DOROTHY

RAYMOND

HURST & CO

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EVELYN RAYMOND

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BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

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Dorothy at Oak Knowe
Dorothy's Triumph
Dorothy's Tour

CONTENTS

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CHAPTER I

HOW DOROTHY CAME

One spring morning Mrs. John Chester opened the front door of her little brick house and screamed. There, upon the marble step, stood a wicker baby-wagon with a baby in it; and, having received this peculiar greeting, the baby screamed, too. Then it laughed, Mrs. Chester laughed, and, hearing both the screams and the laughter, postman John Chester hurriedly set down his cup of coffee and ran to the doorway. In another instant he, also, was laughing. What childless, child-loving man could help doing so, beholding the pretty sight before him?

For Martha, his wife, had caught the little creature out of the wagon and was ecstatically hugging it, cooing to it, mothering it, as naturally as if this little one she was tossing up and down were not almost the first child she had ever so fondled.

"John! John! O John! *It's meant!* It's for us! See, see? The little card on its coat says: 'My name is Dorothy C. I have come to be your daughter.' Our daughter, John Chester! Oh! what a blessed gift! Who—who—can have sent her?"

Then John Chester stopped laughing and, laying his hand on his wife's shoulder with a protesting pressure, said:

"There, little woman, don't go building hopes on such a thing as this. Doubtless, some of the neighbors have left the little one here for a joke. If the good Lord has sent us no babies of our own it's not likely He'd put it into the hearts of others to give us theirs. It'll be called for before I get in from my rounds. Well, good-bye. Wish I could stay and play with the kid, but I'm late already. Good-bye."

As he stooped to kiss her, after his accustomed fashion, his cap touched the baby's cheek, pressed so close to Martha's, and with a frown and a twist Miss Dorothy C. put up her tiny hand and knocked it from his head. Then she wrinkled her funny little nose, laughed again, and from that instant the letter-carrier became her abject slave.

As he sped down the street, to take a car for the post-office and the morning mail he must deliver, he saw old Mrs. Cecil's carriage drive slowly around the corner. She was not "Mrs. Cecil" exactly, for there was more of her name upon

her visiting cards: "Mrs. Cecil Somerset Calvert," and she was one of the proudest of old Maryland dames. But she was called by the shorter title by all sorts and conditions of people. She was on John Chester's route and quite often addressed him as "Johnnie," though Mrs. Martha resented this as being too familiar. In her own eyes John was the wisest and best man in the world, far too good to be called "Johnnie" like any schoolboy. The postman himself did not resent it. He resented very little that befell and simply trotted through life as he did over his mail-route, with a cheery word and smile for everybody. Therefore, it was quite characteristic that he should good-naturedly obey Mrs. Cecil's summons to come to her carriage, that she had ordered stopped, even though he was just boarding a car and had no time to waste.

"Johnnie, what was that I saw in your wife's arms, as I drove by?" she demanded as he came up.

"A baby. The cutest ever was. Somebody's playing a joke on us, leaving it on our steps."

"I shouldn't like that kind of a joke. Whose is it?"

"I don't know. I'll tell you more when I get round with the mail. Beg pardon, please, there comes another car," he replied, still smiling, although he was edging away as fast as he dared, without giving offense to this quick-tempered old lady.

"Shall you be fool enough to take the youngster in, if nobody calls for it? What salary do you get?" she continued, ignoring his evident reluctance to be further delayed.

He answered hastily, raised his cap, and managed to catch the next car, springing up on the rear platform while it was already in motion and reckoning that he would have to run, instead of trot, if he made up time and got his morning letters to those who expected them along with their breakfast.

As he disappeared Mrs. Cecil nodded her handsome white head a number of times, in satisfaction over something, and remarked to her poodle:

"Made no mistake. He's a straight man. Well, well, well! The idea of anybody being simpleton enough to be glad of the care of a squalling baby!"

Then she drove home to her own fine house, which stood at the junction of the broad avenue and the narrow street. As old Ephraim turned his horses into the spacious grounds a thrill of pride ran through his mistress's heart, while she shouted to her half-deaf coachman:

"Bellevieu never looked finer that it does this spring, boy."

To which the gray-headed "boy" echoed:

"Fine this spring, Miss Betty."

"Had another offer for the place yesterday, Ephraim."

"Dat so, Miss Betty? Grandes' place in Baltimo'," responded the other, who had heard but little of what she had said, but guessed sufficiently near to answer sympathetically. Indeed, he was fully as proud of the ancient estate as its present owner, and of the fact that, while he dwelt in the very heart of the southern city, his stables and appointments were quite as roomy as if an open country lay all about them. His "Miss Betty" and he were the last of the "family"; he considered Bellevieu as much his as hers; and, from his throne upon the antiquated Calvert carriage, looked with charitable contempt upon the drivers of less aristocratic vehicles.

The march of progress had left the mansion and its beautiful grounds untouched. Entrenched behind her pride and her comfortable bank account, Mrs. Betty Cecil Somerset-Calvert had withstood every assault upon the old place, whether made by private individual or, as yesterday, by the city authorities, who wished to turn Bellevieu into a park. She had replied to the committee that waited upon her:

"No, gentlemen, thank you. This house was one of the first built in the town, though it was then what you call nowadays a 'suburban residence.' Each generation has received it intact from the preceding one, and intact it will descend to my heirs. What they will do with it remains to be seen. I have the honor to wish you good-bye," she concluded, with her grandest manner, yet the familiar local salutation of parting.

The committee felt itself dismissed and bowed itself out; and the old lady summoned her house-girl to open all the windows and ventilate the rooms contaminated by commercial presence. Then she consoled herself and the poodle with the reflection:

"We shall be free from any more 'offers' for at least two weeks. Let us enjoy our freedom."

Yet Mrs. Cecil's pride did not prevent her taking the liveliest interest in her neighbors and their gossip. Having been born and passed all her life at Bellevieu she knew everything which went on anywhere near it. Ensconced upon her broad piazzas, behind the venerable oaks and evergreens which shaded them, her bright

old eyes watched the outer world with the zest as of youth and utter loneliness. For alone she dwelt in the many-roomed house, that had once been filled by her now vanished "family," and sometimes found her solitude unbearable. Even postman "Johnnie's" thrice-daily visits were a most welcome diversion to her, and lest there should be no mail sufficient to bring him so often to her door, she subscribed for all sorts of publications that she seldom opened, in order to have something due at every delivery.

This morning she was so anxious to see him again that she had her breakfast served on the piazza, sitting down to wait for it as Ephraim drove away toward the stable. It was brought to her by Dinah, grumbling as usual:

"Laws, Miss Betty, you-all shuah do try a body's tempah. It am puffickly ridic'lous de way yo' ca'y on. Off drivin' from pillah to post 'fore breakfast done served, an' you-all not so young an' spry like yo' used to was. Yeah am dem scrambled aigs done gone hard an' tough, like a nigger's skin, an' fust off Ah knows Ah'll have yo' laid up wid dat same old misery in yo' chist. Why-all cayn't yo' eat yo' breakfast in de house, propah, like a Christian, Miss Betty?"

"Because I don't wish to, Dinah," retorted Mrs. Cecil, exactly as a spoiled child might have done.

"You-all know how old yo' be, Miss Betty?" demanded the ancient negress, who had been body-servant to her mistress from the earliest youth of both and who was still indulged beyond limit in her freedom of speech and action.

"Yes, Dinah. I am just one year and a day younger than you are. Go tell cook to scramble me some more eggs; and if I prefer driving before to after breakfast, that doesn't concern you, girl."

"Beg pahdon, Miss Betty, but it do concern. Didn't Ah done go promise yo' dyin' ma how't Ah't take ca' of you-all what'd nevah no sense to take ca' yo'self? Huh! Yo' put dat shawl closeter 'roun' dem purty shouldahs o' yo's, whilst I go shame dat cook for sendin' up such no-'count aigs to my young miss!" And away limped Dinah, the "misery" in her own limbs from her "roomaticals" being very severe.

Meanwhile, in the little house around the corner, Mrs. John Chester was superintending another breakfast which had the delightful zest of novelty about it. No sooner had Dorothy C. been taken within doors than she espied the table which John-postman had so hastily quitted upon sound of her own laughter and, at once, began to kick and squirm in the house mistress's arms with such vigor that the good lady came near to dropping her, and exclaimed, in mingled fear and

pride:

"Why, you strong little thing! You're as hard to hold as—as a human eel! There, there, don't! You've slipped down so far all your clothes are over your head. Are you hungry? Well, well! You shall have all you want to eat, for once!"

Then she placed the child on the floor while she filled a tumbler with milk and offered it; but this was met by disdain and such another swift toss of the baby arm that the glass flew out of the holder's hand, and its contents deluged the floor.

Whereupon, Miss Dorothy C. threw herself backward with shrieks which might mean anger or delight, but were equally confusing to the order-loving Mrs. Chester, who cried, in reproof:

"Oh! you naughty baby! Whoever you belong to should teach you better than that! Now, just see. All my nice clean matting splashed with milk, and milk-grease is hard to get out. Now you lie there till I get a pail and cloth—if you hurt yourself I can't help it. John said you were a joke, but you're no joke to me!"

Having just finished her spring cleaning and having had, for economy's sake, to do it all herself, the housewife's tidy soul was doubly tried, and she had a momentary desire to put the baby and her wagon out upon the street again, to take its chances with somebody else. However, when she re-entered with her pail and cloths, she was instantly diverted by the sight that met her.

Dorothy C. had managed to pull her coat over her head and in some unknown fashion twist the strings of her bonnet around her throat, in an effort to remove the objectionable headgear. The result was disaster. The more she pulled the tighter grew that band around her neck and her face was already blue from choking when Mrs. Chester uncovered it and rescued the child from strangling.

As the lady afterward described the affair to her husband it appeared that:

"Seeing that, and her so nigh death, as it were, gave me the terriblest turn! So that, all unknown, down sits I in that puddle of milk as careless as the little one herself. And I cuddled her up that close, as if I'd comforted lots of babies before, and me a green hand at the business. To see her sweet little lip go quiver-quiver, and her big brown eyes fill with tears—Bless you, John! I was crying myself in the jerk of a lamb's tail! Then I got up, slipped off my wet skirt and got her out of her outside things, and there pinned to her dress was this note. Read it out again, please, it so sort of puzzles me."

So the postman read all that they were to learn, for many and many a day,

concerning the baby which had come to their home; and this is a copy of that ill-spelled, rudely scrawled document:

"thee child Is wun Yere an too Munths old hur burthDay is aPrill Furst. til firthur notis Thar will Bee a letur in The posOfis the furst of Everi mounth with Ten doLurs. to Pay." Signed:

"dorothy's Gardeen

hur X mark."

Now John Chester had been a postman for several years and he had learned to decipher all sorts of handwriting. Instantly, he recognized that this scrawl was in a disguised hand, wholly different from that upon the card pinned to the child's coat, and that the spelling was also incorrect from a set purpose. Laying the two bits of writing together he carefully studied them, and after a few moments' scrutiny declared:

"The same person wrote both these papers. The first one in a natural, cultivated hand, and a woman's. The second in a would-be-ignorant one, to divert suspicion. But—the writer didn't think it out far enough; else she never would have given the same odd shape to her r's and that twist to the tails of her y's. It's somebody that knows us, too, likely, though I can't for the life of me guess who. What shall we do about her? Send her to an Orphanage, ourselves? Or turn her over to the police to care for, Martha dear?"

His face was so grave that, for a moment, she believed him to be in earnest; then that sunny smile which was never long absent from his features broke over them and in that she read the answer to her own desire. To whomsoever Dorothy C. belonged, that heartless person had passed the innocent baby on to them and they might safely keep her for their own.

Only, knowing the extreme tidiness of his energetic wife, John finally cautioned:

"Don't settle it too hastily, Martha. By the snap of her brown eyes and the toss of her yellow head, I foresee there'll be a deal more spilled milk before we've done with her!"

"I don't care!" recklessly answered the housewife, "*she's mine*!"

CHAPTER II

A POSTAL SUBSTITUTE

So long a time had passed that Dorothy C. had grown to be what father John called "a baker's dozen of years old"; and upon another spring morning, as fair as that when she first came to them, the girl was out upon the marble steps, scrubbing away most vigorously. The task was known locally as "doing her front," and if one wishes to be considerable respectable, in Baltimore, one's "front" must be done every day. On Saturdays the entire marble facing of the basement must also be polished; but "pernickity" Mrs. Chester was known to her neighbors as such a forehanded housekeeper that she had her Saturday's work done on Friday, if this were possible.

Now this was Friday and chanced to be a school holiday; so Dorothy had been set to the week-end task, which she hated; and therefore she put all the more energy into it, the sooner to have done with it, meanwhile singing at the top of her voice. Then, when the postman came round the corner of the block, she paused in her singing to stare at him for one brief instant. The next she had pitched her voice a few notes higher still, and it was her song that greeted her father's ears and set him smiling in his old familiar fashion. Unfortunately, he had not been smiling when she first perceived him and there had been a little catch in her tones as she resumed her song. Each was trying to deceive the other and each pretending that nothing of the sort was happening.

"Heigho, my child! At it again, giving the steps a more tombstone effect? Well, since it's the fashion—go ahead!"

"I wish the man, or men, who first thought of putting scrubby-steps before people's houses had them all to clean himself! Hateful old thing!"

With a comical gesture of despair she tossed the bit of sponge-stone, with which she had been polishing, into the gutter and calmly seated herself on the bottom step, "to get her breath." "To get yours, too, father dear," she added, reaching to the postman's hand and gently drawing him down beside her. Then, because her stock of patience was always small and she could not wait for his news, she demanded: "Well! Did you go? What did he say?"

"Yes, darling, I went," he answered, in a low tone and casting an anxious glance backward over his shoulder toward the house where Martha might be

near enough to hear. But having replied to one question he ignored the rest.

However, the girl was not to be put off by silence and her whole heart was in her eyes as she leaned forward and peered into his. He still tried to evade her, but she was so closely bound up with his life, she understood him so quickly and naturally, that this was difficult; so when she commanded in her tender, peremptory way: "Out with it, father mine, body and bones!" he half-cried, half-groaned:

"Worse than all the others! *I—am—doomed!*"

Then he dropped his head on his hands and, regardless of the fact that they were on the street, conspicuous to every passer-by, he gave way to a mute despair. Now when a naturally light-hearted person breaks down the collapse is complete, but Dorothy did not know this nor that recovery is commonly very prompt. She was still staring in grieved amazement at her father's bowed head when he again lifted it and flashed a smile into her freshly astonished eyes. Then she laughed aloud, so great was her relief, and cried:

"There, father John! You've been fooling me again! I should have known you were teasing and not believed you!"

But he answered, though still smiling:

"It's pretty hard to believe the fact, myself. Yet it's true, all the same. Five different doctors have agreed upon it—which is wonderful, in itself; and though I'd much rather not face this kind of a truth I reckon I'll have to; as well as the next question: What is to become of us?"

Dorothy still retained her baby habit of wrinkling her nose when she was perplexed, and she did so now in an absurd earnestness that amused her father, even in the midst of his heartache. During her twelve years of life in the little brick house in Brown Street, she had made a deal of trouble for the generous couple which had given her a home there, but she had brought them so much more of happiness that they now believed they actually could not live without her. As the postman expressed it:

"Her first act in this house was to spill her milk on its tidy floor. She's been spilling milk all along the route from then till now, and long may she spill! Martha'd be 'lost' if she didn't have all that care of the troublesome child."

This sunshiny morning, for the first time since that far-back day when she arrived upon his doorstep, the good postman began to contemplate the possibility of their parting; and many schemes for her future welfare chased themselves

through his troubled brain. If he could only spare Martha and Dorothy the unhappiness that had fallen upon himself he would ask no more of fortune. For a long time they sat there, pondering, till Martha's voice recalled them to the present:

"For goodness sake, Dorothy C.! What are you idling like that for? Don't you know I've to go to market and you have the lunch to get? Then there's that class picnic of yours, and what on earth will Miss Georgia say if you don't go this time? Come, come! Get to work. I'm ashamed to have the neighbors see my marble the way it is, so late in the day. You there, too, John? Finished your beat already? Well, you come, too. I've a mind to take up that dining-room carpet and put down the matting this very day. I never was so late in my spring cleaning before, but every time I say 'carpet' to you, you have an excuse to put me off. I confess I don't understand you, who've always been so handy and kind with my heavy jobs. But come, Dorothy, you needn't laze any longer. It beats all, the lots of talk you and your father always must have whenever you happen to get alongside. Come."

There was a hasty exchange of glances between father and child; then she sprang up, laughing, and as if it were part of her fun held out her hand to the postman and pulled him to his feet. But it was not fun; it was most painful, serious earnest. He could hardly have risen without her aid, and she had noticed, what his wife had not, that, for a long time now, he had never taken a seat without it was near a table, or some other firm object by which he could support himself in rising. Now, as he loosed her hand and climbed the steps, he kept his gaze fixed upon those same troublesome feet and caught hold of the brass hand-rail, which it was the housewife's pride and Dorothy's despair to keep polished to brilliancy.

Once within the house, Martha returned to the subject of the carpet lifting and again he put her off; but this time her suspicion that all was not right had been aroused and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, she demanded in a tone sharpened by sudden anxiety:

"John Chester, what is the matter with you?"

He started, staggered by her touch, light as it was, and sank into a chair; then knowing that the truth must out sometime, almost hurled it at her—though smiling to think how little she would, at first, comprehend:

"Oh! nothing but '*ataxy locomotor*.'"

"But—*what*? Don't tease. I'm in earnest, and a hurry."

"So am I. In deadly earnest. I'm afflicted with '*ataxy locomotor*,' or *locomotor ataxia*. It's come to stay. To change our whole lives."

She hadn't the slightest idea what he meant, as he had surmised would be the case, but something in his tone frightened her, though she answered with a mirthful affectation:

"Humph! I'm glad it's something so respectable!"

Then she turned away, made ready to go to market, and soon left with her basket on her arm. But she carried a now heavy heart within her. She had seen that underneath her husband's jesting manner lay some tragic truth; and in her preoccupied state, she bought recklessly of things she should not and went home without those which were needful. So that once back there, she had to dispatch Dorothy marketward again, while she herself prepared the simple lunch that served till their evening dinner which all enjoyed the more in the leisure of the day's work done. And now, in the absence of the child they both so loved, husband and wife at length discussed the trouble that had befallen.

"Do you mean, John, that you are losing the use of your feet? What in the world will a postman do without his sound feet and as sound a pair of legs above them?" demanded the anxious housemistress, still unable to accept the dreadful fact.

"Nothing. I can't be a postman any longer. I must resign my position at once. I've kept it longer than I should. I haven't done justice to myself or the office in hanging on as I have. But——"

"How long have you known about it?"

"For several months I've noticed that my feet felt queer, but it's only been a few weeks since they became so uncontrollable. I've not been able to walk without keeping my eyes fixed on my toes. My legs have a wild desire to fly out at right angles to my body and—Face it, little woman, face it! You have a cripple on your hands for as long as he may live."

"I haven't! You shan't be a—a cripple!" protested the impulsive housewife, whose greatest griefs, heretofore, had been simple domestic ones which shrank to nothingness before this real calamity. Then she bowed her head on her arms and let the tears fall fast. This served to relieve the tension of her nerves, and when she again lifted her head her face was calm as sad, while she made him tell her all the details of his trouble. He had been to the best specialists in the city. That very day he had consulted the last, whom he had hoped might possibly help

him and whose fee had staggered him by its size.

"How long has Dorothy known this?" asked Martha, with a tinge of jealousy.

"Almost from the beginning. It was quite natural that she should, for she has so often run alongside me on my routes—going to and from school. Besides, you know, she has the very sharpest eyes in the world. Little escapes them. *Nothing* escapes which concerns us whom she loves so dearly. It was her notion that you shouldn't be told till it was necessary, but it fell in with my own ideas. I—I think, though I never heard of anybody else doing such a thing, that I'll have her go along with me this afternoon, when I make my—my last rounds. I confess that since that doctor's word, to-day, I've lost all my courage and my power to walk half-decently. Decently? It hasn't been that for a long time, so if you can spare her I'll have her go."

"Of course I can spare her. She was to go to a class picnic, anyway, but she'd rather go with you. Now, I'll to work; and, maybe, I can think a way out of our trouble. I—I can't bear it, John! You, a cripple for life! It can't be true—it shall not be true. But—if it has to be,—well, you've worked for me all these years and it's a pretty how-de-do if I can't work for you in turn. Now, lie down on the lounge till it's time to go to the office again, and I'll tackle my kitchen floor."

For the first time he allowed her to help him across the room and to place him comfortably on the lounge, and she suddenly remembered how often, during the past few weeks, she had seen Dorothy do this very same thing. She had laughed at it as a foolish fondness in the girl, but now she offered the assistance with a bitter heartache.

Dorothy came back and was overjoyed at the changed program for her holiday afternoon. All along she had longed to go with the postman, to help him, but had not been permitted. Now it was not only a relief that her mother knew their secret and that they could talk it over together, but she had formed a scheme by which she believed everything could go on very much as before.

So with a cane in one hand and his other resting on her shoulder, John Chester made his last "delivery." Fortunately, the late mail of the day was always small and the stops, therefore, infrequent. Most of these, too, were at houses fronting directly on the street, so that the postman could support himself against the end of the steps while Dorothy ran up them and handed in the letters.

It was different at Bellevieu, which chanced to be the end of that trip, and the long path from the gateway to the mansion looked so formidable to father John that he bade Dorothy go in alone with the pouch, emptied now of all matter save

that addressed to Mrs. Cecil.

She sped away, leaving him leaning against the stone pillar of the eagle-gate—so called because each column guarding the entrance was topped by a massive bronze eagle—and waved a smiling farewell to him as she disappeared beneath the trees bordering the driveway.

As usual, Mrs. Cecil was on her piazza, wrapped in shawls and protected by her hooded beach-chair from any possible wind that might blow. Old though she was, her eyes were almost as brown and bright as Dorothy's own, and they opened in surprise at the appearance of this novel mail-carrier.

"How-d'ye-do, Mrs. Cecil? Here's such a lot of letters and papers all for you!" cried Dorothy, bowing, as she swept her hand through the pouch which she had slung over her shoulder in the most official manner. "Where shall I put them? I reckon there are too many for your lap."

"What—who—Where's Johnnie?" demanded the lady, leaning forward and first smiling, then frowning upon the girl.

"Oh! he—he's at the gate," she answered, and was about to explain why he had not come himself. Then a sudden remembrance of how closely he had guarded his secret, even from her mother, closed her lips, leaving the other to infer what she chose; and who promptly exclaimed:

"Well, of all things! Do you know, does he know, that between you the law is broken? Nobody, except a regularly sworn employee has a right to touch the United States mail. How dare he send you? Huh! If I do my duty as a good citizen I shall report him at once. This single breach of faith may cost him his place, even though he has been in the service so long."

