyes so full of strong and tender love, that Becky was almost sure she saw her own image mirrored there; and her heart beat wildly.

"Becky, must I say more?"

He looked at her mischievously; then turned and traced upon the sands the name again—"Becky Sleeper."

"O, Harry, Harry! I'm so glad, so glad!"

She sank down by his side; his arm was about her, and her head was on his breast. Very much like lovers, now. So thought Mrs. Thompson, as she stepped inside the gate; so thought two old fellows, who just then came from the barn towards them.

"Look there, Cyrus, old boy; there's poaching on your ground."

"All right, Paul—if my dove must go. It will be tenderly nurtured there." [245]

And so, in due time, the "Tomboy" became a lovely bride; and the name Harry Thompson had shaped upon the sand, was written in the old family Bible; and another generation of Thompsons sported in the orchard, and plucked fruit from the old tree where Becky Sleeper had long ago been found Running to Waste.

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Illustrations have been moved to paragraph breaks near where they are mentioned.

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Variations in spelling and hyphenation were retained as they appear in the original publication, except that obvious typos have been corrected.

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