Mrs. Cecil's manner was harsher than her thought. For some time she had observed that "Johnnie" looked ill and was far less active than of old and she had intended that very afternoon to offer him a kindness. She would send him and his wife away on a long vacation, wherever they chose to go, till he could recover his health. She would pay all his expenses, including a substitute's salary. Even more generous than all, she would invite that girl, Dorothy C., whom they had so foolishly adopted, to pass the interval of their absence at Bellevieu. She dreaded the infliction of such a visit. She always had insisted that she hated children—but—Well, it was to be hoped the postman would have sense enough to speedily recuperate and take Dorothy off her hands. In any case, she must be gotten rid of before it was time for Mrs. Cecil herself to seek recreation at her summer home in the Hudson highlands.

Now her mood suddenly changed. She had desired to befriend the postman but, if he had taken it into his hands to befriend himself, it was quite another matter. Let him! Why should she bother with anybody in such a different state of life? Disappointment, at having her prospective kindness returned upon her thus, made her sharply say:

"It takes all kinds of fools to fill a world, and I'm sorry to find Johnnie one of them. Don't stare! It's rude, with such big eyes as yours. Drop the mail. Carriers shouldn't loiter—that's another crime. Your father must come himself next time, else——"

She seemed to leave some dire threat unspoken and again Dorothy was just ready to tell this strange old lady, whom the postman had often called "wise," the truth of the trouble that had come to him; when around the corner of the house dashed Peter and Ponce, the two Great Dane dogs which Mrs. Cecil kept as a menace to intruders. They had just been loosed for their evening exercise and, wild with delight, were hurrying to their mistress on her broad porch.

At the sight of their onrush Dorothy caught up the pouch she had dropped and started to retreat—too late! The animals were upon her, had knocked her downward and backward, striking her head against the boards and, for the moment, stunning her. But they had been more playful than vicious and were promptly restrained by Mrs. Cecil's own hand upon their collars; while the brief confusion of the girl's startled thoughts as quickly cleared and she leaped to her feet, furiously angry and indignant.

"Oh! the horrid beasts! How dare you—anybody—keep such dangerous creatures? I'll tell my father! He'll—he'll—" tears choked her further speech and, still suspiciously eyeing the Danes, she was edging cautiously down the steps when she felt herself stopped.

Mrs. Cecil had loosed her hold of Peter to lay her hand upon the girl's shoulder and she was saying, kindly but sternly:

"They are not dangerous but playful. They attack nobody upon whom they are not 'set.' It was an accident; and if any further apology is necessary it is from a little girl to the old gentlewoman—for an insolent suspicion. Now go. The dogs will not follow you."

Dorothy did not see how she had done wrong, yet she felt like a culprit dismissed as she lifted the pouch she had again dropped and started gateward, still keeping a wary eye upon the beautiful dogs, now lying beside their mistress in her beach-chair.

As she neared the entrance she cried:

"Here I am at last, father! I didn't mean to stay so long but that dreadful old woman—Why, father, father! Where are you, dearest father?"

He was nowhere to be seen. Nor anybody, either on the broad avenue or the narrow street around the corner; and when she came breathlessly to the dear home in which she hoped to find him it was empty.

CHAPTER III

AT JOHNS HOPKINS HOSPITAL

The door of No. 77 Brown Street stood wide open. Any of the burglars for whom its mistress was always on the watch might have raided the tiny parlor or made off with father John's Sunday overcoat, hanging upon the hat-rack. Now also, while Dorothy hurried from room to room of the six which were all the house contained, the wind of a rising thunderstorm whistled through them and their open windows. Nor was there any reply to her anxious calls:

"Mother! Father! Anybody—somebody! Oh! where are you? What has happened? Mother—dearest mother Martha! Won't you answer?"

Certainly, this was a strange, a terrifying state of things. It was amazing that so careful a housewife as Martha Chester should leave her home in this unprotected condition, but it was quite natural for the well-trained girl, even in the midst of her alarm, to close the sashes against the rain that now came dashing in.

Then she hurried below and out into the little yard, or garden, that was her own special delight. Nobody there; but the pail and brush which Mrs. Chester had been using to clean her back kitchen were still upon its floor, the pail overturned and the water puddling its bricks, and the sight made Dorothy's heart sink lower yet.

Hurrying back to the street, a neighbor shielded her own head from the downpour and called from a next-door window:

"Something has happened to your father. A boy saw him picked up on the street and a policeman called a Johns Hopkins ambulance, that took him to the hospital. The boy knew him, told your mother, and she's hurried there. Don't worry. Probably it's nothing serious."

"Not serious! Oh! you don't know what you're saying! And to think I left him only such a little while! If that hateful old woman—I must go to him, too, I must, I must!"

With that Dorothy was retreating indoors, but again the neighbor's voice detained her:

"'Tisn't likely you'd be admitted, even if you did go. You'd better stay here and

be ready for your poor mother when she comes. It's worse trouble for her than for you."

This might be so and the advice excellent, but the excited girl was in no mood to profit by it. Once, in her early childhood, she had answered to an inquiry: "I love my mother a *little* the best, but I love my father the *biggest* the best!" and it was so still. Her father, her cheery, indulgent, ever-tender father, would always be "the biggest the best" of her earthly friends, and to be absent from him now, not knowing what had befallen, was impossible.

Glancing upward she observed that the neighbor had already withdrawn her head from the dashing rain and was glad of it. It left her free to bang the front door shut, to rush backward through the house and out at the alley gate, which she also shut, snapping its lock behind her. But she had caught up the key that opened it and, hanging this in a crevice of the fence known for a safe hiding place to each of the family, she started eastward for the great hospital.

Though she had never entered the famous place, she had seen it once from a street-car, and love guided her flying feet. But it was a long, long way from Brown Street, and the present storm was one of those deluging "gusts" familiar to the locality. Within the first five minutes the gutters were filled, the muddy streams pushing outward toward the very middle of the narrower alleys and quite covering her shoe-tops as she splashed through. At one or two of the older thoroughfares she came to the old-time "stepping stones," provided for just such emergencies, and still left standing because of the city's pride in their antiquity. Over these she leaped and was glad of them, but alas! the storm was having its will of her. Her gingham frock was soaked and clung about her with a hindering obstinacy that vexed her, and her wet shoes grew intolerable. She did not remember that she had ever gone barefoot, as some of her mates had done, but at last she sat down on a doorstep and took off her shoes and stockings. After a moment's contemplation of their ruined state, she threw them far aside and stepped upon the brick pavement, just as a policeman in oilskins came up and laid his hand on her shoulder, asking:

"Little girl, what are you doing?"

Dorothy sprang aside, frightened, and wriggled herself free. She forgot that she had never been afraid of such officers; that, indeed, the one upon her own home beat was the friend of all the youngsters on the block, and that this one could give her the shortest direction to the place she sought. She had long ago been taught that, if she were ever lost or in any perplexity upon the street, she

should call upon the nearest policeman for aid and that it was his sworn duty to assist her. She remembered only that it was a policeman who had summoned the ambulance that had carried her father to that horrible place—a hospital! Well, she, too, was bound for it, but only to snatch him thence; and stretching out her small, drenched arms, she wondered if they and mother Martha's together would have strength to lift and seize him.

Then on and on and on! Could one city be so big as this? Did ever brick pavements hurt anybody else as they were hurting her? How many more blocks must she traverse before she came in sight of that wide Broadway with its pretty parks, on which the hospital stood?

Everybody had retreated indoors. Nobody who could escape the fury of the storm endured it, and she had left the officer who could have guided her far behind. But, at last, a slackening of the downpour; and as if by magic, people reappeared upon the street; though of the first few whom she addressed none paused to listen. Yet, finally, a colored boy came hurrying by, his basket of groceries upon his arm, and another empty basket inverted over his head, by way of an umbrella. Him she clutched, demanding with what little of breath she had left:

"The—way—to—Johns Hopkins'—hospital, please!"

"Hey? Horspittle? Wha' for?"

"To find my father, who's been taken there. Oh! tell me the shortest way, please—please—please! I am so tired! and I must be—I must be quick—quick!"

A look of pity and consternation stole into the negro's face, and he drew in his breath with a sort of gasp as he answered:

"Laws, honey, I reckon yo' *mus'* be 'quick'! But de quickes' yo' is ain' half quick enough. Know wha' dem horspittles is for? Jus' to cut up folkses in. Fac'. Dey goes in alibe, dey comes out deaders. Yo' jus' done cal'late yo' ain' got no paw no mo'. He's had his haid, or his laig, or both his arms sawed off 'fore you-all more'n got started a-chasin' of him. Po' li'l gal! Pity yo' got so wet in de rain jus' fo' nottin'! Wheah yo' live at? Yo' bettah go right home an' tell yo' folks take dem cloes off, 'fore you-all done get de pneumony."

Dorothy was shivering, partly from nervousness, partly from the chill of wet garments in the strong breeze. Though she had often heard the postman comment upon the superstitions of the negroes, who formed so large a part of the city's population, and knew that such ideas as this lad expressed were but

superstition only, she could not help being impressed by his words. It was his honest belief that to enter a hospital meant giving himself up to death; and in this ignorance he reasoned that this forlorn child should be prevented from such self-destruction by any means whatever. So when she still pleaded to be directed, despite the fear he had raised in her, he whirled abruptly about and pointed his hand in a direction wholly different from that she had followed. Then he added with a most dramatic air:

"Well, honey, if you-all done daid-set to go get yo' laigs sawed off, travel jus' dat-a-way till yo' come to de place. Mebbe, if dey gibs yo' dat stuff what makes yo' go asleep, you-all won't know nottin' erbout de job."

With this cheerful assurance the grocer's boy went his way, musically whistling a popular tune, and Dorothy gazed after him in deep perplexity. Fortunately, the rain had almost ceased and the brief halt had restored her breath. Then came the reflection:

"He wasn't telling the truth! I know that isn't the way at all, for Johns Hopkins is on the east of the city, and that's toward the north. I'll ask somebody else. There are plenty of people and wagons coming out now; and—Oh! my!"

As if in answer to her thought, there came the clang of an electric bell, the hurrying delivery wagons drew out of the way, and past her, over the clear space thus given, dashed another ambulance, hastening to the relief of some poor sufferer within. On its side she saw the name of the hospital she sought and with frantic speed dashed after this trustworthy guide.

Though she could by no means keep up with its speed she did keep it well in sight, to the very entrance of the wide grounds themselves, and there she lost it. But it didn't matter now. Her journey was almost done, and the building loomed before her, behind whose walls was hidden her beloved father John.

From the gateway up the incline to the broad hospital steps she now dragged her strangely reluctant feet. How, after all, could she enter and learn some dreadful truth? But she must, she must! and with a final burst of courage she rushed into the great entrance hall, which was so silent, so beautiful after the storm outside; and there appeared before her half-blinded eyes a figure as of one coming to meet her.

All alone the figure stood, with nothing near to detract from its majestic tenderness; so large and powerful looking; as if able to bear all the burdens of a troubled world and still smile peace upon it. Slowly, Dorothy crept now to the very feet of the statue and read that this was: "Christ the Healer."

Ah! then! No hospital could be a wicked, murderous place in which He dwelt! and with a sigh of infinite relief, the exhausted child sank down and laid her head upon Him. And then all seemed to fade from view.

The next Dorothy knew she was lying on a white cot; a blue-gowned, white-capped nurse was bending over her, and a pleasant voice was saying:

"Well, now that's good! You've had a splendid rest and must be quite ready for your supper. Here's a fine bowl of broth, and some nice toast. Shall I help you to sit up?"

"Why—why—what's the matter with me? Where am I? Have——" began the astonished child; then, suddenly remembering the colored boy's assertions concerning this dreadful place, she instinctively thrust her hands below the light bed covering and felt of her legs. They were still both there! So were her arms; and, for a matter of fact, she was delightfully rested and comfortable. Again lying back upon her pillow, she smiled into the nurse's face and asked:

"What am I doing here, in a bed? Is this the hospital?"

"Yes, dear, it is; and you are in bed because you fainted in the entrance hall, exhausted by exposure to the terrible storm. That is all—we trust. Now, drink your broth and take another nap if you can."

There was authority, as well as gentleness, in the tone and the patient tried to obey; but this time there was a sharp pain at the back of her head and her neck seemed strangely stiff. With a little exclamation of distress, she put her hand on the painful spot, and the attendant quickly asked:

"Does that hurt you? Can you remember to have had a blow, or a fall, lately?"

"Why, yes. The big dogs knocked me down over at Bellevieu. It made me blind for a few minutes, but I was too mad to stay blind! If it hadn't been for that—Oh! please, where *is* my father?" answered Dorothy.

"Your father? I don't know. Have you lost, or missed, him, dear?" returned the other, understanding now why such a healthy child should have collapsed as she had, there at the feet of the beautiful statue. Excitement, exposure, and the blow; these accounted for the condition in which a house doctor had found her. Also, there was nothing to hinder prompt recovery if the excitement could be allayed; and to this end the nurse went on:

"Tell me about him, little girl. Maybe I can help you, and don't worry about being here. It is the very loveliest place in the world for ailing people and

nothing shall hurt you."

So Dorothy told all she knew; of the long weeks past when the postman's active feet had become more and more troublesome; of his sudden disappearance; and of her now terrible fear that, since the poor feet were of so little use, these hospital surgeons would promptly "saw" them off and so be rid of them.

Ripples of amusement chased themselves across the nurse's fair face as she listened, yet beneath them lay a sympathetic seriousness which kept down Dorothy's anger, half-roused by the fleeting smiles.

"Well, my dear, neither he nor you could have come to a better place to get help. The very wisest doctors in the country are here, I believe. It's a disease with a long name, I fancy——"

"Yes, yes! I know it! He told me. It's 'locomort'—'loco' something, 'at'—'at' something else. It's perfectly horrible just to hear it, and what must it be to suffer it? But he never complains. My father John is the bravest, dearest, best man in the world!"

"Indeed? Then you should be the 'bravest, dearest, best' little daughter as well. And we'll hope some help, some cure, can be found for him. Now, will you go to sleep?"

"No. If you please I will go home. But I don't see my clothes anywhere. Funny they should take away a little girl's clothes just 'cause she forgot and went to sleep in the wrong place!"

"In the very right-est place in all the world, dear child! At the Saviour's feet. Be sure nothing but goodness and kindness rule over the hospital whose entrance He guards. Your clothes are drying in the laundry. You will, doubtless, have them in the morning, and, so far as I can judge now, there'll be nothing to prevent your going home then," comforted the nurse, gently stroking Dorothy's brow and by her touch soothing the pain in it. Oddly enough, though her head had ached intensely, ever since that tumble on Mrs. Cecil's piazza, she had not paid any attention to it while her anxious search continued. She was fast drowsing off again, but roused for an instant to ask:

"Have you seen my father? Did he hurt himself when he fell? Did he fall? What did happen to him, anyway? Mayn't I see him just a minute, just one little minute, 'fore this—this queer sleepiness gets me?"

"My dear, you can ask as many questions as a Yankee! I'll tell you what I

think: Your father was probably taken to the emergency ward. I have nothing to do with that. My place is here, in the children's ward; and the first thing nurses—or children—learn in this pleasant room is—obedience. I have my orders to obey and one of them is to prevent talking after certain hours."

"You—you a big, grown-up woman, have to 'obey'? How funny!" cried Dorothy, thinking that the face beneath the little white cap was almost the very sweetest she had ever seen. But to this the other merely nodded, then went softly away.

Dorothy lay in a little room off from the general ward, into which the nurse had disappeared, and where there was the sound of low-toned conversation, with an occasional fretful cry from some unseen baby. The doctor, or interne as he was called, making his night rounds, seeing that all his little charges were comfortable for their long rest, and discussing with the blue-gowned assistant their needs and conditions. It was he who had found Dorothy, unconscious on the tiles, and had ordered her to bed; and it was of herself, had she known it, that he and the nurse had just been talking. As a result of this he merely looked in at the door of the little room, blinked a good-night from behind his spectacles, which, like two balls of fire, reflected the electric light above the door, and passed on.

Dorothy intended to keep awake. For a long time her head had been full of various schemes by which she should rise to the support of her family, whenever that day foreseen by the postman should arrive when his own support should fail. The day had come! Very suddenly, after all, as even the best-prepared-for catastrophes have a way of doing; and now, despite her earnest desires—Dorothy was going to sleep! She was ashamed of herself. She must stay awake and think—think—think! She simply *must*—she——

"Well, Dorothy C., good morning! A nice, dutiful daughter, you, to run away and leave mother Martha alone all night!"

That was the next she knew! That was Mrs. Chester's voice, speaking in that familiar tone a reproof which was no reproof at all, but only a loving satisfaction. And there she sat, the tidy little woman, in her second-best hat and gown, smiling, smiling, as if there were no such thing as trouble in the world! as if both husband and child were not, at that very moment, lying in hospital beds!

CHAPTER IV

DOROTHY GAINS IN WISDOM

"Why, mother! Why—why—*mother*!" cried the astonished Dorothy, sitting up in her cot and smiling back into the happy face before her, yet wondering at its happiness and her own heartlessness, in being glad while her father was so ill. Then she realized that her neck was very stiff and that when she tried to turn her head it moved with a painful wrench, so sank back again, but still gazed at Mrs. Chester with a grieved amazement.

Seeing which, the lady bent over the cot and kissed the little girl, then promptly explained:

"You needn't be troubled, dearie, this is the very best thing that could have happened to us. Your father tired of waiting for you, his head was dizzy, and when he tried to walk home he fell. They hurried him here—his uniform showed he was somebody important—and into that emergency place. There the doctors examined him and they say, O Dorothy C.! they say that there is a chance, a chance of his sometime *getting well*! Think of that! John may get well! All those other outside doctors, that he paid so much to, told him he never could. He'd just grow worse and worse till—till he died. These don't. They say he has a chance. He's to stay here and be built up on extra nourishments, for awhile, and then he's to go into the country and live. Oh! I'm the happiest woman in Baltimore, this day! And how is my little girl? Though the nurse tells me there's nothing much the matter with you, and that you'll be able to go home with me as soon as you have had your breakfast. Such a late breakfast, Dorothy C., for a schoolgirl! Lucky it's a Saturday!"

Dorothy had never seen her mother like this. At home, when trifles went wrong, she was apt to be a bit sharp-tongued and to make life uncomfortable for father John and their daughter, but now, that this real trouble had befallen, she was so gay! For, even if there was hope that the postman might sometime recover, was he not still helpless in a hospital? And had she forgotten that they had no money except his salary? which would stop, of course, since he could no longer earn it. It was certainly strange; and seeing the gravity steal into the childish face which was so dear to her, mother Martha stooped above it and, now herself wholly grave, explained:

"My dear, don't think I'm not realizing everything. But, since I've been once face to face with the possibility that death—*death*—was coming to our loved one and now learn that he will still live, as long as I do, maybe, I don't care about anything else. God never shuts one door but He opens another; and we'll manage. Some way we'll manage, sweetheart, to care for father John who has so long cared for us. Now, enough of talk. Here comes a maid with your breakfast; and see. There are your clothes, as fresh and clean as if I had laundered them myself. Maybe you should dress yourself before you eat. Then you are to see your father for a few minutes; and then we'll go home to pack up."

It was long since Mrs. Chester had helped Dorothy to dress, except on some rare holiday occasion, but she did so now, as if the girl were still the baby she had found upon her doorstep. She, also, made such play of the business that the other became even more gay than herself, and chattered away of all that had befallen her, from her discovery of the deserted home till now.

Then came the nice breakfast, so heartily enjoyed that the nurse smiled, knowing there could be nothing seriously amiss with so hungry a patient. Afterward, a quiet walk through long corridors and spacious halls, from which they caught glimpses of cots with patients in them, and passed by wheeled chairs in which convalescents were enjoying a change.

"It's so still! Does nobody ever speak out loud?" whispered Dorothy to her mother, half-afraid of her own footfalls, though she now wore a pair of felt slippers in place of the shoes she had yesterday discarded. "It's the biggest, cleanest, quietest place I could even dream of!"

But Mrs. Chester did not answer, save by a nod and a finger upon lip; and so following the guide assigned them, they came to one of the open bridges connecting two of the hospital buildings, and there was father John, in a rolling chair, wearing a spotless dressing-gown, and holding out both hands toward them, while his eyes fairly shone with delight. An orderly, in a white uniform, was pushing the chair along the bridge, which was so wide and looked down upon such beautiful grounds that it reminded Dorothy of Bellevieu, and he stopped short at their approach. He even stepped back a few paces, the better to leave them free for their interview.

But if there was any emotion to be displayed at that meeting, it was not of a gloomy sort; and it was almost in his wife's very words that the postman exclaimed:

"To think I should get impatient, lose my head, tumble down, and—up into

this fine place! Where I've heard the best of news and live like a lord! Who wouldn't give his legs a rest, for a spell, if he could have such a chair as this to loll in while another man does his walking for him! Well, how's the girl? Why, since when have you taken to wearing slippers so much too big for you? I should think they'd bother you in walking as much as my limpsy feet did me."

Nothing escaped this cheery hospital patient even now, and before Mrs. Chester could interpose, Dorothy had told her own tale and how she had been a hospital patient herself. How now she had been "discharged" and was ready to go home with all her legs and arms intact, a thing she had feared might not be the case when she had ventured thither.

"To think I should have been so silly as to believe that poor boy! Or that, if I had followed his wrong directions, I shouldn't have gotten here at all. Oh! isn't it beautiful! What makes some of the women dress all in white and some in blue? When I grow up I believe I'll be a hospital nurse myself."

"Good idea. Excellent. Stick to it. See if you can make that notion last as long as that other one about being a great artist; or, yes, the next scheme was to write books—books that didn't 'preach' but kept folks laughing all the way through."

"Now, father! You needn't tease, and you haven't answered, about the different dresses. Do you know, already?" protested Dorothy, kissing his hand that rested on the arm of his chair.

"Oh! yes, I know. The orderly explained, for I wasn't any wiser than you before he did. The blue girls are 'probationers,' or under-graduates. They have to study and take care of cranky sick folks for three whole years before they can wear those white clothes. Think of that, little Miss Impatience, before you decide on the business! Three years. That's a long time to be shut up with aches and pains and groans. But a noble life. One that needs patience; even more than the Peabody course!"

They all laughed, even Dorothy who was being teased. After any new experience, it was her propensity immediately to desire to continue the delightful novelty. After a visit to a famous local picture gallery, she had returned home fully intent upon becoming an artist who should be, also, famous. To that end she had wasted any number of cheap pads and pencils, and had littered her mother's tidy rooms with "sketches" galore. When she had gone with a schoolmate to a Peabody recital, she had been seized with the spirit of music and had almost ruined a naturally sweet voice—as well as the hearers' nerves—by a self-instructed course of training, which her teasing father had sometimes likened to

a cat concert on a roof. However, upon learning that it required many years of steady practise and that her life must be filled with music—music alone—if she ever hoped to graduate from the Institute, she abandoned the idea and aspired to literature.

So from one ambition to another, her almost too active mind veered; but her wise guardians allowed it free scope, believing that, soon or late, it would find the right direction and that for which nature had really fitted her. The greatest disappointment the postman had felt, concerning these various experiments, was about the music. He was almost passionately fond of it, and rarely passed even a street organ without a brief pause to listen. Except, of course, when he had been upon his rounds. Then he forced himself past the alluring thing, even if he had himself to whistle to keep it out of mind. This habit of his had gained for him the nickname, along his beat, of the "whistling postman"; and, had he known it, there were many regrets among those who had responded to his whistle as promptly as to his ring of the bell that they should hear the cheerful sound no more.

The news of his collapse had quickly spread, for a new postman was already on his route, and it was only at Bellevieu, where "Johnnie" would be most missed, that it was not known.

The eagle-gate was shut. Ephraim was not to drive his fat horses through it that morning, nor for many more to come. During the night Mrs. Cecil had been taken ill with one of her periodical bronchial attacks, of which she made so light, but her physician and old Dinah so much. To them her life seemed invaluable; for they, better than anybody else, knew of her wide-spread yet half-hidden charities, and they would keep her safely in her room, as long as this were possible.

After a time, the invalid would take matters into her own hands and return to her beloved piazza; for she was the only one not frightened by her own condition, and was wont to declare:

"I shall live just as long, and have just as many aches, as the dear Lord decrees. When He's through with me here He'll let me know, and all your fussing, Dinah, won't avail. My father was ninety, my mother ninety-seven when they died. We're tough old Maryland stock, not easily killed."

Indeed, frail though Mrs. Cecil looked, it was the fragility of extreme slenderness rather than health; and it was another pride of Dinah's that her Miss Betty had still almost the figure of a girl. Occasionally, even yet, the lady would

sit to read with a board strapped across her shoulders, as she had been used when in her teens, to keep them erect; and it was her boast that she had kept her "fine shape" simply because never, in all her life, had she suffered whalebone or corset to interfere with nature.

This Saturday morning, therefore, a colored boy waited beneath the eagles, to receive his mistress's mail and to prevent the ringing of the gate-bell, which might disturb her. In passing him, on her way home, Dorothy noticed the unusual circumstance and thought how much the gossip-loving dame would miss her ever-welcome "Johnnie." But she was now most fully engrossed by her own affairs and did not stop to enlighten him.

After leaving the hospital, Mrs. Chester and she had gone downtown to replace the shoes and stockings so recklessly discarded the day before; Dorothy hobbling along in the felt slippers and declaring that she would suffer less if she were barefooted. But her mother had answered:

"No, indeed! I'd be ashamed to be seen with such a big girl as you in that condition. Besides, I must get some new things for John. So, while I select the nightshirts and wrapper he needs, you go into the shoe department and buy for yourself."

"Oh, mother! May I? I never bought any of my clothes alone. How nice and grown-up I feel! May I get just what I like?"

"Yes. Only, at the outside, you must not pay more than two dollars for the shoes, nor above a quarter for the stockings. I could scold you for spoiling your old ones, if I were not too thankful about your father to scold anybody."

So they parted by the elevator in the great store, and with even more than her native enthusiasm Dorothy plunged into these new delights of shopping. The clerk first displayed a substantial line of black shoes, as seemed most suitable to a young girl in the plainest of gingham frocks; but the small customer would have none of these. Said she:

"No, I don't like that kind. Please show me the very prettiest ties you have for two dollars a pair," and she nodded her head suggestively toward a glass case wherein were displayed dainty slippers of varying hues. There were also white ones among them, and Dorothy remembered that her chum, Mabel Bruce, had appeared at Sunday school the week before, wearing such, and had looked "too lovely for words." But then, of course, Mabel's frock and hat were also white and her father was the plumber. When Dorothy had narrated the circumstance to father John, and had sighed that she was "just suffering for white shoes," he had

laughed and declared that:

"Plumbers were the only men rich enough to keep their daughters shod that way!"

But she saw now that he was mistaken. These beauties which the rather supercilious clerk was showing her didn't cost a cent more than the limit she had been allowed. Indeed, they were even less. They were marked a "special sale," only one dollar ninety-seven cents. Why, she was saving three whole cents by taking them, as well as pleasing herself.

The transaction was swiftly closed. White stockings were added to the purchase, on which, also, the shopper saved another two cents, so that she felt almost a millionaire as she stepped out of the shoe department and around to the elevator door, where she was to meet her mother. The lady promptly arrived but had not finished her own errands; nor, in the crowd, could she see her daughter's feet and the manner of their clothing. She simply held out her front-door key to the girl and bade her hurry home, to put the little house in order for the coming Sabbath.

Thus Dorothy's fear that her mother might disapprove her choice was allayed for the time being. She would not be sent back to that clerk, who had jested about the felt slippers in a manner the young shopper felt was quite ill-bred, to ask him to exchange the white shoes for black ones. So she stepped briskly forth, keeping her own gaze fixed admiringly upon the snowy tips which peeped out from beneath her short skirts, and for a time all went well. She managed to avoid collision with the bargain-morning shoppers all about her and she wholly failed to see the amused faces of those who watched her.

On the whole, Dorothy C. was as sensible a girl as she was a bright one; but there's nobody perfect, and she was rather unduly vain of her shapely hands and feet. They were exceedingly small and well-formed, and though the hands had not been spared in doing the rough tasks of life, which fall to the lot of humble bread-earners, her father John had insisted that his child's feet should be well cared for. He, more than Martha, had seen in their adopted daughter traces of more aristocratic origin than their own; and he had never forgotten the possibility that sometime she might be reclaimed.

Usually Dorothy walked home from any downtown trip, to market or otherwise, and set out briskly to do so now. But, all at once, a horrible pain started in the toes of her right foot! She shook the toes, angrily, as if they were to blame for the condition of things; and thus resting all her weight upon her left foot that, likewise, mutinied and sent a thrill of torture through its entire length.

Did white shoes always act that way?

She stopped short and addressed the misbehaving members in her sternest tones:

"What's the matter with you to make you hurt so? Never before has a new shoe done it; I've just put them on and walked out of the store as comfortably as if they were old ones. Hmm! I guess it's all imagination. They aren't quite, not *quite* so big as my old ones were, but they fit ex-quis-ite-ly! Ouch!"

"Excruciatingly" would have been the better word, as Dorothy presently realized; but, also, came the happy thought that she had "saved" enough money on her purchases to pay her car-fare home. She knew that mother Martha would consider her extravagant to ride when she had no market basket to carry but—Whew! Ride she must! That pain, it began to make her feel positively ill! Also, it rendered her entrance of the car a difficult matter; so that, instead of the light spring up the step she was accustomed to give, she tottered like an old woman and was most grateful for the conductor's help as he pulled her in. She sank into the corner seat with a look of agony on her pretty face and her aching toes thrust straight out before her, in a vain seeking for relief; nor did it add to her composure to see the glances of others in the car follow hers to the projecting feet while a smile touched more faces than one.

Poor Dorothy never forgot her first purchase, "all alone"; and her vanity received a pretty severe lesson that day. So severe that as she finally limped to the steps of No. 77 she sat down on the bottom one, unable to ascend them till she had removed her shoes. The misery which followed this act was, at first, so overpowering that she closed her eyes, the better to endure it; and when she opened them again there stood a man before her, looking at her so sharply that she was frightened; and who, when she would have risen, stopped her by a gesture and a smile that were even more alarming than his stare.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the little girl, suddenly realizing that in this broad daylight, upon an open street, nobody would dare to hurt her.

The stranger's unlovely smile deepened into a gruff laughter, as he answered:

"Humph! You don't appear to know me. But I know you. I know you better than the folks who've brought you up. I can help you to a great fortune if you'll let me. Hey?"

"You—can? Oh! how!" cried Dorothy, springing up, and in her amazement at this statement forgetting her aching feet. "A fortune!" And that was the very

thing that father John now needed.

CHAPTER V

DOROTHY ENTERTAINS

Dorothy's punishment for her unwise purchase was to wear the white shoes continually. This was only possible by slitting their tops in various places, which not only spoiled their beauty but was a constant "lecture" to their wearer; who remarked:

"One thing, mother Martha, I've learned by 'shopping'—the vanity of vanity! I've always longed for pretty things, but—call *them* pretty? Doesn't matter though, does it? if we're really going to move and everything to be so changed. When we live in the country may I have all the flowers I want?"

"Yes," answered the matron, absently. Although this was Sunday, a day on which she faithfully tried to keep her mind free from weekday cares, she could not banish them now. Instead of going to church she was to visit the hospital and spend the morning with her husband. Dorothy was to attend Sunday school, as usual, wearing the slitted shoes, for the simple reason that she now possessed no others. Afterward, she might invite Mabel Bruce to stay with her, and they were to keep house till its mistress's return.

"I hope you'll have a very happy day, dear. After I leave John, though I shall stay with him as long as I am allowed, I must go to see Aunt Chloe. There'll be no time for visits during the week, and besides, she'll want to hear about everything at first hand. Poor old creature! It'll be hard for her to part with her 'boy' and I mustn't neglect her. You needn't cook any dinner, for there's a good, cold lunch. I made a nice custard pie for you, last night, after you were asleep. There's plenty of bread and butter, an extra bottle of milk, and you may cut a few thin slices of the boiled ham. Be sure to do it carefully, for we will have to live upon it for as long as possible. If you tell Mrs. Bruce that the invitation is from me I think she'll let Mabel come. Don't leave the house without locking up tight, and after you come back from Sunday school don't leave it at all. Have you learned your lesson? Already? My! but you are quick at your books! Good-bye. I hope you'll have a happy day, and you may expect me sometime in the afternoon."

"But, mother, wait! There's a cluster of my fairy-roses out in bloom and I want to send them to father. A deep red sort that hasn't blossomed before and that

we've been watching so long. I'll fill it with kisses, tell him, and almost want to get half-sick again, myself, to be back in hospital with him. Aren't you going to take him any of that nice ham? You know he loves it so."

"No, dear. I was specially told not to bring food. The nurses will give him all he needs and that's better for him than anything we outside folks could fix. Afterwards—Well, let us hope we shall still have decent stuff to eat! Now I'm off. Good-bye. Be careful and don't get into any sort of foolishness. Good-bye."

Dorothy gazed after her mother as she disappeared and felt a strange desire to call her back, or beg to go with her. The house was so empty and desolate without the cheerful presence of the postman. Their Sunday mornings had used to be so happy. Then he was at liberty to walk with her in the park near-by, if it were cold weather; or if the lovely season for gardening, as now they repaired to the little back yard which their united labors had made to "blossom like the rose."

John Chester had bought No. 77 Brown Street. It was not yet much more than half paid for, but he considered it his. Martha was the most prudent of housekeepers and could make a little money go a long way; so that, even though his salary was small, they managed each month to lay aside a few dollars toward reducing the mortgage which still remained on the property. But he had not waited to be wholly out of debt to begin his improvements, and the first of these had been to turn the bare ground behind the house into a charming garden. Not an inch of the space, save that required for paths and a tiny shed for ash and garbage cans, was left untilled; and as Baltimore markets afford most beautiful plants at low rates he had gathered a fine collection. Better than that, there were stables at the rear, instead of the negro-alleys which intersect so many of the city blocks, and from these he not only obtained extra soil but stirred his stable friends to emulate his industry. Vines and ivies had been planted on the stable walls as well as on his own back fence, so that, instead of looking out upon ugly brick and whitewash, the neighbors felt that they possessed a sort of private park behind their dwellings, and all considered father John a public benefactor and rejoiced in the results of his efforts. Many of them, too, were stirred—like the stable-men—to attempt some gardening on their own account, and this was not only good for them but made the one-hundred-block of Brown Street quite famous in the town.

Dorothy had visited the garden that morning before breakfast and had found the new roses which were the latest addition to their stock. She had also shed a few tears over them, realizing that he who had planted them would watch them

no more.

"Dear little 'fairies'! seems if you just blossom for nothing, now!" she had said to them, then had resolved that they should go to him since he could not come to them; and, having cut them, she fled the garden, missing him more there than anywhere.

Once Dorothy C. would have been ashamed to appear among her classmates, in their Sunday attire, wearing her slitted shoes; but to-day her mind was full of other, far more important, matters. So she bore their raillery with good nature, laughed by way of answer, and was so impatient to be at home, where she could discuss all with her chum, that she could hardly wait to obtain Mrs. Bruce's consent to the visit. So, as soon as the two girls were cozily settled in the little parlor, she exclaimed:

"Mabel Bruce! I've something perfectly wonderful to tell you. Do you know —*I'm an—heiress*!"

"No. I don't know, nor you either," returned Mabel, coolly; rocking her plump body to and fro in the postman's own chair, and complacently smoothing her ruffles. Then she leaned forward, glanced from her own feet to Dorothy's, and carefully dusted her white shoes with her handkerchief.

The little hostess laughed, but remarked, a trifle tartly:

"That's what I call nasty-nice. Next time you'll be wiping your nose on that same thing and I'd rather have the dust on my shoes than in my nostrils. But no matter. I've so many things to tell you I don't know where to begin!"

"Don't you? Well, then, you're such a terrible talker when you get started, s'pose we have our dinner first. I'm terrible hungry."

"Hungry, Mabel Bruce? Already? Didn't you have your breakfast?"

"Course, I did. But a girl can't eat once and make it last all day, can she?"

"I reckon *you* can't. You're the greatest eater I ever did see. All the girls say so. That's why you're always put on the refreshment committee at our picnics. Even Miss Georgia says: 'If you want to be sure of enough provision make Mabel chairman.' A chairman is the boss of any particular thing, if you don't know:" instructed this extremely frank hostess.

"Oh! course I know. You just said I was one and folks most gen'ally know what they are themselves, I guess," answered the plumber's daughter, without resentment. What anybody *said* didn't matter to phlegmatic Mabel so long as

their *doing* agreed with her desires. She was fond of Dorothy C. Oh! yes, she was sincerely fond as well as proud! The Chesters were bringing up their daughter very nicely, her mother declared, and that Dorothy had the prettiest manners of all the girls who came to their house. Mabel had her own opinion of those manners, of which she had just had a specimen, but she never contradicted her mother and not often her playmates. As a rule she was too lazy, and was only moved to dispute a statement when it was really beyond belief—like that of her chum's having suddenly become an "heiress." Heiresses were rich. Mabel wasn't very wise but she knew that, and witness Dorothy's ragged shoes. Heiress? Huh! It was more sensible to return to the subject of dinner, for the visitor had sampled Mrs. Chester's cooking before now and knew it to be excellent. So she rose and started for the kitchen, and with an exclamation of regret the hostess followed the guest, though cautioning her:

"If we eat our lunch now, at a little after eleven o'clock, you mustn't expect another dinner at one. My mother didn't say I could have two meals, so you better eat dreadful slow and make it last."

"All right. I will. Maybe, too, I'll go home by our own dinner time. Sundays, that isn't till after two o'clock, 'cause my mother goes to church and has to cook it afterward. Sunday is the only day my father is home to dinner, so he wants a big one and mother gets it for him. Your father's home Sundays, too, isn't he?"

"He—he was—He used——" began Dorothy, then with a sudden burst of tears turned away and hid her face in her hands.

Warm-hearted, if always-hungry, Mabel instantly threw her arms about her friend's waist and tried to comfort her with loving kisses and the assurance:

"He will be again, girlie. Don't you worry. Folks go to hospitals all the time and come back out of them. My father, he had the typhoid fever, last year, and he went. Don't you remember? and how nice all the neighbors were to me and ma. And now he's as strong—as strong! So'll your father be, too, and go whistling round the block just like he used to did. Don't cry, Dorothy C. It makes your eyes all funny and—and besides, if you don't stop I'll be crying myself, in a minute, and I don't want to. *I* look perfectly horrid when I cry, I get so red and puffy, and I shouldn't like to cry on this dress. It's just been done up and ma says I've got to keep it clean enough to wear four Sundays, it's such a job to iron all the ruffles."

Despite her loneliness Dorothy laughed. There was a deal of consideration for herself in Mabel's remarks, yet her sympathy was sincere as her affection long-proved. She had been the first playmate of the little foundling, and it was her

belief—gathered from that of her parents—that the Chesters' adopted child would turn out to be of good birth, if ever the truth were known. In any case, she was the prettiest and cleverest girl in school, and Mabel was proud to be the one selected this morning as a companion.

"O you funny Mabel!" cried Dorothy. "You're sorry for both of us, aren't you! Well, come along. We started to get lunch and to talk. You go to the ice-box and get the things, while I set the table. Wait! Put on my tie-before, to keep your dress clean. Good thing your sleeves are short. Arms'll wash easier than ruffles. Hurry up—you to eat and I to talk."

Very shortly they were engaged in these congenial matters, though Mabel almost forgot that she was hungry in her astonishment at Dorothy's opening statement:

"We're going to move. I guess this is about the last time you'll ever come to this house to dinner."

"Going—to—move!" ejaculated Mabel, with her mouth so full of pie that she could hardly speak.

"Yes. We've got to pack up this very week."

"Where to? Who's going to live here? Who told you? Why?" demanded Mabel, hastening to get in as many questions as she could, during the interval of arranging a sandwich for herself.

"I don't—know! Why I never thought to ask, but I know it's true because it was my mother told me. 'Into the country,' she said, 'cause the hospital folks say that's the only thing for my father to do if he wants to get well. And of course he wants. We all want, more than anything else in the world. So, that's why, and that's the first piece of news. And say, Mabel, maybe your folks'll let you come and see me sometimes. That is, if my folks ask you," she added, with cautious afterthought.

"Maybe! Wouldn't that be just lovely? We'd go driving in a little T-cart, all by ourselves, with a dear little pony to haul us, and—and peaches and plums and strawberries and blackberries—Um!" exclaimed the prospective guest, compressing her lips as if she were already tasting these delights.

"I—don't—know. Perhaps, we would. If we had the pony, and the cart, and were let. That's a lot of 'ifs' to settle first."

"Why, of course. I was in the country once, two whole weeks. It was to a big

house where my father was putting the plumbing in order for the family and the family had gone away while he was doing it. It was there he got the typhoid fever, and they went away because they didn't want to get it. They left some 'coons' to do the cooking and told my father he could bring me and ma, and we could have a vacation in a cottage on the place. So we did; and the man, the colored one, that took care of the horses used to hitch the pony up to the T-cart and me and ma rode out every day. Course, if you live in the country you'll have to have a pony. How else'd you go around? There wasn't any street cars to that country, 'at ever I saw, and folks can't walk all the roads there are. Pooh! You see, I've been and you haven't, and that's the difference."

"Yes, you've been and I haven't, but, Mabel Bruce, I know more about things that grow than you do, for I know—even in Lexington Market—you don't get strawberries and peaches at the same time. So you needn't expect all those good things when you come. You'll have to put up with part at a time, with whatever happens to be in our garden. If we have a garden! And as for ponies, our house in the country won't be a big one, like yours was, that much I know, too. We haven't any money, hardly. My mother Martha was crying about that yesterday, though she didn't know I saw her till I asked and after I'd spent all those two dollars for these silly shoes. Mabel Bruce, don't you ever go buy shoes too small for you. Umm. I tell you if you do your feet'll hurt you worse than my head did after I banged it—the dog banged it—on Mrs. Cecil's stoop. Isn't she a funny old woman? My father thinks she is the wisest one he knows, but I—I—Well, it doesn't count what I think. Only if I was as rich as she, and I expect I will be sometime, I wouldn't keep Great Dane dogs to jump on little girls like she does. Have some more ham, Mabel?"

The mere thought of her prospective wealth had increased Dorothy's hospitality—at her mother's expense: but to her surprise her guest replied:

"No—I guess—I guess I can't. Not 'less you've got some mustard mixed somewhere, to eat on it. I've et——"

"Eaten," corrected her classmate, who was considered an expert in grammar.

"Et-ten about all I can hold without—without mustard, to sort of season it. Ma always has mustard to put on her ham; and yours is—is getting sort of—bitter," replied Mabel, leaning back in her chair. She always ate rapidly—"stuffed," as her father reproved her—and to-day she had outdone herself. The food was delicious. Mrs. Chester was too thrifty a housewife ever to "spoil" anything, no matter how inexpensive a dish, and in her judgment, boiled ham was a luxury, to

be partaken of sparingly and with due appreciation, never "gobbled."

Therefore it was with positive consternation that Dorothy's thoughts came back to practical things and to the joint which she had placed before her guest, allowing her to carve. Though she had herself barely tasted the morsel placed upon her own plate, being too much engaged in talking, she now perceived that Mabel had done more than justice to her lunch. So it was with a cry of real distress that she snatched the dish from the table, exclaiming:

"Well, I guess you don't need mustard to sharpen your appetite, you greedy thing! Beg pardon. That was a nasty thing to say to—to company, and I'm sorry I said it. But mother told me we had to live on that ham most the week, she'd be so much too busy to cook and—Why, Mabel Bruce! You've eaten almost half that pie, too! Hmm. I guess you can stay contented the rest the day. You won't need to go home to your two-o'clock dinner!"

No offense was intended or received. These two small maids had been accustomed, from infancy, to utter frankness with one another, and with perfect amiability the guest replied:

"Maybe I do eat a little too much. Ma thinks I do, sometimes, and pa says that's the reason I'm so fat. I'd rather not be fat. I'd like to be as slim as you are, Dorothy C. Ma says you've got such a pretty figure 't you look nice in anything. Well, I guess since I've got to keep my dress so clean for so long, I won't offer to help do the dishes. I'll go sit in the parlor and take care of the front of the house."

With that Miss Mabel took off her friend's "tie-before," a big gingham apron which covered all her skirts, and hung it on its nail, then retreated to the postman's rocker, at perfect peace with herself and all the world.

Not so Dorothy C. She looked after her chum with a contempt that was as new as it was uncomfortable. She had promised herself a real treat in discussing her own affairs—for the first time in her life become important ones—with this reliable confidante, but now she was bitterly disappointed. "Mabel is selfish, but Mabel is truthful. She never speaks ill of another and she always keeps her word:" had been Miss Georgia's decision once, when some class matters had gone wrong and the plumber's daughter had been accused of "tattling." To this Dorothy now added: "And Mabel is a regular, gluttonous simpleton. She isn't really interested in anybody except—Mabel!"

With this uncharitable sentiment, the little hostess proceeded to clear away; and did this with so much vim that she dropped a tumbler and broke it. This was sufficient to calm her anger and turn what was left of it against her own

carelessness, anticipating her mother's reproof. She finished her task very quietly, now, and then repaired to the parlor, where she found Mabel had fallen asleep in the rocker.

Also, at that moment, there sauntered past the windows a man who peered through them with considerable curiosity: and who at sight of Dorothy C. stopped sauntering, lifted his eyebrows questioningly, and, turning around, walked back to the steps.

Dorothy's heart almost choked her, it so suddenly began to beat violently, while a chill ran through her whole body, and made her recall a saying of old Aunt Chloe that "when a body turns all goose-flesh it's a sign somebody is walking over her, or his, grave." Father John laughed at this superstition as he did at many another of the dear old aunt who had "raised" him, an orphan; and had he been present Dorothy would have laughed with him. But she didn't laugh now; though she was presently calm enough to review the situation and to decide that none could be better. Also, that she must, at once, get rid of Mabel Bruce. For this was the same man who had appeared before her, on the previous morning, and had, at first startled, then profoundly interested her. He had imposed secrecy upon her; at least secrecy as far as her parents were concerned, though she had meant to tell Mabel all that he had told her. She didn't like secrets. She hated them! Yet if they were to benefit those whom she loved better than herself she was willing to keep them—for a time.

In another moment she had roused her visitor by a strong shake of the pretty, plump shoulder under the lace-trimmed frock, and had said, rather loudly:

"Mabel, if you're going home to dinner, you'd better go now. Because—because I have some business to attend to, and I shall have to see the gentleman alone."

She felt that though her words might be rude—she wouldn't like to be sent home, herself, from a visit—yet her manner was beautifully grown-up and dignified; and, as Mabel obediently vanished, "Miss Chester" bade the gentleman waiting outside to enter.

CHAPTER VI

DOROTHY GOES UPON AN ERRAND

When Mrs. Chester returned she was tired and found Dorothy so. The girl took her mother's hat and put it away in its box, brought her a fan, and asked if she should get her something to eat.

"No, dear, thank you. I had dinner, all I wanted, with Aunt Chloe Chester. She takes this trouble of ours very hard, and declares that she will not live to see 'her boy' come back to Baltimore. She wishes she could die first, right away, so 'that he could go to my funeral while he's handy to it.'"

"Horrors! I—I suppose I love Aunt Chloe, because she was so good to father John, but I hope I'll never grow into such a terrible old woman. Seems if she had always to be dragged up out of the gloom into the sunshine. It's always the worst things are going to happen—with her. I don't see how father ever grew up to be such a sunshiny man, always under her hand, so. You must have had a dreary visit."

"It wasn't a restful one; but the reason for John's always looking on the bright side may be just that she always did the opposite. But you look sober, too, dearie. Wasn't Mabel's visit a pleasant one? How long has she been gone?"

"Oh! a good while. She went home to dinner. I—she ate 'most all the ham. All the best big slices anyway, and full half the pie. Then she wanted mustard, so she could eat more. She said that sometimes when she couldn't eat a big lot and they had extra good things, she'd get up and walk around the table, so she could. She didn't say that, to-day, though, but did once at a school picnic. And I—I broke a tumbler. One of the best."

"Why, Dorothy C.! How could you?" returned Mrs. Chester, but not at all as if she really heard or were in the least vexed. Then, as if forcing herself to an interest in small, home matters, she asked: "Were you very lonely after she went?"

"No, indeed. I wasn't alone—I mean, I wasn't lonely. Did father like his roses?"

"Yes, darling, and he fully appreciated your cutting them. He said he knew how you disliked it, for you'd never got over your baby notion that it hurt the

plants, just as a cut finger hurt you. He said, too, that I was to tell you he'd found all the kisses, every one, but if you wanted any paid back you'd have to come to Johns Hopkins after them. It was a comfort to find him so happy and sure of getting well. I wish I were half as sure!"

Dorothy opened her lips to say something which it seemed impossible to keep from this beloved little mother opposite, who already seemed so changed and worn; who had lost every bit of that gayety which had been so astonishing, yesterday. But not yet—not yet. Besides, she was fully as truthful as Mabel Bruce and had given her pledge to silence. Then she remembered that she did not know to what part of the "country" they were destined, and asked:

"Mother Martha, can't you tell me something of your plans? Where we are going and when? And what is to become of this dear home?"

There was so much earnestness and sympathy in the girl's tones that Mrs. Chester forgot how young she was, and now talked with her as she might have done with a much older person; almost, indeed, as she would have done with the postman himself.

"We are going to a far-away state; to a place I haven't seen since I was a child, myself—the Hudson River highlands."

"Why—the Hudson River is in New York and we're in Maryland!" cried Dorothy. "Why go so far, away from everybody we know and care for? Wouldn't it do just to go to some little spot right near Baltimore, where we could come into the city on the cars, at any time? Isn't that what the Johns Hopkins doctors call the 'country'?"

"Oh! if we only might! But, my dear, there's an old saying about 'beggars' being 'choosers.' We aren't beggars, of course, but we are too poor to be 'choosers.' Fortunately, or unfortunately, as time will prove, I have a little place in the country where I told you. It belonged to an old bachelor uncle who died long ago. It has stood empty for many years and may be badly out of order. He willed it to me, as my portion of his estate: and though some of his other heirs have once or twice offered to buy it from me, the price they offered was so small that John had me refuse it. He's said in jest: 'No telling how glad we may some time be of that rocky hill-farm, Martha. Better hold on to it, as long as we can pay the taxes and keep it.' The taxes were not heavy, and we've paid them. Now, it is the only place out of the city where we have a right to go; and in one sense there couldn't be a better. It's one of the healthiest spots on earth, I suppose: and there'll be plenty of room for John to live in 'the open,' as he's advised. So we

must go;" and with a heavy sigh mother Martha ceased speaking and leaned her head back, closing her eyes as if she were about to sleep.

But underneath all her calmness of tone had lain a profound sadness, and none but the absent John could have told how bitter to her was the coming severance from all she had ever held dear. Though born in New York State, she had come south with her parents when she was too small to remember any other home than their humble one in this same city. Here she had met and married John. Here they had together earned their cozy home. Here were all her church associations, and here the few whom she called friends.

She had always leaned upon her husband's greater wisdom and strength in all the affairs of their quiet lives, and now that she needed them most she was deprived of them. Alone, she must pack up, or sell, their household goods, and not an article of them but was dear because of some sacrifice involved in its purchase. Alone, she must attend to the sale or rental of their house, for the doctors had told her that very morning that her patient must not be disturbed "for any cause whatever. There was a chance, one in a thousand, that he might get well. If this chance were to be his it depended upon his absolute freedom from care and responsibility."

She had assured them that this should be so, and it had seemed easy to promise, in the face of the greater sorrow if he must remain an invalid or, possibly, die. But now, back in the security of her beloved home, her courage waned; and Dorothy, watching, saw tears steal from under the closed eyelids and chase one another down the pale cheek, which only yesterday, it seemed, had been so round and rosy.

To a loving child there is no more piteous sight than a mother weeping. It was more than Dorothy could bear, and, with a little cry of distress, she threw herself at Mrs. Chester's knees and hid her own wet eyes upon them. Then she lifted her head and begged:

"Don't cry, mother! Dearest mother Martha, please, please, don't cry! You've never done it, never; in all my life I haven't seen you, no matter what happened. If you cry we can't do anything, and I'm going to help you. Maybe we won't have to go away. Maybe something perfectly splendid will happen to prevent. Maybe darling father will get well, just resting from his mail route. Surely, nobody could fix him nicer nourishments than you can, if we can afford it. Maybe we shall be able to afford—Oh! if only I could tell you something! Something that would make you happy again!"

Mother Martha ceased weeping and smiled into the tender eyes of the devoted child who had so well repaid her own generosity. Then she wiped both their faces and in quite a matter-of-fact way bade Dorothy sit down, quietly, while she told her some necessary things. One: that in the morning she should be sent to the post-office, to receive the envelope containing the ten dollars due for her own board. Mrs. Chester had arranged with the new postman about it and there would be no difficulty. There was never a word written with these payments. The postman's address was on the outside the envelope, which was never registered, had never gone astray, and had never held more than the solitary crisp ten-dollar bill expected.

"We shall need all the money we can get in hand, for the expenses of our moving will be heavy—for us. I'm going to see some real-estate men and decide whether it is best to sell, or rent, this house. I shall be very busy. John isn't to stay at the hospital but a week, and so by the end of this coming one I want to be in our new home. I rather dread the journey, though we can easily make it in a day—or less. But your father thinks he can get along real well on crutches, that we'll have to buy, of course; and I've noticed that people on the street cars, even, are always kind and helpful to invalids. John believes that it's a good, jolly old world, and you and I must try to believe the same. He says there's lots of truth in the saying: 'He that would have friends must show himself friendly.' I reckon nobody ever turned a friendlier face toward others than John has, and that's why everybody loves him so.

"Now, dearie, fetch me my Bible and I'll read awhile. I don't feel as if I'd had any real Sunday, yet. Then, by and by, you may make me a cup of tea and we'll get to bed early. Of course, there'll be no more school for you here, though I shall want you to step in and bid Miss Georgia good-bye. That's no more than polite, even if you don't love her as you should."

Dorothy made a little mouth, which for once her mother did not reprove: and presently they both were reading. At least, Mrs. Chester really was, while the peace of the volume she studied stole into her troubled heart and shed its light upon her face. Dorothy, also, held her book in her hand and kept her eyes fixed on the printed pages; but, had her mother chanced to look up and observe, she would have seen no leaves turned; though gradually an expression of almost wild delight grew upon the mobile features till the girl looked as if she were just ready to sing.

However, she said nothing of her happy thoughts and watched her mother fall asleep in the drowsy heat of the late afternoon, and from the fatigue of a

sleepless night and a busy day. Then she crept on tiptoe out of the room, noiselessly removing her slitted shoes before she rose from her chair, and presently had gained the kitchen at the rear. Here she lighted a little gas stove and put on the kettle to boil. Then she did what seemed a strange thing for a girl as strictly reared as she, on a Sunday evening. She caught up her short skirts and, after the manner of pictured dancers upon wall-posters, began to whirl and pirouette around the little space, as if by such movements, only, could she express the rapture that thrilled her.

"There, I reckon I've worked myself down to quiet!" she exclaimed, at length, to the cat which entered, stretching its legs in a sleepy fashion and ready for its supper. "Now, I'll feed you, Ma'am Puss, though you ought to feed yourself on the rats that bother our garden. Queer, isn't it? How everything 'feeds' on something else. I hate rats, and I hate to have them killed. Killing is horrible: and, I'm afraid that to have my roses killed by the creatures is worst of all."

Ma'am Puss did not reply, except by rubbing herself against her mistress's legs, and, having filled a saucer with milk, Dorothy went out into the garden and stayed there a long time. There many thoughts came to her, and many, many regrets. Regrets for past negligencies, that had caused the drooping—therefore suffering—of some tender plant; for the knowledge of her coming separation from these treasures which both she and father John had loved almost as if they were human creatures; but keenest of all, regrets for the lost activity of the once so active postman. Mother Martha's griefs and her own might be hard to bear, but his was far, far worse. Nothing, not even the delightful surprises she felt she had in store for him, could give him back his lost health.

She had no propensity to dance when she went indoors again. It was a very sober, thoughtful Dorothy C. who presently carried a little tray into the parlor and insisted upon the tired housemistress enjoying her supper there, where she could look out upon the cheerful street with its Sunday promenaders, "and just be waited on, nice and cozy."

Both inmates of the little home slept soundly that night. Sleep is a close friend to the toilers of the world, though the idle rich seek it in vain: and the morning found them refreshed and courageous for the duties awaiting. There would be few tears and no repining on the part of either because of a home-breaking. Bitterer trials might come, but the depth of this one they had fathomed and put behind them.

Moreover, it fell in with Dorothy's own desires that she was to make the post-

office trip: and she started upon it with so much confidence that her mother was surprised and remarked:

"Well, small daughter, for a child who knows so little of business and has never been further down town than the market, alone, you are behaving beautifully. I'm proud of you. So will your father be. Maybe, if any of the agents I'm going to telephone come here to-day and keep me, I'll let you go to pay the daily visit to John and tell him all the news. Take care of the street crossings. It's so crowded on the business streets and I should be forlorn, indeed, if harm befell my Dorothy C."

Even when the child turned, half-way down the block, to toss a kiss backward to her mother in the doorway, that anxious woman felt a strange fear for her darling and recalled her for a final caution:

"Be sure to take care of your car-fare, Dorothy; and be more than sure you don't lose the money-letter. When you board a car look to see another isn't coming on the other track, to knock you down."

The little girl came back and clung to Mrs. Chester for a moment, laughing, yet feeling her own courage a trifle dashed by these suggestions of peril. But she slipped away again, determining to do her errands promptly, while, with a curious foreboding in her mind, the housemistress re-entered her deserted home, reflecting:

"John always laughs at my 'presentiments,' yet I never had one as strong as this upon me now that I did not wish, afterward, I had yielded to it. I've half a mind to follow the child and overtake her before she gets into a car. I could snatch a little while to do those downtown errands and she'd be perfectly safe here. Pshaw! How silly I am! Dorothy is old enough to be trusted and can be. I'll put her out of mind till I hear her gay little call at the door, when she rings its bell: 'It's I, mother Martha! Please let me in!'"

But alas! That familiar summons was never again to be heard at No. 77 Brown Street.

CHAPTER VII

AN OFFICE SEEKER AND A CLIENT

"Well, little girl, what are you doing here?"

Dorothy had safely reached the big post-office, which seemed to be the busiest place she had ever entered; busier even than the department stores on a "bargain day;" and she had timidly slipped into the quietest corner she could find, to wait a moment while the crowd thinned. Then she would present her note, that asked for father John's letter to be given her, and which was in his own handwriting, to make sure. But the crowd did not thin! Besides the swarms and swarms of postmen, wearing just such gray uniforms as her father's, there were so many men. All were hastening to or from the various windows which partitioned a big inner room from this bigger outside one and behind which were other men in uniform—all so busy, busy, busy!

"Why! I didn't dream there could ever be so many letter-carriers! and each one is so like father, that I'm all mixed up! I know I've got to go to one those windows, to give this letter and get the other one, but how will I ever get a chance to do it, between all those men?"

Then while Dorothy thus wondered, growing half-frightened, there had come that question, put in a familiar tone, and looking up she saw another gray-uniformed person whom she recognized as her father's friend. Once he had been to their house to dinner, and how glad she now was for that.

"Oh, Mr. Lathrop! How glad I am to see you! I've got to get a letter and I don't see how I'll ever have the chance. The people don't stop coming, not a minute."

"That's so, little girl—Beg pardon, but I forget your name, though I know you belong to John Chester."

"Dorothy it is, Mr. Lathrop. Could you—could you possibly spare time to help me?"

"Well, I reckon there's nobody in this office but would spare any amount of time to help one of John Chester's folks. I was just starting on my rounds—second delivery—heavy mail—but come along with me and I'll fix you out all right."

He turned, shifted his heavy pouch a little, and caught her hand. Then he threaded his way through the crowd with what seemed to his small companion a marvelous dexterity. It happened to be the "rush hour" of business, and at almost any other, Dorothy would not have found any difficulty in making her own way around, but there was also the confusion of a first visit. Presently, however, she found herself at the right window to secure the letter she sought, received it, and heard Mr. Lathrop say:

"There. That's all right. I reckon you can find your way out all safe, and I'm in a hurry. Please make my regards to your mother and tell her we've heard where John is and some of us are going to see him, first chance we get. Too bad such a thing should happen to him! Don't let anybody snatch that letter from you, and good-bye."

Then Dorothy found herself alone and no longer afraid. She had accomplished her mother's errand—now she must attend to a much more important one of her own. She gazed about her with keenest interest, trying to understand the entire postal business, as there represented before her, and assuring herself that after all it was extremely simple.

"It's just because it's new. New things always puzzle folks. As soon as I've been once or twice I shan't mind it, no more than any of these people do. I wonder which way I must go? If he's the head man he ought to have the head room, I should think. Hmm. I'll have to ask, and—and—I sort of hate to. Never mind, Dorothy C.! You're doing it for father John and mother Martha; and if you plan to be grown-up, in your outsides, you must be inside, too. Father hates bold little girls. He says they're a—a—annemoly, or something. It belongs to girl children to be afraid of things. He thinks it's nice. Well, I'm all right nice enough inside, this minute, but—I'll do it!"

After these reflections and this sudden resolution Dorothy darted forward and seized the arm of a negro who was cleaning the floor.

"Please, boy, tell me the way to the head man's place. The real postmaster of all."

"Hey? I dunno as he's in, yet. He don't come down soon, o' mornin's. What you want to see him for?"

"On business of my own. The way, please," answered Dorothy, bracing her resolution by the fancied air of a grown person.

The negro grinned and resumed his scrubbing, but nodded backward over his

shoulder toward a tall gentleman just entering the building.

"That's him. Now you got your chance, better take it."

There was nothing to inspire fear in the face of this "head man of all," nor was there anything left in Dorothy's mind but the desire to accomplish her "business" at once and, of course, successfully. Another instant, and the gentleman crossing the floor felt a detaining touch upon his sleeve and beheld a bonny little face looking earnestly up into his own. Also, a childish voice was saying:

"I'm John Chester's little girl. May I ask you something?"

"You seem already to be asking me something, but I'm happy to meet you, Miss Chester, and shall be very glad to hear all about your father. He was one of the very best men on the force, one of the most intelligent. I can give you five minutes. Come this way, please."

Dorothy flashed him one of her beautiful smiles, and the postmaster, who happened to love all children, observed that this was a very handsome child with a pair of wonderful, appealing eyes. Though, of course, he did not express his admiration in words, Dorothy felt that she had pleased him and her last hesitation vanished.

As soon as they were seated in a private apartment, she burst into the heart of the matter, saying:

"Please, Mr. Postmaster, will you let me take my father's place?"

"W-wh—at?" asked the gentleman, almost as if he whistled it in astonishment.

Dorothy laughed. "I know I'm pretty small to carry big pouches, 'specially the Christmas and Easter ones, but you always have 'extras' then, anyway. I know my father's whole beat. I know it from end to end—all the people's houses, the numbers to them, and lots of the folks that live around. What I don't know I can read on the envelopes. I'm a quick reader of handwriting, Miss Georgia says."

The postmaster did not interrupt her by a word, but the twinkle in his eyes grew brighter and brighter and at the end he laughed. Not harshly nor in a manner to hurt her feelings, which he saw were deep and sincere, but because he found this one of the most refreshing experiences of his rather humdrum position. Here was a visitor, a petitioner, quite different from the numberless illiterate men who bothered him for office. He hated to disappoint her, just yet, so asked with interest:

"And who is Miss Georgia?"

"She's my teacher. She's the vice principal of our school. She's dreadful smart."

"Indeed? But what, Miss Chester, put this notion into your head? By taking your father's 'place' I conclude that you are applying for his position as mail-carrier. Did you ever hear of a little girl postman?"

"No, sir, I didn't, but there has to be a first time, a first one, to everything, doesn't there? So I could be the first girl postman. And why I want to is because I think I must support my parents."

The applicant's reply was given with the serious importance due from a young lady whom such a fine gentleman called "Miss Chester"; and when he again desired to know whose idea it was that she should seek a place on "the force," she answered proudly:

"All my own. Nobody's else. Not a single body—not even my mother Martha—ever suspects. I want it to be a surprise, a real, Christmassy surprise. Oh! She's feeling terrible bad about our leaving our home and not knowing what we'll have to live on. So I thought it all out and that I'd come right to you and ask, before any other substitute got appointed.

"Well, maybe the notion came that last day my father carried the mail. His poor legs and feet got so terribly wobbly that he was afraid he'd fall down or something and couldn't finish his delivery. So I walked alongside of him and ran up the steps and handed in the letters and everybody was just as nice as nice to us, except old Mrs. Cecil, who lives at Bellevieu. She was mad. She was real mad. She said we were breaking the law, the two of us. Think of that! My father, John Chester, a law-breaker! Why, he couldn't break a law to save his life. He's too good."

The postmaster smiled. He had, apparently, forgotten that he was to give only five minutes to this small maid, and he was really charmed by her simplicity and confidence.

"Was that the day Mr. Chester was taken to the hospital? The boys have told me about him—some things. How is he doing? Will he be there long? You see, I can ask questions, too!" continued the gentleman, very socially.

"My mother says there's a chance he may get well. He's to be there only this week that ever is. Then he's to be taken into the country, away, away to some mountains in New York State. He's got to live right outdoors all the time, and he mustn't worry, not a single worry. My mother daren't even talk with him about

selling, or renting, our house, or the furniture, or—or anything. So she talks to me—some."

"I hope you talk to her—more than 'some'; and I'm wondering if you had done so before you came to me whether I should ever have had the pleasure of your acquaintance."

Was there a reproof in this? Dorothy's sensitive heart fancied so, yet she couldn't imagine in what she had done wrong. With a little waning of hope—the postmaster had been so delightful that she was already sure he would grant her request—she asked:

"Is it bad? why shouldn't I want to earn the money for my parents? Same as they have for me and us all. If I had the place, they could go to the country, just the same, and the money could be sent to them to live on every month. Of course, I'd have to not go with them. I reckon Mrs. Bruce, the plumber's wife, would let me live with her, if my folks paid her board for me. Mabel and I could sleep together, and I'd help with the dishes and work, 'cause if I were a postman I couldn't go to school, of course. I'd have to study nights, same as father has. So, if I didn't make much trouble, maybe Mrs. Bruce wouldn't charge much. But, excuse me. My father John says I talk too much, and that when I go to do errands I should stick to business. He says it doesn't make any difference to the folks that hire you to work for them whether you're rich or poor, sick or well. All they want is to have the work done—and no talk about it. I'm sorry I've said so much. I didn't mean to, but——"

"But," repeated the postmaster, suggestively; and Dorothy finished her sentence:

"I haven't talked a single word to anybody else, and it seems so good to do it now. I never had a secret—secrets, for I've got another one yet, that I can't tell—before and I don't like them. I beg your pardon, and—May I have my father's position?" said Dorothy, rising, and seeing by the big clock on the wall that she had long overstayed the time allotted for this interview.

The gentleman also rose, and laid his hand kindly upon her shoulder, but his face and voice were grave, as he answered:

"No, my dear, I am sorry to disappoint you, but you ask the impossible. You could not—But there's no use in details of explanation. As your wise father has taught you, business should be reduced to its simplest terms. I cannot give you the place, but I can, and do, give you the best of advice—for one of your imaginative nature. Never cherish secrets! Never, even such delightful,

surprising ones, as this of yours has been. Especially, never keep anything from your mother. When anything comes into your mind which you feel you cannot tell *her* banish the idea at once and you'll stay on the safe side of things. Good-morning."

Other people were entering the private office and Dorothy was being courteously bowed out of it, before she fully realized that she had not obtained her desire, and never would. For a few seconds, her temper flamed, and she reflected, tartly:

"Huh! I should make as good a postman as lots of them do. My father says some of them are too ignorant for their places. *I*'m not ignorant. I'm the best scholar in my class, and my class is the highest one in our Primary. I could do it. I could so. But—Well, he was real nice. He acted just as if he had little girls of his own and knew just how they felt. He laughed at me, but he didn't laugh hateful, like Miss Georgia does on her 'nervous days' when she mixes me all up in my lessons. And anyhow, maybe it's just as well. If I'd got to be a letter-girl I couldn't have gone to the country with father and mother, and I should have about died of lonesomeness without them. Maybe Mrs. Bruce wouldn't have had me, nor the minister's folks either. Anyway, I've got that other, more splendid secret, still. I *have* to have that, because I have it already, and so can't help. Miss Georgia would say that there were two too many 'haves' in that sentence, and the 'two too' sounds funny, too. Now I must go home. I've got my money-letter all right and, after all, I'm glad mother Martha doesn't know that I wanted father's beat, she'd be so much disappointed to know how near we came to staying here and couldn't."

With which philosophic acceptance of facts and a cheerful looking forward to the "next thing," the rejected seeker after public office ran up the hill leading from the post-office and straight against another opportunity, as it were.

Just as she had signalled a car, the "gentleman" who had twice called upon her and who had told her that his name was "John Smith," appeared beside her on the sidewalk, raised his hat, and with an engaging air exclaimed:

"Why, Miss Chester, how fortunate! I was just on the point of going to see you. Now, if you will go with me, instead, it will save time and answer just as well. We don't take this car, but another. My office is on Howard Street, and we'll walk till we meet a Linden Avenue car. This way, please. Allow me?"

But Dorothy shrank back from this overly pleasant man. It was with the same feeling of repulsion that she had experienced on each of their previous meetings,

and which she had tried to conquer because of the great benefit he claimed he had sought her to bestow upon her.

Her next sensation was one of pride, remembering that this was the second time that morning for her to be called "Miss Chester." Each time it had been by a grown-up gentleman and the fact made her feel quite grown-up and important, also. Besides, this present person was able, he said, to more than compensate for any disappointment the postmaster had inflicted—though, of course, that affair was known only to "the head man of all" and herself. However, she couldn't accept Mr. Smith's invitation, for, she explained:

"Thank you, but I can't go with you now. I'm doing an errand for my mother and she'll be expecting me home. She's very busy and needs me to help her. Nor do I want to make her worry, for she has all the trouble now she can bear. The first time I can come, if you'll tell me where, I'll try to do so. Are you sure, sure, Mr. Smith, that I am really an heiress and you will help me to get the money that belongs to me?"

"Perfectly sure. A lawyer like me doesn't waste his time on any doubtful business. I have more cases on hand, this very minute, than I can attend to and ought not to stand idle here one moment. Don't, I beg of you, also stand in your own light, against your real interests and the interests of those who are dearer to you than yourself. It is very simple. As soon as you reach the office I'll give you paper and pen and you can send a message to your mother, explaining that you have been detained on business but will soon be with her. Ah, yes, the note by all means. It quite goes against my nature to cause anybody needless anxiety. Here's our car. Step in, please."

As she obeyed Dorothy thought that she had never heard anybody talk as fast as the man did. Faster even than she did herself, and with an assured air of authority which could not fail to impress an obedient child, trained to accept the decisions of her elders without question. She still tightly clutched the envelope containing the precious ten-dollar bill, and had so nervously folded and unfolded it that, by the time they reached the place on North Howard Street, it was in such a state she was ashamed of it.

"Right up stairs, Miss Chester. Sorry I haven't an elevator to assist you," remarked the lawyer, curiously regarding her feet in their poor shoes. "However, there are plenty willing to climb three flights of stairs for the sake of my advice. I've been in business right here in Baltimore longer than I care to remember—it makes me feel so old. Lawyers who have lovely young clients prefer to remain

young themselves, you know."

"No, I don't know. I know nothing about lawyers, anyway, and I don't like it in here. I was never in such a dark house before. I—I think I won't stay. I'll go home and tell my mother everything. That's what the other gentleman advised and I—I *liked him*. Good-bye," said the now frightened girl, and turned about on that flight to the third story.

But Mr. Smith was right behind her. She'd have to brush past him to descend the narrow stairway, and he was again chattering away, pretending not to hear her objections, but glibly explaining:

"The reason the house is so dark is because it is so old—one of the oldest in the city, I've been told. Besides, each floor has been turned into a flat, or suite of offices, and the tenants keep their doors closed. That's why I chose the top story for my own use—it's so much lighter, and—Here we are!"

Here they were, indeed, but by no stretch of imagination could the apartment be called light. There was a skylight over the top of the stairs, but this was darkened by gray holland shades, and though there appeared to be three rooms on this floor, the doors of all were closed as the doors on the floors below.

Dorothy was trembling visibly, as her guide opened the door of the middle room—the "dark one" of the peculiarly constructed city houses—and she faced absolute blackness. But her host seemed to know the way and to be surprised that nobody was present to receive them. With exclamations of annoyance he hurried to light a single gas jet and the small flame illumined a dingy, most untidy "office."

Yet still with a grand flourish of manner the lawyer pushed a chair before a littered desk, rummaged till he found paper, ink, and pen, and waved his small client toward it. She was almost in tears, from her fright; yet still bolstered her courage with the thought: "For my father and mother!" and resolved to see the business through.

Certainly no such gentlemanly appearing person could intend injury to an unprotected child. Why should she imagine it?

Drawing the paper toward her she began to write and had quickly finished the brief note which told her mother as much, and no more than, her instructor had prescribed. He had kept his eyes rather closely fixed upon the wrinkled envelope she held, and now carelessly remarked:

"You could send that letter home with your note, too, if you wish, though

you'll be detained only a little while. I don't see why that witness I spoke of hasn't come. I do hate a dilatory client! Will she need it, do you think?"

"She might. I will send it, I guess," answered poor Dorothy, and giving the folded envelope still another twist, enclosed and sealed it in her own note which she handed to her "lawyer."

He took it, hastily, and informed her that he would "just trip down those troublesome stairs and find a messenger boy, then be back in a jiffy."

As he reckoned time a "jiffy" must have meant several hours; for the whole day had passed and still he had not returned.

CHAPTER VIII

TENANTS FOR NO. 77

"Oh! do get out of the way, Ma'am Puss! What possesses you to be always under foot? If you're looking for your little mistress she's not here, She's gone away down town on business," cried Mrs. Chester to the cat, as she stumbled over the creature for the third time in about as many minutes.

The animal's behavior annoyed her. For some time it had kept up an intermittent and most doleful mewing and, as if seeking some precious thing no longer to be found, it had wandered in and out of corners in a nerve-distracting way.

The house mistress herself was almost as uneasy as the cat, and she had endured about all the mental strain she could without collapse; or, at least, venting her overtaxed patience upon somebody. Ma'am Puss happened to be the "somebody" most convenient, and with a fresh sinking of her spirits, Martha Chester recalled the many frolics her husband, as well as daughter, had had with their pet. Would anything in her life ever be again as it had been!

Sitting down in the nearest chair, for a moment, the lonely woman took the sleek maltese into her arms and held it close, stroking its fur affectionately, and in a manner to surprise the recipient of this most unusual attention. For Martha didn't like cats; and the only reason Ma'am Puss was tolerated on her premises was because she liked rats and mice still less. But now she not only petted but confided to the purring feline the fact:

"Dorothy has been gone four hours, and I'm dreadfully worried. At the longest she shouldn't have been gone more'n two, even if there was a hold-up on the car line. Besides, she wouldn't have waited for such a thing, anyway. She'd have started home on her own feet, first, for she's a loving child and knows I need her help. That money-letter! I'm afraid somebody's waylaid her and took it away. It wasn't so much—to some people—but ten dollars? Why, Puss, a man was murdered out Towson way for less than that, not so long ago! I wish she'd come. Oh! How I wish she'd come!"

But Dorothy did not come. There was no sign of her on the street, no matter how many times the anxious watcher ran to the door and looked out; and the four hours were fast lengthening into five when the first change came to divert

Mrs. Chester's thoughts, for the time being, from her terrible forebodings. As she gazed in one direction for the sight of a blue gingham frock a cheerful voice called to her from another:

"Howdy, Mis' Chester? Now ain't I brought you the greatest luck? Here's my sister-in-law, without chick nor child to upset things, and only a husband that's night watchman—is going to be—come right here to Baltimore an' is looking for a house. Firm he's worked for is putting up a new factory, right over in them open lots beyond an' nothin' to do but he must take care of 'em. This is my sister-in-law, Mis' Jones, Mis' Chester. I was a Jones myself. Well, they're ready to rent or buy, reasonable, either one; and I reckon it's a chance you won't get in a hurry—no children, too! What you say?"

For a moment Martha could say nothing, except to bid her callers enter the house and to place them comfortably in the cool parlor; and even her first remark bore little on the subject Mrs. Bruce had presented. Handing fans all round she ejaculated:

"It's so terrible hot! I'm all beat out—picking up and—and worrying."

"Well, to get your house off your hands so sudden'll be one worry less," comforted Mrs. Bruce, fanning herself vigorously and looking as if such a thing as anxiety had never entered her own contented mind.

"I—I just stepped 'round to the drug-store, a spell ago, and telephoned to three real-estate men to come up an' look things over. I—Why, it's only Monday morning, and I've got a whole week yet. I mean—It seems so sudden. I've got to see John—No, I haven't. It seems dreadful to take such steps, do business without him, which I never have, but the doctors—How much rent'd you be willing to pay, Mis' Jones?"

Poor Mrs. Chester was strangely distraught. Her neighbor, the plumber's wife, had never seen her like this, but she understood some part of what the other was suffering, though, as yet, she was ignorant of Dorothy's prolonged absence; and she again tried to console:

"I know just how you feel. Havin' slaved so long to pay for the house, out of a postman's salary, an' him an' you bein' such a happy contented couple—Don't doubt I'm feelin' for you an' wantin' to lend a hand, if so be I can. As to rent, there ain't never no houses on this one-hunderd block of Brown Street *to* rent. We both know that, 'cause it's the nicest kept one, with the prettiest back yard anywhere's near. No negro houses in the alleys, neither. So, course, this is a splendid chance for Bill and Jane; but I asked Mr. Bruce an' he said twenty

dollars a month was fair and the goin' rates."

Mrs. Chester listened with still greater dismay. At the utmost she had expected the watchman would offer no more than fifteen dollars, but twenty! The highest rate she had looked to receive from anybody. Of course she wanted to rent—she had now fully decided not to sell—but to succeed so promptly, was almost like having the ground taken from beneath her feet.

At last she forced herself to say:

"I know it's a good chance. I'm not unmindful it's a neighborly thing in you, Mrs. Bruce, or that Mrs. Jones'd make a good tenant. I'm—Well, I'll try to give you your answer some time to-night. Will that do?"

Mrs. Bruce rose and there was some asperity in her tone as she returned:

"I s'pose it'll have to do, since you're the one to pass the word. But we'll look round, other houses, anyway. My folks have left their old place an' this week's the only idle one Bill'll have. He wants to help Jane settle—she ain't overly strong—and they'd like to move in a-Wednesday, or Thursday mornin' at the latest."

"So—soon!" gasped the mistress of No. 77. Despite her will a tear stole down her cheek and her warm-hearted neighbor was instantly moved to greater sympathy. Laying her fat hand on Mrs. Chester's bowed head she urged:

"Keep up your spirit, Martha. If you just rent, why you know you can come back any time. A month's notice, give an' take, that's all. I'm hopin' John'll get well right away, an' you'll all come flyin' back to Baltimore. By the way, where's Dorothy? Mabel said she wasn't goin' to school no more."

"Oh, Mrs. Bruce, I don't know! I don't know!" and the anxious mother poured out her perplexities in the ear of this other mother, who promptly said:

"Well, if I was you, Martha Chester, I'd put on my hat and go straight down to that post-office an' find out what had become of her. If 'twas Mabel, I should."

"Oh! that's what I've been longing to do! But I thought the real-estate men might come, and I dared not leave. I'm getting so nervous I can't keep still, and as for going on with my packing, it's no use. I must go to see John, this afternoon, too, and——"

"Martha Chester, have you had a bite to eat?" demanded Mrs. Bruce, in an accusing tone.

Martha smiled, and reluctantly answered:

"I don't believe I have. I didn't think, but—course, it's past lunch time."

"Lunch! Hear her, Jane. She's one o' the fashionable women 't cooks her dinner at sundown!" cried the plumber's wife, with an attempt at raillery, but in her mind already deciding that hunger was half the matter with her neighbor's nerves. "Now, look here, the pair of you. Me an' him is more sensibler. We have our dinner at dinner time, and you know that was as nice a vegetable soup we had this noon, Jane Jones, as ever was made, an' you needn't deny it. You just stay here a minute an' Martha'll show you round the house, an' the garden—That garden'll tickle Bill 'most to death, he's that set on posies!—while I skip home and fetch a pail of it. 'Twon't take a minute to do it, an' it can be het up on the gas stove, even if the range fire's out. By that time Dorothy C. 'll have got back: an' me an' Jane'll help her keep house while you step across to Johns Hopkins. I reckon that's good plannin', so you begin while I skip."

The idea of corpulent Mrs. Bruce "skipping" brought a smile to both the listeners' faces, but Martha was already greatly comforted and now realized that she was, indeed, faint from want of food. She had taken but little breakfast, being "too busy to eat," as she explained; but she now set out on a tour of the little house with much pride in it, and in the fact that taken unaware, even, it would be found in spotless order. Her washing was already drying in the sunny garden among the roses and Mrs. Jones's delight over that part of the premises was most flattering.

Indeed, there was a dainty simplicity about the little country-woman which now quite won Mrs. Chester's heart, and after they had examined each of the rooms, and each had found Mrs. Jones more and more enthusiastic, the impulsive housemistress exclaimed:

"Maybe you'll think I'm queer, but I believe the Lord just sent you! That you're the very one will love our home for us while we're away."

"Oh! I'm glad to hear you say that. It's the way I feel about things. I ain't so glib a talker as *his* folks is, but I think a good deal. I've always hankered to live in a city, where if *I* wanted a bucket of water, all I'd have to do would be to turn a spigot, 'stead of tugging it up a hill from a spring or hauling it out a well. An' Bill, he's tidy. I've trained him. I begun right off, soon's we was married. The Joneses they—well, they ain't none of 'em too partic'lar, though warmer-hearted folks never lived. But, my man? Why, bless you, now he'd no more think o' comin' in from outdoors without takin' off his boots an' puttin' on his slippers 'an

he'd think o' flyin'. I didn't have to scold him into it, neither. 'Twas just himself seein' me get down an' scrub up the mud he'd tracked in, without even wipin' his feet. But, my! I said I wasn't no talker, an' here I'm makin' myself out a story-teller. But, if so be you an' him come to a right agreement, I promise you one thing: I'll take just as good care, or better, of your prop'ty as if it was my own. Nobody couldn't do more than that, could they?"

"No, indeed: and I'm glad I can have such good news to tell John when I go to him. After all, Mrs. Jones, property troubles don't compare with troubles of your heart. I feel so different, all in these few minutes, so glad you came. I reckon there won't be no difficulty about the agreement: and—look! There comes Mrs. Bruce already and a colored girl with her."

The plumber's wife entered, panting from her efforts to carry a big pail of soup at sufficient distance from her fat sides to keep it from spilling, and announcing that the basket the little colored maid had in hand contained "a few other things I picked up, might come in nice."

"An' I collared 'Mandy, here, on the street. She's the girl does my front, an' I thought she might do yours, to-day. She does it for a nickel and don't you pay her no more. Hear, 'Mandy? If you leave a speck on this lady's steps, I won't give you that baker's cake I promised. Where's your cleanin' things, Mis' Chester?"

These were quickly produced and then the housemistress sat down to her meal, her guests declining to join her in it, though more than willing to sit beside her and talk while she ate. Moreover, Mrs. Bruce was extremely proud to show this other notable housekeeper a specimen of her own cooking, knowing that she was usually considered a failure in that line, but had succeeded well this time.

Then said Mrs. Jones:

"I've been thinkin' things over a mite, whilst you two talked. Bill's and my goods are to the depot here, ready packed an' waitin', and I've not a hand's turn to do, till I get a place to unpack them in. If you'll let me I'd admire to come help you get your stuff ready for movin'. Havin' just done mine I've sort of got my hand in, so to speak, an' can take hold capable. I'll look after the house, too, and learn the ways of it, while you're off on your errands or seeing your husband, or the like. What say, sister, to that notion?"

"I call it first-rate: an' I'll be able to help some, 'tween times. Now, Martha Chester, if you've finished your dinner, be off with you. Jane an' me'll do everything all right, an' I'm getting as wild to have Dorothy back as you are. Don't suppose she's one to run away an' play with some the school children, do

you?" said Mrs. Bruce.

"No, I don't. I wish I did think she might, but Dorothy never ran away, not in all her life, except when she was a mite of a thing and followed her father on his route. Well, you can tell the real-estate men, if they come, 't the thing is settled already. I say it 'tis, but I reckon they'll be some put out, comin' up here for nothing. Good-bye. Do wish me good luck! and I'll hurry back."

Late though she felt that she was for her hospital visit, Mrs. Chester hurried first to the post-office, her anxiety increasing all the way, and reached it just as Mr. Lathrop was leaving it for his last delivery. To her anxious inquiry he returned a discouraging:

"No. I haven't seen Dorothy since early this morning, when I helped her a bit in getting her money-letter. But I'll ask if anybody else knows what became of her. Doubtless she'll turn up all right and with a simple explanation of her absence. She's a bright little girl, you'll find her all safe. I'll go back with you now."

Thus for the second time that day, the busy postman delayed his own work to do kindness to a comrade's family, nor could he quite understand why his faith in his own words was less than he wished hers to be. It was rare to hear of a child being lost in that safe city, and it would be a bitter blow to the already afflicted John Chester if harm befell his adopted daughter. When no good news could be obtained here, he advised Martha to go on to the hospital but to say nothing to her husband of Dorothy. He would notify the police, and if she had met with any accident, or by some rare mischance lost her way, she would speedily be traced.

Because she could do no better, Mrs. Chester followed his advice, boarded a car for the hospital, and was soon at her husband's side. But alas! She was to find no comfort in this interview. With a natural reaction from his first elation over the possibility of recovery he was now greatly depressed. Having lived so long on will-power, and having once given up, he had developed a great weakness of body, and, in a degree, of mind. Before his wife was admitted to his presence she was warned that nothing but the pleasantest topics must be discussed, and was told that the doctors now desired him to be removed to the country right away.

"This terrible heat has injured him, as it has others. Get him out of town at once, Mrs. Chester, if you would save his life."

So when he asked for Dorothy she ignored his question, but talked glibly of the fine chance that they had of letting the house: yet to her amazement he showed no interest in this matter.

"Do whatever you think best, little woman. I don't care. I don't believe I'll ever care about anything in the world again."

"Oh, John! Don't say that. You'll be better soon. But, good-bye till to-morrow:" and hastily bidding him expect her then, with some home flowers and "lots of good news," she hurried away.

"No news?" she asked, as her own door opened to receive her, and the gentle little country-woman welcomed her.

"Oh! no. Not yet. Ain't hardly time!" cheerfully responded Jane Jones, just as if she were imparting other tidings. "Mustn't look for miracles, nowadays. That child's off visitin', somewheres, you may depend. And you mustn't be hard on her when she comes back," advised this new friend.

"Hard on her? Me? Why, I'd give ten years of my life to know she was safe, this minute! *Hard on her!* All I ask is to hold her fast in my arms once more. But, course, you don't know Dorothy C. The little child that was *sent*, and that's made John an' me so happy all her life. Look. Here's her picture. We thought it was extravagant, but somehow we felt we had to have it. 'Twas taken this very spring, on the same day we found her on the steps."

From a little secretary in the dining room Mrs. Chester produced the photograph, still carefully wrapped in its waxed paper covering, and displayed to her admiring guest the picture of a very lovely child. The shapely head was crowned by short brown curls, the big brown eyes looked eagerly forth, and the pretty red lips were curved in a half-smile that was altogether bewitching.

"Why! She's a beauty! A regular beauty! She looks as if she belonged to high-up folks; I declare she does," commented Mrs. Jones.

Mother Martha was touched by this sincere admiration, and lifting the picture to her lips lightly pressed a kiss upon it. Then she carefully put it away again, saying with a sigh:

"We'd laid out to get it framed, soon, and hang it in the parlor. That's why we had but one taken. John thought one big one was better worth while than a dozen small ones. My! Hark! What's that? Such a ring—my heart's in my mouth—you open the door—please—I can't!" and so imploring, Mrs. Chester sank upon the lounge and covered her face with her hands.

Even Mrs. Jones was all a-tremble and her hands fumbled so with the unfamiliar latch that the housemistress sprang to her feet and opened the door herself with the glad cry:

"Dorothy! Dorothy, have you come?"

"Not Dorothy, Mrs. Chester; just Lathrop, you know, with a detective, come to get some points."

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE EXPERIENCES

"Why doesn't he come back! Oh! what will my mother think of my staying away like this? All the help she has now, too, and needing me so much. I'll wait just five minutes longer, then I'll go home, anyway, whether that 'witness' who's to tell me so much about myself and my real father and mother comes or not. No father or mother could be as dear to me as father John and mother Martha. I don't want any others. Let them keep their old fortune the rest of the time, since they've kept it so long and never sent for me," said Dorothy C. to herself, after she had waited with what slight patience she could for Mr. Smith's return, and more than an hour had already passed.

Hitherto she had not deemed it polite to explore her present quarters, but now began to do so in an idle sort of way. If her "lawyer" left her so long alone he couldn't blame her if she amused herself in some manner; and first she examined the few books which were tossed in a heap on the untidy desk. They did not look like law-books, many of them, though one or two were bound in dirty calf-skin and showed much handling. In any case none of them interested her.

Next she tried to open the window, that gave upon the hall from one side of the room as the door by which she had entered did upon another, but found it fast.

"Why, that's funny! What would anybody want to nail an inside window tight for? Oh! maybe because this is an apartment house, he said, and other people might come in. My father says he wouldn't like to live in a flat, it's so mixed up with different families. He'd rather have a tiny house like ours and have it separate. Well! if I can't open the window, I reckon I can that door which must go into a back room."

Immediately she proceeded to try this second door, which was opposite the nailed window, and, to her delight, found that it yielded easily to her touch. But the room thus disclosed was almost as dark as the "office" she had just quitted, although it had two windows at the back. The upper sashes of these had been lowered as far as possible, but behind them were wooden shutters and these were also nailed, or spiked fast. There were crescent-shaped holes in the tops of the shutters and through these a little air and light penetrated into the gloom of what,

now that her eyes had become accustomed to the dimness, she perceived was a bedroom. From one side of this opened a bathroom, whose window was secured like those of the bedroom, but where was the cheerful sound of running water.

Now terribly frightened by her strange surroundings, Dorothy's throat grew so dry and parched that she hastened to get a drink from the faucet, beneath which hung a rusty tin cup. Then she thought:

"Maybe I can get out into the hall by this bathroom door!"

It could not be opened, and now half-frantic with fear, the imprisoned girl ran from one door to another, only to find that while she had the freedom of the three apartments, every exit from these into the hall was securely bolted, or locked, upon the outside, and realized that it was with some evil intention she had been brought to this place.

For hours she worked over doors, then windows, and back again to the doors —testing her puny strength against them, only to fail each time. The heat was intolerable in the rooms, for it was the top story of a small house with the sun beating against the roof. Even below, in the street, people mopped their faces and groaned beneath this unseasonable temperature. As for poor Dorothy, she felt herself growing faint, and remembered that she, as well as her mother, had taken but a light breakfast; but her eyes had now grown accustomed to the dim light of the rooms and the gas jet still flickered in the "office," so that, after a time, she threw herself on the bed, worn out with her efforts and hoping a few moments' rest might help her "to think a way out" of her prison.

How long she slept, she never knew, for it was that of utter exhaustion, but she was suddenly roused by the sound of a bolt shot in its lock, and the opening of the "office" door. It was Mr. Smith returning, profuse with apologies which Dorothy scarcely heard and wholly disdained, as, darting past him, she made for the entrance with all her speed.

"Why, Miss Chester! Don't, I beg, don't treat me so suspiciously. Indeed, it is quite as I tell you. I was—was detained against my will. I have only just now been able to come back here, and you must imagine—for I cannot describe them —what my sufferings have been on your account. I know that you'll think hardly of me, but, indeed, I mean you nothing but good. Wait, please; wait just a moment and taste these sandwiches I've brought and this bottle of milk. You must be famished. You can't? You won't? Why, my dear young lady, how am I ever to do you any good if you mistrust me so on such slight grounds?"

"Slight grounds!" almost screamed Dorothy, struggling to free herself from the

man's grasp, which, apparently gentle, was still far too firm for her to resist.

At once, also, he began again to talk, so fast, so plausibly, that his words fairly tripped each other up, and still pressing upon her acceptance a paper of very dainty sandwiches and a glass of most innocent appearing milk.

"Just take these first. I should be distressed beyond measure to have you return to your home in this condition. I have a carriage at the door to carry you there and we'll start immediately after you have eaten, or at least drank something. You needn't be so alarmed. Your mother received your note only a few moments after you sent it, with the envelope enclosed. She is now most anxious for you to hear all that my witness—witnesses, in fact—have to disclose as to your real parentage and possessions. It is such a grand thing for her and her husband, now that he has lost his health. Just five minutes, to keep yourself from fainting, then we'll be off. Indeed, I'm far more anxious to be on the road than you are, I so deeply regret this misadventure."

At that moment there was the ring of sincerity in his words, and also just then there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs, followed by the appearance at the door of a hack-driver in the attire of his class.

"Time's erbout up, suh, 't I was hired for, an' soon's you-all's ready, suh, I ____"

"All right, Jehu. I'll pay for overtime, but can't hurry a young lady, you know. Especially one that's been shut up by accident almost all day in my office." Then turning to Dorothy, who still refrained from touching the sandwiches which, however, began to look irresistibly tempting, he begged: "At least drink the milk. This good fellow seems to be in haste, though it's only a few minutes' drive to Brown Street and you can nibble the sandwiches in the carriage."

She was not worldly-wise, she was very hungry, and the man seemed profoundly distressed that she had suffered such treatment at his hands. Moreover, it appeared that the shortest way to liberty was to obey him. She would drink the milk, she was fairly famishing for it, but once upon the street she would enter no carriage of his providing but trust rather to her own nimble feet to reach her home, and, if need be, to the protection of the first policeman she could summon.

Wrapping the sandwiches once more in their paper, she hastily drank the milk and again started to leave. This time she was not prevented nor as they left the "office" did its proprietor use the precaution of the bolt which anybody from outside could unfasten—none from within! But he did turn out the gas, with a

noteworthy prudence, and still retained his courteous support of Dorothy's arm.

Released at last from the imprisonment which had so terrified her she was strangely dizzy. Her head felt very much as it had done when she had been knocked down by Mrs. Cecil's big dogs, and it was now of her own accord that she clutched Mr. Smith's arm, fearing she would fall.

How far, far away sounded the hackman's footsteps, retreating before them to the street! How queerly her feet jogged up and down on the stairs, which seemed to spring upward into her very face as she descended! In all her life she had never, never felt so tired and curiously weak as now, when all the power to move her limbs seemed suddenly to leave her.

"Ah! the carriage!" She could dimly see it, in the glare of an electric light, and now she welcomed it most eagerly. If ever she were to reach that blessed haven of home she would have to be carried there. So she made no remonstrance when she was bodily lifted into the coupé and placed upon its cushions, where, at once, she went to sleep.

"Here girl. Time you woke up and took your breakfast."

After that strange dizziness in descending the stairs of the house in Howard Street, Dorothy's first sensation was one of languid surprise. A big, coarse-looking woman stood beside the bed on which she lay, holding a plate in one hand, a cup in the other. Broad beams of sunlight streamed through an uncurtained window near, and a fresh breeze blew in from the fields beyond.

"Why—the country! Have we come to it so soon and I not knowing? Mother! Where is my mother?" she asked, gaining in strength and rising upon her elbow. Then she saw that she had lain down without undressing and cautiously stepped to the floor, which was bare and not wholly clean. Her head felt light and dizzy still, so that she suddenly again sat down on the bed's edge to recover herself. Thereupon the woman dragged a wooden chair forward and, placing the breakfast on it, said:

"I can't bother no more. Eat it or leave it. I've got my fruit to pick."

Then she turned away, but Dorothy reached forward, caught the blue denim skirt, and demanded:

"Tell me where my mother is? I want her. I want her right away."

"Like enough. I don't know. I'm goin'. I'll be in to get your dinner. You can lie down again or do what you want, only stay inside. Orders."

Dorothy was very hungry. The hunger of yesterday was nothing compared to the craving she felt now and, postponing all further questions till that was satisfied, she fell to eating the contents of the great plate with greed. Then she drank the bowl of coffee and, still strangely drowsy, lay back upon the pillow and again instantly dropped asleep.

The clatter of dishes in the room beyond that one where she lay was what next roused her and her head was now nearly normal. Only a dull pain remained and her wits were clearing of the mist that had enveloped them. Memories of strange stories came to her, and she thought:

"Something has happened to me, more than I dreamed. I've been kidnapped! I see it, understand it all now. But—why? *Why?* An orphan foundling like me—what should anybody steal me away from my home for? Father and mother have no money to pay ransom—like that little boy father read about in the paper—who was stolen and not given back till thousands of dollars were sent. But I'm somewhere in the country now, and in a house that's all open, every side. It's easy to get away from *here*. I'll go. I'll go right away, soon as I wash my face and brush my hair—if I can find a brush. I'll go into that other room and act just as if I wasn't afraid and—that dinner smells good!"

The big woman, whose denim skirt and blouse suggested the overalls of a day laborer, was bending over a small cooking stove whereon was frying some bacon and eggs. A great pot of boiled potatoes waited on the stove-hearth, and on an oilcloth-covered table were set out a few dishes. A boy was just entering the kitchen from the lean-to beyond and was carrying a wooden pail of water with a tin dipper. He was almost as tall as the woman but bore no further resemblance to her, being extremely thin and fair. Indeed, his hair was so nearly white that Dorothy stared at it, and his eyes were very blue, while the woman looked like a swarthy foreigner from some south country.

Mother Martha had a saying, when anybody about her was inclined to sharpness of speech, that "you can catch more flies with molasses than with vinegar," and, oddly enough, the adage came to Dorothy's mind at that very instant. She had come into the kitchen prepared to demand her liberty and to be directed home, but she now spoke as politely as she would have done to the minister's wife:

"Please, madam, will you show me where I can wash and freshen myself a

little? I feel so dirty I'd like to do it before I eat my dinner or go home."

The woman rose from above her frying pan with a face of astonishment. She was so tanned and burned by the sun as well as by the heat of cooking that the contrast between herself and her son—if he were her son—made him look fairly ghostlike. Furthermore, as the inwardly anxious, if outwardly suave, little girl perceived—her face was more stupid than vicious.

Without the waste of a word the woman nodded over her shoulder toward the lean-to and proceeded to dish up her bacon, now cooked to her satisfaction. She placed it in the middle of a great yellow platter, the eggs around it, and a row of potatoes around them. Then she set the platter on the table, drew her own chair to it, filled a tin plate with the mixture, and proceeded with her dinner. She made no remark when the boy, also, sat down, and neither of them waited an instant for their girl guest.

But Dorothy's spirit was now roused and she felt herself fully equal to dealing with these rustics: and it was with all the dignity she could summon that she drew a third chair to the table and herself sat down, saying:

"Now, if you please, I wish to be told where I am and how I came here."

The hostess paid no more heed than if a fly had touched her, but the lad paused in the act of shoveling food into his mouth and stared at Dorothy, as he might have done at the same fly, could it have spoken. Nor did he remove his gaze from her till she had repeated her question. Then he shifted it to the woman's face, who waited awhile longer, then said:

"I tell nothing. Drink your milk."

"Oh, indeed! Then I suppose I must find out for myself. I don't care for the milk, thank you. I rarely drink it at home, but I'm fond of bacon and eggs, and yours look nice. Please serve me some."

The woman made no answer. She had finished her own meal and left the others to do the same. So, as the taciturn creature departed for the open fields, with a hoe over her shoulder, Dorothy drew the platter toward her, found a third empty tin plate, and helped herself.

She had noticed one thing that the others had, apparently, not known she had: a sign of silence interchanged between the woman and the lanky lad. He had been bidden to hold his tongue and been left to clear up the dinner matters. He did this as deftly as a girl, though not after the manner in which Dorothy had been trained: and casting a look of contempt upon him, she finished her dinner,

rose, and quietly left the room and the house.

But she got no further than a few rods' distance when she felt a strong hand on her arm, herself turned rudely about, and led back to the cottage. There she was pushed upon the doorstep and a note thrust into her hand by this abnormally silent woman, who had returned from the field as suddenly as if she had sprung from the earth at the girl's very feet.

The note was plainly enough written and to the point:

> "Stay quiet where you are and you'll soon be set free. Try to run away and you'll meet big trouble."

There was no signature and the handwriting was unknown: and Dorothy was still blankly gazing at it when it was snatched from her hand, the woman had again disappeared, and a huge mastiff had come around the corner of the cottage, to seat himself upon the doorstep beside her. His attentions might have been friendly; but Dorothy was afraid of dogs, and shrank from this one into the smallest space possible, while there fluttered down over her shoulder the note that had been seized. There was now pinned to it a scrap of paper on which were scrawled three words:

"Drink no milk."

CHAPTER X

THE FLITTING

Disappointed, Mrs. Chester had stepped back into her little hall, and the postman with the detective followed. Then they went further still and settled themselves in the parlor, as if come for a prolonged stay. To the detective's inquiry whether the missing Dorothy had recently met any strangers, made acquaintances who might be able to furnish some clew to her present whereabouts—as friends of longer standing had not been able—the mother answered: "No. She was always at home or in the immediate neighborhood."

But conquering her timidity, the country-woman now interrupted:

"Wait a minute. Mabel was here yesterday, wasn't she?"

"Why, yes. She came home with my little girl from Sunday school and spent part of the day. Why she did not stay longer I don't know. What of it?" returned mother Martha, drearily.

"She didn't stay longer because she was sent home. I was there and I noticed what a good-natured child she was not to get mad about it. She told her mother that Dorothy had a gentleman caller and had to see him on business. We both laughed over it, 'cause 'twas so grown-up an' old-fashioned like. An', sister, she said as how city children didn't scarce have any childhood, they begun to be beauin' each other round so early. We *laughed*, but still, I thought 'twas a pity, for I like little girls to stay such, long as they can."

"Nonsense! My Dorothy is—was the simplest child in the world. A gentleman caller—the idea is ridiculous!" cried Mrs. Chester, indignantly, and poor Mrs. Jones felt herself snubbed and wished that she had held her tongue.

Not so the detective, who quietly asked:

"Who is this Mabel, and where can she be found?"

"She's my niece an' likely she'll be found in bed, by now. No matter about that, though. If you'd like to see her I'll fetch her to once," answered Mrs. Jones, promptly rising.

"Do so, please," said the officer, and the woman hurried away.

The postman friend employed the interval of her absence in telling the plans formed by "the boys" for the benefit of their ailing comrade.

"You see, Mrs. Chester, John's about the best liked man on the force and we want he should be the best cared for. So, to-night, after I saw you I ran over to the hospital myself and saw one the doctors—the one that has most to say about John. He wants to get him into the country right away. Then back I hurried and got leave of absence, from Wednesday night till next Monday morning, and I'm going with you, to help you on the trip and see him settled all straight. No—Don't say a word yet! It'll be all right. It's settled. You can get ready."

"Oh! but I can't, I can't!" protested Martha, deeply touched by this kindness, yet feeling as if she were being fairly hurled out of her old life into the new one. Besides, if this mystery of Dorothy's disappearance were not cleared she could never leave the city, never! and so she stoutly declared.

"But—it's a case of adopted daughter *versus* a husband's life, seems to me," put in the detective quietly. "Moreover, I'm told by Lathrop, here, that Chester isn't to be worried about anything. *Anything.* His chance of recovery depends on it."

The tortured housemistress was vastly relieved to see not only Mabel, but the entire household of Bruce-and-Jones, coming swiftly toward the house and presently entering at the doorway, left open because of the great heat. Both the plumber and his wife were panting from their exertions; Mr. Jones was as excited as if he were going to a circus; his wife uncommonly proud of her part in the occasion; and the terrified Mabel weeping loudly:

"I don't know a thing! I don't—I don't!"

"Why, Miss Bruce, what a surprising statement from such a bright-looking young lady as you!" exclaimed the detective, suavely, and the girl stopped sobbing long enough to see that this was no formidable policeman in blue-and-brass but a very simple gentleman, in a business suit rather the worse for wear. In another moment he had gallantly placed this possibly important witness in the coziest corner of the sofa, and had placed himself beside her, as if to protect her from the inquisitiveness of her friends.

Then in a tone so low that it effectually prevented their words being overheard, he deftly drew from the now reassured Mabel a much better description of Dorothy's caller than fear would have extorted. Indeed, she became inclined to enlarge upon facts, as she saw her statements recorded in a small notebook. But this finally held no more than the brief entry:

"Tall. Light hair. Left eye squints. Eyebrows meet. Glib. Name not given."

Then the notebook was closed and pocketed, the cross-examination was over, and all were free to take a part in a discussion—which they did so volubly, that the detective smiled and called a halt. Moreover, his words had the weight of one who knew, as he said:

"We've gone into this business very promptly, and it must, for the present, be kept out of the newspapers, else the guilty party who is detaining Dorothy—if there is such a party—will be warned and may escape. It is but twelve hours since the child disappeared. At the end of another twenty-four will be time enough to publish. Meanwhile, Madam, rest assured that we shall keep steadily at work, trying to locate your missing daughter and—I wish you all good-evening."

The gentleman's departure was a relief. It seemed to lessen the horror of Dorothy's absence, though her mother was glad to know that the efforts of the police were being made to trace her. But—Why, the darling might come walking in, at any moment, and how distressed she'd be to find herself an object of such unpleasant importance!

"Now, Mrs. Chester," said Mr. Lathrop, "we 'boys' don't want you to worry one minute about this moving business. We've agreed to send a professional packer and his men here, the first thing to-morrow morning. You needn't touch one thing. It's better that you should not, for if all is left to this man he is responsible for everything. You just rest, visit John and get him braced up for his journey, and take it easy. If little Dorothy is back before Thursday morning, when we start, all right. She shall go with us and be the life of the party. If she isn't—why, as soon as she does come, some way will be found, somebody, to bring her safely to you."

"Oh, Mr. Lathrop! You and the 'boys' are goodness itself, but I can't—I cannot go away in such uncertainty. If Dorothy isn't found—John will be the first one to say that we must wait until she is."

This was a natural attitude of mind, and Mr. Lathrop, as well as all the other friends of the Chesters, anticipated it. But by slow degrees, the arguments of her pastor, the hospital doctors, and the honest neighbors who sympathized with the tortured mother, finally succeeded in bringing her to view the matter as they did.

"Not an effort shall be relaxed, any more than if you were on the spot to direct us. We all feel as if we, too, had lost a beloved child and none of us will rest until this mystery is cleared. Trust the advice of all your best-wishers, Mrs.

Chester, and take this fine chance offered your lame husband to make the long journey under the care of his postman friend," urged the minister, and his final argument procured her consent.

"Oh! these last two days! Shall I ever forget them!" cried Mrs. Chester, when Wednesday evening had arrived and she sat in her dismantled home upon one of her incoming tenant's chairs. "To think that on Monday morning, when you came, Mrs. Jones, I hadn't touched a single thing to pack! and now—there isn't one left. All in boxes an' crates, over there to the station; me all alone; no Dorothy C.; no John—I'm just heart-broke!"

Mrs. Jones's patience was tried. For these two busy days she and her "Bill" had stayed at No. 77, helping where help was needed, and keeping a careful eye to the "professional" packing which they more than half distrusted. The frail country-woman had just gone through the same sort of business, almost single-handed, and she felt that her new friend failed to realize the blessings of her lot and that a reproof was in order.

"Well, Mis' Chester, you may be. I can't tell. I never had chick nor child to make me sad or glad, ary one. But if I'd adopted one, right out of the streets as you did, an' she'd seen fit to run away an' turn her back on a good home, after enjoyin' it so long, an' I'd still got my *man* left, an' folks had been that generous to me, payin' for everything—Laws! I sh'd think I had some mercies left. *Some*."

Mother Martha rose. She was not offended, but she was deeply hurt and she was glad the time had come to say good-bye. With a weary smile she held out her hand, saying:

"Well, that's right, too, but you don't understand. Nobody can who hasn't lived with *Dorothy*. There was never a child like her. Never. I'll be going. I said good-bye to everybody—everything, this side the city, and I've fixed it to sleep at a boarding house right across the street from the Hospital. We've got to make an early start and I'll be close on hand. If she—O my darling!—Good-bye. I—I hope you'll be as happy here as I was before all this trouble came upon me. No. I don't want company. I want to be alone. It's the only way I can bear it and—good-bye, old home! Good-bye—good-bye!"

The door opened and the mistress of the prettiest house on Brown Street vanished into the darkness of a somber, sultry night; and what her feelings were only those who have thus parted with a beloved home can understand; and what the hours of sleeplessness which followed only she herself knew.

The morning found her sunshiny and bright, as if her whole heart were in this

sudden flitting, and waiting in the carriage at the hospital door, while an orderly and Mr. Lathrop, superintended by a nurse and doctor, helped John Chester to make his first short journey upon crutches.

The excitement of the event had sent a flush to his cheeks and a brightness to his eyes which made him look so like his old self that his wife rejoiced that, after all, there had been no delay in their removal. Yet, once in the carriage, with his useless legs stretched out before him, he suddenly demanded:

"Why, where's my girl? Where's Dorothy C.?"

He looked toward his wife, but it was Mr. Lathrop who answered:

"Oh! she's coming later. We—we couldn't bother with a child, this trip."

"Couldn't 'bother' with my Dorothy! Why, friend, you're the best I have, but you don't know Dorothy. Humph! She's more brains in her curly head than anybody in this party has in theirs. Beg pardon, all, but—but you see I'm rather daft on Dorothy. I simply cannot go without her. What's more, I shan't even try."

This was worse than they had expected. Martha had felt that her husband should no longer be deceived as to the state of things; even in his weakened condition she believed that his good sense would support him under their dreadful trial, and that he would suffer less if the news were gently broken to him here than if he were left to learn it later, in some ruder way. But her judgment had been overruled even as now his decision was; for without an instant's delay Mr. Lathrop ordered the carriage to drive on and that memorable journey had begun.

As he was lifted out of the vehicle at the station entrance, he turned upon his wife and for the first time in her memory of him spoke harshly to her:

"Martha, you're deceiving me. Taking advantage of my helplessness. You've always been jealous of my love for little Dorothy, and now, I suppose, just because I can't work to support her you've got rid of her. Well, I shall have her back. I may be a cripple, but my brain isn't lame—it's only my legs—and I'll find some way to take care of her. She shall come back. Trust me. Now, go ahead!"

He submitted to the porter and his friend Lathrop, and, the train just rolling in, he was carried through the gates and placed aboard it in the parlor car where seats had been procured. He had never before traveled in such luxury, but instead of the gay abandon with which he would once have accepted and enjoyed it, he seemed now not to notice anything about him. Except that, just as the train was moving out, he caught at a newsboy hurrying from it, seized a paper, tossed a

nickel, and spread the sheet open on his knee.

Alas! for all the over-wise precautions of his friends! The first words his eyes rested upon were the scare-head capitals of this sentence:

THE FATE OF POSTMAN JOHN CHESTER'S DAUGHTER DOROTHY STILL UNKNOWN—KIDNAPPING AND MURDER THE PROBABLE SOLUTION OF THE MYSTERY.

He stared at the letters as if they had no significance. Then he read them singly, in pairs, in dozens—trying to make his shocked brain comprehend their meaning. The utmost he could do was to see them as letters of fire, printed on the air before him, and on the darkness of the tunnel they now entered. A darkness so suggestive of the misery that had shrouded a once happy household that poor Martha, burying her face in her hands, could only sob aloud.

But from the stricken "father John" came neither sob nor groan, for there was still upon him the numbness of the shock he had received; and it was in that same silence that he made the long journey, with its several changes, and came at last to the farmhouse on the hilltop, which was to have been made glad by a child's presence and was now so desolate.

CHAPTER XI

JIM BARLOW

Dorothy reread the note. Then she took off the scrawl attached to it and tore it into bits, remarking to the mastiff, or whoever might hear:

"Well, I don't want any milk. I shall never like it again. I believe that dreadful man put something in it last night—was it only last night?—that made me go to sleep and not know a thing was happening after I got into the carriage till I woke up here. Milk! Ugh!"

With a shudder of repulsion she looked over her shoulder just as a sibilant, warning "S-Ssh!" came from the room behind. Then she stood up and screamed as the mastiff, likewise rising, grasped her skirt in his teeth.

"Hush! you better not let her hear you!" was the second, whispered warning, and though she peered into the kitchen she could see nobody, till, after a moment, she discovered a pair of dirty bare feet protruding from under the bed that stood in one corner.

Dorothy was afraid of the dog that held her, but she was not usually afraid of human beings; so she called quite loudly:

"You long white boy, come out from that place. I want to talk to you!"

The dog loosened its grip long enough to growl, then took a fresh hold, as the lad cautiously drew himself into full sight and noiselessly stood up. But he laid one grimy hand on his lips, again commanding silence, and snatching a big basket from the floor ran out of a rear door.

The girl tried to follow. Of the two human beings she had seen in this isolated cottage the long boy seemed the gentler, and she was determined to make him, or somebody, tell her where she was. The mastiff still held her prisoner and she suspected he was acting upon orders. Her temper rose and with it her courage. It was absurd that she could not do as she pleased in a little bit of a country cottage like this, where there were no locks nor bolts to hinder! So for the third time she moved, and for the third time the dog's great teeth set themselves more firmly on her light clothing. Clenching her small hands in her impotent wrath, she began to screech and yell, at the top of her voice, incessantly, deafeningly, defiantly. Pausing only long enough to renew her breath, and wondering if that old woman

she could see yonder, picking berries from a bed, could endure the noise as long as she could endure to make it.

Apparently, the uproar had no further result than to tire her own throat; for, until she had finished gathering the strawberries from one long row of vines, the woman did not pause. But, having reached the limit of the bed and of the crate she moved along before her as she worked, she suddenly stood up, lifted the crate to her head, and strode back to the house. There she deposited her precious fruit in an outer shed and entered the kitchen. From the small clock-shelf she gathered a pad of writing paper, a bunch of envelopes, and a lead pencil; which with an air of pride, and the first semblance of a smile Dorothy had seen upon her grim features, she offered to the child.

"Here. To write on. To your ma. He left 'em. Tige, let go!"

Instantly, the mastiff loosened his hold of Dorothy's skirts and followed his mistress into the strawberry patch whither she had again gone, carrying another crate filled with empty baskets. Evidently, this was a truck-farm and the mistress of it was preparing for market. Just such crates and cups, or little baskets, were now plentiful at all the city shops where groceries were sold, and Dorothy's hopes rose at the thought that she might be taken thither with this woman when she went to sell her stuff.

"Oh! that's what she'll let me do! So what's the use of writing? And how fine those berries look! I'd like to pick some myself. I'd rather do it than do nothing. I'll just go and offer to help."

In better spirits than she would have thought possible, even a few moments before, the homesick girl ran across the garden and to the woman's side, who merely looked up and said nothing, till Dorothy lifted one of the wooden cups and began to pick fruit into it.

For a brief space the other watched her closely, as the nimble little fingers plucked the beautiful berries; till by mischance Dorothy pulled off an entire stem, holding not only ripened fruit but several green and half-turned drupes. Whereupon her fingers were smartly tapped and by example, rather than speech, she was instructed in the art of berry picking.

"Oh! I do love to learn things, and I see, I see!" cried the novice, and smiling up into the old face now so near her own, she began the task afresh. Already the market-woman had resumed her own work, and it seemed incredible that such coarse fingers as hers could so deftly strip the vines of perfect berries only, leaving all others intact for a future picking. Also, she had a swift way of

packing them in the cups that left each berry showing its best side and filled the receptacle without crowding.

"Ah! I see! I'm getting the trick of it! And that's what mother means by paying for a quart and not getting a quart, isn't it? Oh! how delicious they are!" and, without asking, Dorothy popped the plumpest berry she had yet found into her own mouth.

That was a mistake, as the frown upon the woman's face promptly told her; and with a sudden sinking of her heart she realized again that she was, after all, a prisoner in an unknown place. She rose, apologized in a haughty manner, and would have retreated to the cottage again had she been permitted. But having proved herself of service, retreat was not so easy. Again she was pulled down to a stooping posture and her cup thrust back into her hand.

"Work. Eat spoiled ones. Don't dally."

Dorothy obeyed; but alas! her self-elected task grew very wearisome. The heat was still great and the afternoon sun shone full upon her back, and there seemed positively no end to the berries. There were rows upon rows of them, and the woman had only just begun when Dorothy joined her. Or so it seemed, though there were already several crates waiting in the little shed till the full day's crop should be garnered.

At the end of one row of vines she stood up and protested:

"I can't pick any more. I'm so tired. Please tell me where I am and what your name is. Tell me, too, when I can go home and the way."

"No matter. Go. Write. I'll take it. Here;" and this big woman of small speech held out on the palm of her great hand a half-dozen over-ripe berries, which Dorothy hesitated to accept, yet found delicious when she did so.

"Thank you! and if you won't tell me who you are or where I am, I shall call you Mrs. Denim, after the clothes you wear; and I shall find out where this farm is and run away from it at the first chance. I'd rather that horrid old dog would eat me up than be kept a prisoner this way. Is that long boy your son? May I go talk to him? May he show me the way home to Baltimore?"

To none of these questions was any answer vouchsafed, and offended Dorothy was moved to remark:

"Humph! You're the savingest woman I ever saw! You don't waste even a word, let alone a spoiled strawberry. Oh! I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to be

quite so saucy, but I'm almost crazy to go home. I want to go home—*I want to go home*!"

There was such misery in this wail that the long boy, weeding onions a few feet away, paused in his tedious task and raised his shock head with a look of pity on his face. But the woman seemed to know his every movement, even though her own head was bowed above the vines, and shot him such an angry glance that he returned to his weeding with no further expression of his sympathy.

Poor Dorothy C.! Homesickness in its bitterest form had come upon her and her grief made her feel so ill that she dropped down just where she was, unable longer to stand upright. Instantly, she was snatched up again by "Mrs. Denim's" strong arms and violently shaken. That anybody, even an ignorant stranger, should lie down in a strawberry patch and thus ruin many valuable berries was the height of folly! So, without more ado, Dorothy was carried indoors, almost tossed upon the bed in the kitchen, and the paper and pencil thrown upon the patchwork quilt beside her. Then she was left to recover at her leisure, while whistling to Tige to watch the girl, "Mrs. Denim" returned to her outdoor labors; nor was she seen again till darkness had filled the narrow room.

Then once again Dorothy was lifted and was now carried to a loft above the kitchen, where, by the dim light of a tallow candle, she was shown a rude bed on the floor and a plate of food. Also, there was a bowl of milk, but at this the girl looked with a shudder. She wasn't hungry, but she reflected that people grew faint and ill without food, so she forced herself to nibble at the brown bread, which had been dipped in molasses, instead of being spread with butter, and its sweetness gave her a great thirst. Slipping down the stairs, she found the pail and dipper and got her drink, and it was with some surprise that she did this unreproved.

However, a snore from the bed explained why. "Mrs. Denim" was asleep and the "long boy" was invisible. At the foot of the stairs, Dorothy hesitated. Wasn't this a chance to steal away and start for home? Once out of this house and on some road, she would meet people who would direct her. She had heard her father say, time and time again, that the world was full of kindness; and, though her present circumstances seemed to contradict this statement, she was anxious to believe it true. But, as she stood there debating whether she dare run away in the darkness or wait until daylight, the sleepless Tiger gave a vicious growl and bounded in from the shed where he had lain.

That settled it. With a leap as swift as his own Dorothy sped back over the stairs and flung herself on the "shake-down" where she had been told to sleep; and again silence, broken only by its mistress's snores, fell upon this lonely cottage in the fields.

Dorothy's own sleep was fitful. This low room under the eaves was close and warm. Her head ached strangely, and her throat was sore. At times she seemed burning up with fever, and the next instant found herself shaking with the cold. She roused, at length, from one disturbed nap to hear the sound of wheels creaking heavily over rough ground, and to see the attic dimly lighted.

"Can it be morning already? Is that woman going to market and not taking me, after all I begged her so?" cried the girl aloud and, hurrying from the bed to the low window, looked out.

It was the light of a late-rising moon that brightened the scene and there was slowly disappearing in the distance one of those curious, schooner-shaped vehicles which truck-farmers use: and with a vain belief that she could overtake it, Dorothy again rushed down the stairs and plump upon the mastiff crouched on the floor below, and evidently on guard.

But, yawning and stretching his long limbs, there just then entered the shock-headed youth; and his "Pshaw!" Dorothy's "O-Oh!" and Tiger's growl made a trio of sounds in the silent house: to which he promptly added his question:

"Huh? you awake?"

"Yes, yes! But I want to go with that woman! Call off the dog—I must go—I *must*!"

The boy did call the dog to him and laid his hand upon the creature's collar; then he said:

"I'm glad of it."

"Glad that I'm left, you—horrid thing!" cried Dorothy, trying to run past him and out of the door.

But she was not permitted, even had her own strength not suddenly forsaken her: for the lad put out his free hand and stopped her.

"Glad you're awake. So's we can talk," he said; and now releasing the mastiff, whom he bade: "Lie down!" he led her to the doorstep and made her sit down, with him beside her.

"So you *can* talk, if you want to! I thought you were tongue-tied!" she remarked, now realizing that the wagon had passed beyond reach, but thankful to have speech with anybody, even this silly-looking fellow. "What's your name?"

"Jim. Jim Barlow. I hain't got no folks. All dead. I work for her," he answered, readily enough, and she understood that it was only from fear he had been so silent until now.

"Are you afraid of her? Do you mean 'her' to be that dreadful woman?"

"Yep. She ain't so bad. She's only queer, and she's scared herself of *him*. What's yourn?"

"My name, you mean? Dorothy Chester. Who's 'him'? Has 'she' gone to market? Does she go every market day? To Lexington, or Hollins, or Richmond —which? What's her name?"

Jim gasped. His experience of girls was limited, and he didn't know which of these many questions to answer first. He began with the last: and now that he had the chance he seemed as willing to talk as Dorothy was to listen. Apparently, neither of them now thought of the hour and its fitness for sleep: though Tiger had lain down before them on the flat stone step and was himself snoring, his need of vigilance past for the time being. Said the boy:

"Stott. Mirandy Stott. Her man died. *He* was a baby. She brung him up—good. She earned this hull truck-farm. She makes money. All for him an' he keeps her close. She sent him to school an' made a man of him. She can't read nor write. She makes her 'mark,' but he can, the first-ratest ever was. I can, too, some. I'm learnin' myself. I'm goin' to school some time, myself, after I leave her."

"If you're going to school, I should think it was time you began. You're a big boy," said Dorothy. "Why don't you leave her now?"

"Well—'cause. She—I come here when my folks died an' I hadn't no other place. She treats me decent, only makes me hold my tongue. She hates folks that talk. *He* talks fast enough, though. So I—I've just stayed on, a-waitin' my chance. I get good grub an' she don't lick me. She likes me, I guess, next to him. She likes him better even than she likes money. I don't. I'm scared of him. So's she. She does what he says every time. That's why I said 'no milk.'"

"Who is 'he'? Does he live here? What is about the milk?"

There was nobody anywhere near them except the dog. By no possibility could anybody besides Dorothy hear the information next imparted: yet Jim

stood up, peered in every direction, and when he again sat down resumed in a whisper:

"You ain't the first one. 'Tother was a boy, real little. He cried all the time, first off. Then 'he' fetched some white powders an' she put 'em in the kid's milk. After that he didn't cry no more but he slept most all the time. I seen her. I watched. I seen her put one in yourn. I liked you. I thought if you stayed you'd be comp'ny, if you was awake. That's why."

"What became of the little boy?" asked Dorothy, also whispering, and frightened.

"He took him away. I studied out 't he gets money that way. He wouldn't do it, 'less he did, seems if. I guess that's what he's plannin' 'bout you. I'll watch. You watch. Don't mad her an' she'll treat you good enough. 'Less—'less he should tell her different. Then I don't know."

Dorothy sat silent for a long time. She was horrified to find her own suspicions verified by this other person though he seemed to be friendly; and her mind formed plan after plan of escape, only to reject each as impossible. Finally she asked:

"Where is this house? How far from Baltimore?"

"'Bout a dozen mile, more or less. Ain't no town or village nigh. That's why she bought it cheap, the land laying away off that way. So fur is the reason she has to have four mules, 'stead of two, for the truck-wagon. She makes money! All for him. Him an' money—that's the hull of her."

"Say, Jim, do you like me? Really, as you said?" demanded Dorothy, after another period of confused thought, her brain seeming strangely dull and stupid, and a desire to lie down and rest greater, for the present, than that for freedom.

"Course. I said so," he responded, promptly.

"Will you help me get away from here, back to my home? Listen. You told me about yourself, I'll tell about myself:" and as simply as possible she did so. Her story fell in exactly with his own ideas, that money was to be extorted for her restoration to her family, but his promise to help her was not forthcoming: and when he did not reply, she impatiently exclaimed: "You won't help me! You horrid, hateful wretch!"

"Ain't nuther. Hark. One thing I know if I don't know another. I won't lie for nobody, even her or him. If I can—*if I can*—I'll help you, but I ain't promisin'

nothin' more. I'll watch out. You watch, an' *if I can*, without makin' it worse for you, I will. Now I'm goin' to bed. You best, too. She's found out you can work an' you'll have to. I've got plowin' to do. I sleep out yonder, in the shed. Tige, you stay where you be."

Without further words, Jim retreated to his bunk in the shed and Dorothy to her attic. She was now conscious only of utter weariness and a racking pain through her whole body. She was, in fact, a very sick girl.

CHAPTER XII

DOROTHY'S ILLNESS

"Measles."

This was the one-word-verdict announced by Mrs. Stott's lips, as a few hours later, she stood beside the bed in the kitchen and sternly regarded the girl whom she had just brought from the attic and laid there. She didn't look pleased, and poor Dorothy had never felt so guilty in her life—nor so wretched. Yet she plucked up spirit enough to retort:

"I didn't get them on purpose!"

Then she covered her eyes with her hands and fell to weeping, remembering mother Martha's tenderness whenever she had "come down" with any childish disease. Remembering, too, how father John had teased her about being such a "catcher." "Such a sympathetic child nobody must have chicken pox, scarlatina, or even mumps, but you must share them! Well, a good thing to get through all your childish complaints in your childhood, and have done with them!" Almost she could hear his dear voice saying those very words and see the tender smile that belied their jest. Oh! to feel herself lifted once more in his strong arms! and to know that, no matter what was amiss with her, he never shrank from fondling or comforting her.

This woman did shrink, yet how could it be from fear of infection to herself? Besides, she made Jim stay wholly outside in the shed; and thus the acquaintance begun during the night was suddenly suspended. Still, though there was real consternation in her mind, the farm mistress was not unkind. It may be that she felt the shortest way to a recovery was, also, the least expensive one to herself; and immediately she went to work upon her patient, after one more question:

"Know anybody had 'em?"

"Yes. Lots. Half my class," answered Dorothy, defiantly.

"Hmm. Yes. Measles," commented Mrs. Stott, as she put on her sunbonnet and went out to rummage in her sage bed for fresh sprigs with which to make a tea. This she forced Dorothy to drink, scalding hot; next she covered her up with the heavy quilt, fastened the windows down, and ordered Tige to take up his post beside the bed. Then she commanded: "Stay in that bed. Get out, take cold, die.

Not on my hands."

"Suppose she doesn't care if I do die on the hands of somebody else!" reflected the patient, but said nothing aloud. Yet she watched the woman do a strange thing—go to the door at the foot of the attic stairs, lock it, and put the key in her pocket. Then she went out of the cottage and took Jim with her.

Left alone with the dog, Dorothy C. had many sad thoughts; but soon bodily discomfort banished her more serious anxieties and she became wholly absorbed in efforts to find some spot on that hard couch where she might rest.

"I'll get up! I can't bear this heat!" she cried, at last, and tossed the heavy covers from her. But no sooner had she done so than a heavy chill succeeded and she crept back again, shivering. Thus passed the morning and nobody came near; but at noon when the farm woman re-entered the kitchen Dorothy's piteous plea was for "Water! Water!" and she had become oblivious to almost all else save the terrible thirst.

With the ignorance of her class the now really alarmed Mrs. Stott refused the comforting drink, only to see her charge sink back in a state of utter collapse; and, thereafter, for several days, the child realized little that went on about her. On the few occasions when she did rouse, she was so weakly patient that even the hard-natured woman who nursed her felt her own heart softened to a sincere pity. Curiously, too, Tiger became devoted to her. He would stand beside the bed and lick the wan hand that lay on the quilt, as if trying to express his sympathy; and his black, cool nose was grateful in her hot palm.

Miranda Stott smiled grimly over this new friendship and, for the present, did not interfere with it. Dorothy couldn't get away then, even with the mastiff's connivance; but her hostess most heartily regretted that the girl had ever come. She had perplexities of her own, now, which this enforced guest and her illness greatly increased; and, as she gradually returned to strength, Dorothy often observed a deep frown on the woman's face and, in her whole bearing, a strange attitude of listening and of fear.

One afternoon, when Miranda and Jim were hard at work in the field beyond the house and Dorothy still lay upon the bed, though for the first time dressed in her own clothes, which her nurse had found time to launder, the girl fancied that she heard a groan from somewhere.

"Why, Tige, what's that?" she asked, half rising and listening intently.

He answered by a thump of his tail on the boards and his head turned

sidewise, with his ears pricked up. Evidently, he, too, had caught the sound, and was puzzled by it.

A moment later, Dorothy was certain she heard a movement of somebody in the room overhead. There was but one, she knew, and it covered the entire width of the small house, for she had seen that during her brief occupation of it. Who could it be?

Half-frightened and wholly curious she crossed from the bed to the door and looked out. Yes, the two other inmates of the cottage were still in the field, setting out celery plants, as she had heard them discussing at dinner.

Tiger kept close beside her and, now that she was upon her feet again, seemed doubtful whether he were to remain her friend or again become her watchful enemy. She settled that question, however, by her loving pat on his head and the smile she gave him. His attentions to her, while she had lain so weak and helpless, had won her own affection and made her feel that she would never again be afraid of any dog.

Suddenly Mrs. Stott looked round and saw the girl in the doorway. Then she at once stood up, said something to Jim, and hurried to the house: demanding, as she reached it and with evident alarm:

"What's the matter?"

Dorothy smiled. She had been so dependent on this woman that she had learned to really like her, and she answered brightly:

"Nothing but fancies, I reckon! I thought, Tiger, too, thought, we heard somebody in the room upstairs. Then we came to the door and saw you were both outdoors, so there couldn't have been, could there? You never have burglars in this out-of-the-way place, do you? My darling mother Martha is always looking out for them and there's none ever came. Oh! I'm so glad to be well, almost well, once more. You'll let me go home to her, won't you? The very next time you go to market? I've been such a trouble I'm sure you'll be glad to be rid of me!" and Dorothy impulsively caught at the woman's hand and kissed it.

For an instant Miranda Stott looked as if she could have been "knocked down with a feather." A kiss was as unknown and startling a thing to her as it was possible to imagine and it disconcerted her. But her answer was:

"Yes, I'm glad too. I'll fetch a chair. Do you good."

So she caught up a chair in one strong hand, leaving a muddy impress upon it;

and, seeing this, covered her other hand with her apron, then thrust it under Dorothy's arm and so piloted her out to the celery patch. There were no trees allowed to grow in that utilitarian spot, except here and there a fruit tree; and under the sparse shade of a slender plum-sapling Dorothy was made to sit, while Jim went on with his dropping of tiny seedlings into holes filled with water. Mrs. Stott had gone again to the house and for a moment the boy and girl were free to talk, and all her own old interest in gardening returned. Besides, she wanted to learn all she could about it, so that she might be useful when she, at last, got to that home "in the country" where they were all going so soon.

"Why do you do that, Jim?" she asked, intently watching his long fingers straighten the fine roots of the plants, then drop them into the prepared drill.

"Why, to make 'em grow. 'Cause it's the way," he answered, surprised that anybody should ask such a foolish question.

"Oh, I see. You drill a place with a wooden peg, then you pour water into it, then you plant the plant. Hmm. That's easy. I'll know how to make our celery grow, too."

Jim looked up. "Where's your celery at?"

"I reckon it's 'at' a seed store, yet. 'Cause we haven't got there. Say, Jim, were you afraid you'd 'catch' the measles? the reason why you didn't come into the kitchen at all."

The lad laughed, slyly.

"No, I wasn't. She was, though. 'Cause I've had 'em. She didn't know an' I didn't tell her. Stayin' out in the barn I had time to myself. I learned myself six more words. Hear me?"

"Maybe I don't know them myself. Then I shouldn't know if you spelled them right or wrong," she cautiously answered. "If I had a book I'd hear them, gladly."

Jim forgot that he was never expected to pause in any labor on hand and stood up: his thin body appearing to elongate indefinitely with surprise as he returned:

"Why—but *you've* been to school! Anybody could hear 'em off a book. I could hear 'em myself that way! Pshaw!" and into this mild expletive he put such a world of contempt that Dorothy's cheeks tingled.

"Go ahead. Maybe I know them, but—you'd better work; Mrs. Stott is coming."

The woman was, indeed, almost upon them and listening suspiciously to what they might be saying; and though there was scorn in her expression there was also relief. She couldn't understand what any farm hand needed of "book learning," but it sounded harmless enough when Jim pronounced the word: "Baker. B-a-k-e-r, baker," and the girl applauded with a clap of her hands and the exclamation: "Good! Right! Fine! Next!"

Back on his knees again, the lad cast a sheepish glance toward his employer, as if asking her permission to continue. She did not forbid him, so he went on with: "Tinker. T-i-n, tin, k-e-r, ker, tinker."

Again Dorothy commended him and was thankful that her own knowledge was sufficiently in advance of his that she should not be put to shame—"without a book." Also, by the time the ambitious youth had recited his new lesson of six words, in their entirety, both he and Dorothy were in a fine glow of enthusiasm. She, also, loved study and found it easy; and she longed with all her heart that she could put inside this Jim's head as much as she already learned.

Then he was sent away to attend to the cattle for the night, to see that the market-wagon was again packed, and to put all utensils safely under cover. Because she could afford no waste, or thought she couldn't, Miranda Stott took better care of her farm implements than most farmers did; and if indoors there was much to be desired in the way of neatness, out-of-doors all was ship-shape and tidy. She finished the celery planting herself, and Dorothy wondered if there were people enough in the world to eat all those plants, after they were grown. Then Miranda took the chair from Dorothy and said:

"Come, I want my bed again. I'll fix you outside." And as if some further explanation were needed, added: "It's healthier. You've got to get well, quick."

"Oh! I want to. I am, almost, already. It is so good to be out of doors, and—are you going to take me home, to-night, when you drive in?"

"No. Take letter. See?" answered this laconic woman, and led the girl into the barn and into what had been a small harness-room partitioned from one side. This had, evidently, been prepared for occupation and there was a suspicious air of wisdom on Jim's face, as Dorothy passed him, fastening the cattle-stanchions, betraying that this barn bedroom was a familiar place to him.

"Why, it is a bedroom! If the bed is only a pile of hay! There are sheets on it and a pillow and a blanket. My! It smells so sweet and outdoor-sy!" cried Dorothy, thinking how much more restful such a couch would be than that hot feather bed in the kitchen, on which she had lain and tossed.

"Yours. Stay here now. Jim'll bring your supper, and a chair. Fetch the paper, boy," she concluded, as he departed for the cellar under the cottage which was used for a dairy.

Then Mrs. Stott went away, Tiger nestled up to her—as if offering his society—and the still weak girl dropped down on the sweet-smelling bed and felt almost happy, even though still refused a return home.

"Well, it's something to be let to write to mother. I was so sick I haven't done it often; but if, as that Mr. Smith said, she knew I was safe she won't worry much. Not so very much. But, oh! How I want her, how I want her!"

The farm-mistress herself brought back the chair and paper, and waited while Jim followed with the supper of bread and cold meat. He added a pitcher of water without bidding, and, supposing him to have finished, his mistress left the place. Indeed, she seemed so changed and preoccupied that Dorothy wondered and pitied. Her own sorrows were teaching her the divine gift of compassion, and though she was this woman's prisoner she longed to share and soothe the distress she was so evidently suffering.

But she dared not. With a gesture of despair, Mrs. Stott suddenly threw both hands outward, then hurried away into the cottage, leaving the boy and girl staring after her. Even Jim did not tarry, though he longed to do so; yet he managed to whisper, in his own mysterious fashion:

"It's *him*. He's got 'em. They're goin' hard—he's old."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PLUMBER AND HIS GOSSIP

The eagle-gate was open again. Mrs. Cecil had recovered from her illness, and was once more upon her broad piazza. This time she was not awaiting the arrival of the postman but of the plumber. The sudden heat of the southern city reminded her of her northern home in the highlands and she was anxious to remove there as soon as possible. But, with true Maryland housewifery, she must personally see to all the details of the annual flitting.

In every room of the house pictures were being swathed in tarletan, chandeliers wrapped in the same stuff, carpets lifted, furniture put into freshly starched slips, and the entire interior protected to the utmost against the summer's dust and fading. Only one matter did not progress as rapidly as this impatient little mistress of the mansion felt it should. Nobody came at her instant command to examine the plumbing and see that it was in order for the season.

"And water makes more trouble than even flies. Dinah, girl! Are you sure a message was sent to that man how I was waiting?"

"Posi*tive*-ly sho, Miss Betty. Laws, honey, don't go worritin' yo'se'f an' you-all jus' done gettin' ovah yo' misery. He'll be comin' erlong, bime-by," comforted the maid, officiously folding a shawl about Mrs. Cecil's shoulders, and having the shawl instantly tossed aside, with a gesture of disgust.

"O you girl! Do stop fussing about me. I'm nearly suffocated, already, in this awful heat, and I won't—I won't be wrapped up in flannel, like a mummy. You never had any sense, Dinah!"

"Yas'm. I 'low dat's so, Miss Betty. Mebbe on account you-all nevah done beaten me ernough. Yas'm, but I doan 'pear to be acquainted wid er mummy, Miss Betty. What-all be dey like?" And with imperturbable good nature, Dinah picked up the shawl and again placed it around her lady, who permitted it to remain without further protest.

"Hmm. No matter what they're like, Dinah. But you know, girl, you know as well as I do what trouble it made for us last year, when we went away and forgot to have the water turned off from the fountain, yonder. That care-taker we left—Oh! dear! Is there anybody in this world fit to be trusted!"

Mrs. Cecil was not yet as strong as she professed to be, but her weakened nerves seemed to add strength to her temper. A red spot was already coming out upon her pale cheeks when there sauntered through the gateway a corpulent man, with a kit of plumber's tools over his shoulder. He slowly advanced to the steps, lifted his hat, and, bowing courteously, said:

"Good-morning, Mrs. Cecil. Glad to see you able to enjoy the fine weather."

"Fine weather! Morning! I should think it was afternoon—by the way you've kept me waiting. Didn't you get my message?"

"Oh! yes, I did. A pickaninny about as big as a button brought it. What's to be done? The usual shutting-off, Ma'am?"

"Everything's to be done, this year, and thoroughly. The water made no end of trouble last season, for half the faucets weren't looked after. As soon as we got home in the fall and turned it on in the bathroom, the whole place was flooded."

"So, so? That was a pity. Yes, I remember. Well, it shall be gone over now, and I promise you nothing shall happen. By the way, all my men were out. Can one of your 'boys' wait on me and hand me my tools? I'm kind of stout and stooping bothers——"

She didn't wait for him to finish his sentence. A small black boy was throwing stones at the sparrows on the lawn, and him she summoned by the absurd title of:

"Methuselah Bonaparte Washington, come wait on this man!"

The poor little wizened specimen of humanity, whose mighty name seemed to have stunted his growth, timidly approached. His great dark eyes were appealingly lifted, as if protesting against a forthcoming blow, and his face was as sad as that of a weary old man. The sight of him amused the plumber and called forth from his mistress the question:

"Did anybody ever see such a woe-begone infant? He acts as if he had been thrashed within an inch of his life and on every day of it, but I know he's never been struck once. Been better for him if he had been, likely. He's Ephraim's grandchild and petted to death. His grandfather gave him his first name, Dinah his second, and as a graceful finish I tucked on the last. In real fact he's simply Brown."

Mrs. Cecil had now quite recovered her usual cheerfulness, which nothing greatly affected except the failure of other people to instantly obey her commands. Besides, she was lonely. She didn't like the postman who had taken

"Johnnie's" place, and was never on hand when he appeared, indeed had not been able until now. Almost all her personal friends were already out of town: and with her old desire to hear about her neighbors, as well as a determination to look after the plumber's work this time, she rose and followed him into the house and to the upper floor where his examination of the spigots began.

Mr. Bruce had worked at Bellevieu ever since he was an apprentice and had not done so without learning something of its mistress's character. So, to please her love of gossip, he turned to where she had taken a chair to watch him and remarked:

"Terrible sad thing about John Chester's girl."

"'Girl'? Servant, do you mean?" instantly interested by the name of "Chester."

"Servant? Oh! no. That's a luxury my neighbor never had, nor any of us in Brown Street, except when somebody was sick. We're work-a-day folks on my block, Mrs. Cecil."

"Humph. What do you mean, then, by 'girl'?"

"His adopted daughter, Dorothy C. Haven't you seen about her in the paper?" he continued, well pleased that he had found some topic interesting to his employer.

"No. I've seen no papers. I've been ill, or that foolish doctor said I was, which amounts to the same thing. Anyway, I hardly ever do read the papers in the summer time. There's never anything in them—with everybody out of town, so."

The plumber laughed, a trifle grimly; answering with some spirit:

"Well, *everybody* isn't away, when there are several hundred people swelter all the hot season right here in Baltimore."

"Why don't they go away? Why do they 'swelter'—such a horrid word that is!" returned the lady, more to calm a strangely rising flutter of her own spirits than because there was sense in the words; which sounded so foolish to herself even, that she laughed. But her laugh was a nervous one and was instantly followed by the inquiry:

"What—what happened to the child?"

"Nobody knows. Kidnapped, I suppose, or murdered. All *is* known—she was sent to the post-office to get a letter of her father's. He couldn't go himself, being lame and off to a hospital. Letter was one like the rest that came every month,

and had come ever since Dorothy was left on the Chesters' doorstep. There was ten dollars in it, likely. She got the letter, was seen to go out of the office, and has never been seen since. No trace of her, either, though the post-office 'boys' clubbed together and offered a reward. A hundred dollars for any information sent, whether dead or alive. Do you want both these spigots to have new washers on? They need it, I think."

"Spigots? Spigots?" repeated Mrs. Cecil, as if she did not comprehend; and, looking up, the plumber saw to his surprise and alarm that the lady was trembling and had turned very pale. He went to her and asked:

"Feeling bad, Ma'am? Shall I call somebody?"

She put her white hand to her head in a confused way and returned:

"Bad? It's horrible! Horrible! A—*hundred—dollars*!"

Mr. Bruce fancied she imagined the sum to be too large and was indignant. He reflected, also, that this was a childless old woman, and a rich one. In his experience he had found the wealthy also the most miserly, and nobody who had not a daughter of her own could understand what the loss of one might mean to a parent. His own beloved Mabel, ill at that moment with the measles, then epidemic—what would life be worth without her? Yet he knew, as well as anybody, that dear as his child was, Dorothy had been infinitely her superior in way of appearance, intelligence, even in affection. So much greater her loss then! and with a crispness that might easily hurt his business, he demanded:

"Do you think a hundred dollars too much to pay for the life of a child?"

"Too much? *Too—much!*"

Again she was repeating his words, in that peculiar manner which might mean either contempt or admiration. In any case she was acting strangely. She had evidently lost all interest in the business on hand, yet there was no suggestion of feebleness in the step with which she now hurried out of the room, and the plumber looked after her in fresh amazement. These idle people! How hard they were to be understood! But, in any case, he was glad to be rid of the lady's presence. He could work so much faster and better by himself, and if there were any harm to Bellevieu, that coming season of its owner's absence, it should not be his fault. There shouldn't be an inch of water-pipe, nor a single faucet, that didn't have his critical inspection—and bill according!

Mrs. Cecil's bell rang sharply, and Dinah hurried to answer it, that is, she fancied she was hurrying, though her mistress knew she really "dawdled" on the

way and so informed "the creature" as she appeared.

"Oh, you lazy thing! I must get a younger woman—I certainly must! Didn't you hear me ring?"

"Yas'm, I sho done did. An' I come, ain't I? What's wantin', Miss Betty? Is yo' feelin' po'ly again, honey?"

"Tell Ephraim to have the carriage round within five minutes—not one instant later. Then come back and get me my outdoor things."

"Yas'm. Dat's so. I ain't no younger 'n I was yestiddy. But what for you-all done want Ephraim fotch de kerridge? Yo' know, Miss Betty, I ain't gwine let yo' out ridin', yet a spell. Yas'm."

"Will *you* tell him or must *I*? Between you and that wretched doctor I've been kept in this terrible ignorance. I'll never forgive you, never, for shutting me up in my bedroom, unknowing all these days, until now it's too late! Too late!" cried Mrs. Cecil, strangely excited and hastily tossing off her morning gown to replace it by another fit for the street.

Dinah was unperturbed. She understood that her mistress would have her will, but felt that it was a foolish one and should not be encouraged by any enthusiasm on her own part. With an exasperating calmness she lifted the discarded garment and carried it to a closet. From this with equal calmness, and an annoying deliberation, she brought her mistress's outside wraps and a black silk gown, such as she usually wore when driving out. But she purposely made the mistake of offering a winter one, heavily lined. She hoped that the "fuss" of dressing would change Mrs. Cecil's plans, for it was really far too warm to go out then. Later in the day, after the sun had set, she would help the scheme most willingly.

But the gentlewoman was now gaining control of her nerves and fully understood that it was over-affection, rather than disobedience, which made Dinah act so provokingly. With one of her kindest smiles, she took the heavy gown back to the closet herself, and secured the lighter one suitable to the day. Then she explained:

"It's no silly whim, my girl, that sends me down town on such a hot morning. Something serious has happened. Something which has just come to my knowledge and that I must try to set right at once. If you love me—help me, not hinder. You are to go with me, also. So, hurry and put on a fresh apron and cap. I can finish by myself."

"Yas'm. But yo' knows, honey, you-all only done lef yo' bed a speck o' time. Cayn't yo' business be put off, Miss Betty?"

"Not a minute. Not one single minute longer than necessary to take me to Baltimore Street. Hurry. Fix your own self. Don't bother about me."

"Yes'm. I'se gwine hu'y. But dat yere plumber gempleman—what erbout leabin' him, to go rummagin' 'round, puttin' new fixin's in whe' ol' ones do? Ain't you-all done bettah wait a little spell, an' 'tend to him, yo'se'f? Hey, Miss Betty?"

Dinah had touched upon her mistress's own regret, but a regret swallowed by so much of a calamity that she put it aside and merely pointed to the door, as if further speech were useless.

It was more than five minutes before Ephraim drove his well-groomed horses out of the eagle-gate, but it was in a very short time for one who moved as slowly as he, and he turned his head for orders, with expectation of: "The Park."

Quite to the contrary the word was:

"Baltimore Street. Kidder & Kidder's."

"Hey? 'D you say Eutaw Place, er Moun' Ver'n Avenoo?" he inquired.

"There, boy. You're not half so deaf as you pretend. Drive to Kidder & Kidder's, and do it at once," she repeated with decision.

"Yas'm. But does yo' know, Miss Betty, erbout a man was sunstroke yestiddy, Baltimo' Street way? It sutenly is pow'ful wa'm."

Mrs. Cecil vouchsafed no further parley with her too devoted coachman, though Dinah took it upon herself to administer one reproof which her fellow servant coolly ignored.

However, he had seen that in Mrs. Cecil's eye which brooked no disobedience, and so he guided his bays southward through the city, by wide thoroughfares and narrow, past crowding wagons and jangling street cars, till he turned into the densely packed street his lady had designated.

"Kidder & Kidder" were her men of business. He knew that. There had been no time, for years upon years, when a firm of this same name had not served the owners of Bellevieu. The first lawyer of that race had handed down the business to his heirs, as the first tenant of the rich estate had willed that to his. But it was now more common for the lady of the mansion to send for her advisers to visit her, than for her to visit them; and that there was something unusual in her

present business both her old servitors realized.

It was something worth while to see how the elder Mr. Kidder, himself an octogenarian, retaining an almost youthful vigor, rose and salaamed, as this beautiful old gentlewoman, followed by her gray-haired maid in spotless attire, entered his rather dingy office. How the old-time courtesies were exchanged between these remnants of an earlier society, when brusqueness was considered ill-bred and suavity the mark of good blood.

A few such greetings past, and the old lawyer conducted his distinguished client into an inner room, exclusively his own, leaving Dinah to wait without, and whence the pair soon emerged; the lady urging: "You will kindly attend to it at once, please;" and he answering, with equal earnestness: "Immediately, Madam."

Then he escorted her to her carriage and stood bareheaded while she entered it: each courteously saluting the other as it rolled away, and he returning to his office with a look of anxiety on his fine face, as there was one of relief on hers.

"Well, I've done the best I could—now!" she exclaimed, after a time. "I've never entrusted any matter to Kidder & Kidder that did not end satisfactorily. That old firm is a rock in the midst of this shifting modernity!"

To which Dinah, not comprehending, replied with her usual:

"Yas'm. I spec' dat's so, honey, Miss Betty."

That evening both Ephraim and the maid, sitting under their own back porch, exchanged speculations concerning their lady's morning trip, and her subsequent quietude during the whole day.

"I 'low 'twas anudder will, our Miss Betty, she done get made. Dat's what dem lawyer gentlemen is most inginerally for. How many dem wills has she had writ, a'ready, Dinah?" queried Ephraim.

"Huh! I doan' know. Erbout fifty sixty, I reckon. She will her prop'ty off so many times, dey won' be nottin lef to will, bimeby. 'Twas dat, though, Ephraim, I 'low, too. Mebbe—Does dey put erbout makin' wills in de papahs, boy?"

"I doan' know. Likely. Why, Dinah?"

"Cayse, warn't no res' twel Miss Betty done sent yo' Methusalem out to de drug-sto' fo' to buy de ebenin' one. Spec' she was lookin' had Massa Kiddah done got it printed right. Doan' know what she want o' papahs, when she ain't looked at one this long spell, scusin 'twas to find out dat."

But neither of them guessed that Mrs. Cecil's interest lay in a large-typed advertisement, offering five hundred dollars reward for the return of the lost, humble little Dorothy C. Nor that this sum would have been twice as great, had not the worldly wisdom of Kidder & Kidder been larger than that of their aristocratic client.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BITER BIT

Even healthy Dorothy had rarely slept as soundly as she did that night, there in the airy barn on her bed of hay; and she had lain down as soon as she had finished her brief letter to her mother—which like those that had gone before it would travel no further than Mrs. Stott's range fire.

She woke in the morning to find it much later than usual when she was roused and that it was only Jim who was calling her. He did so softly, yet with evident excitement; and as soon as possible the girl got out of her hostess's too big nightgown and into her own clothes, still fresh from yesterday's laundering. Then she opened the door and ran to the trough of water, used for the cattle; and after a liberal ducking of her curly head, shook herself dry—for want of a better towel. Afterwards, to the barnyard, calling eagerly:

"Jim! O Jim!"

"Here I be. Don't holler. I'll come, soon's I take the milk in. I thought you'd sleep till doomsday!" he replied, still in a low tone, yet with less caution than he usually displayed.

She sat down on the barn door sill and waited. She had a strong reluctance to enter the cottage which was tightly closed and where she had so greatly suffered. So that it was with real delight she saw the lad was bringing a plate with him, as he returned, and guessed it to be her breakfast.

"Oh! how nice! I'll love to picnic out here, but how does it happen? and, Jim, what makes you so sober? Is—is she sick? Didn't she go to market last night? Tell—talk—why can't you? I want to hear everything, every single thing. I didn't know—I went to sleep—What a funny wagon it is, anyway!"

The big vehicle stood in the yard before them, its shafts resting on the ground; and the four mules used to draw it were feeding in the pasture beyond. Dorothy thought it wonderful how anybody, most of all a woman, could drive four mules, as Miranda did, without reins to guide them, yet make them so obedient to her will. The wagon, also, was a curiosity to her, though she had often seen similar ones on the streets at home.

It was a large affair, rising several feet upwards from its box, its ends

projecting; forward over the dashboard and, at the rear, backward beyond a step and a row of chicken crates. The top was of canvas, that had once been white, and the tall sides were half of a brick-red, half of bright blue. Its capacity was enormous, and so prolific was the truck-farm that it was always well filled when it made its city trips.

"Have you had your breakfast, too, Jim?" asked Dorothy, rather critically inspecting hers, which did not at all suggest the dainty cooking of mother Martha.

"Yep. All I wanted. He—I reckon he's powerful sick."

"Can't you sit down by me for company? I feel so good this morning. I'd like somebody to talk to."

"A minute, maybe. I can make it up later."

"Jim Barlow, I think you're a splendid boy. I never saw anybody so faithful to such a horrid old woman. You never waste a bit of time, you only study when you ought to sleep, and yet—yet I didn't like you at all when I first saw you. When I get home and my father gets well, I'm going to tell him or the minister all about you, and ask them to get you a better place. To send you to school, or do anything you like."

The lad flushed with pleasure, and vainly tried to keep the bare feet of which he was so conscious out of sight in the hay upon the barn floor, where, for this brief moment, he dared to linger. Dorothy saw the movement and laughingly thrust forth her own pink toes, fresh from an ablution in the trough, and from which she had had to permanently discard her ragged ties.

"That's nothing. We're both the same. Anyway, a barefooted boy came to be president! Think of that. President James Barlow, of the United States! I salute you, Excellency, and request the honor of your sharing my brown-bread-and-treacle!"

Then she laughed, as she had not done for many days; from the sheer delight of life and the beautiful world around her. For it was beautiful, that first June day, despite the ugly cottage which blotted the landscape and the sordid implements of labor all about.

To his own amazement, the orphan farm boy laughed with her, as he did not know he could, as he surely never had before. This girl's coming had opened a new world to him. She had commended his ambition and made light of the difficulties in way of its achievement. She had assured him that "learning is easy

as easy!" and she knew such a lot! She didn't scorn him because he was uncouth and ill-clad; and—Well, at that moment he was distinctly glad that she was barefooted like himself.

Recklessly forgetting that he was "using the time I was hired for"—the hire being board and lodging, only—he dropped down on the step and watched as she ate, so daintily that he could think of nothing but the sparrows on the ground. And as she ate she also talked; which in itself was wonderful. For he—Well, he couldn't talk and eat at the same time. It was an accomplishment far beyond him, one that had never been taught at the table of Miranda Stott. She not only chattered away but she made him chatter, too, now, in this unwonted freedom from his mistress's eye.

"Who's 'him'? Why, he's *hern*," he explained. "Her son, you know."

"No, I don't know. I know nothing—except that I'm a stolen little girl who's lost everybody, everything in the world she loves!" cried poor Dorothy, suddenly overcome in the midst of her gayety by the thought of her own sorrows.

Jim had never known girls and their ways, but he had the innate masculine dread of tears, and by the look of Dorothy's brown eyes he saw that tears portended. To change the subject, he answered her question definitely:

"He's the man what brought you here. *That's* him. He's *hern*."

"That man—*Smith*? He here? In the cottage yonder? Then—*good-bye*!"

Reckless of the sharp stones and stubble of the barnyard that so cruelly hurt her tender feet, the girl was up and away; only to find herself rudely pulled back again and to hear Jim's familiar:

"Pshaw! He can't harm you none. He's dreadful sick. He come——"

Here the lad paused for some time, pondering in his too honest heart how much of his employer's affairs he had the right to make known, even to this Dorothy. Then having decided that she already knew so much there could be no danger in her learning more, he went on:

"He come one night whilst you was so sick. She fetched him in the wagon an', 'cause you was in her bed, she put him up-attic, in yourn. Ain't but them two rooms, you know, an' the shed where I did sleep but don't now. I don't know what he'd done but—somethin' 't made him scared of stayin' in the city. He's been that way afore an' come out here, 'to rest' he called it. 'To hide,' seems if, to me. 'Cause he'd never go out door, till me or his ma'd look round to see if

anybody was comin'. Nobody does come. Never did, only them he fetched, or her did."

Again a shudder of fear and repulsion swept over Dorothy, and again she would have run away but Jim's next words detained her.

"He can't move, hair ner hide. He's ketched them measles offen you an' he's terrible bad. She thinks he's goin' to die an', queer, but now she don't care for nothin' else. Her sun's riz an' sot in him, an' he's treated her mean. Leastways, *I* call it mean. She don't. She'd 'bout lie down on the floor an' let him tramp all over her, if he'd wanted to. She's goin' round, doin' things inside there, but she's clean forgot how it's berry-day agin an' the crop wastin'.

"So 'm *I* wastin' time, an' she claims that's money. I didn't know, afore, whuther 'twas him er money she liked best, but now I guess it's him. If you was a mind you could help pick berries for her. *If you was a mind*," said Jim, rising and shouldering a crate of cups, then starting for the strawberry patch.

Dorothy C. looked after him with some contempt. He seemed a lad of mighty little spirit. To work like a slave even when there was nobody to domineer over him! Indeed, she fancied that he was even more diligent in business now than he had been before. It was very strange.

"It's all strange. Life's so strange, too. They say 'Providence leads.' Well, it seems a queer sort of leading that I should be sent to do an errand and then that I should be so silly as to go with a man my folks didn't know—and get stolen. That's what I am, now: just a stolen child, of no use to anybody. Why? Why, too, should my father John be let to get an 'ataxious' something in his legs, so he had to lose his place? And mother Martha have to give up her pretty house she loves so, and go away off to the country where she doesn't know anybody? Why should I come here to this old truck-farm and a horrid woman and a horrider man and get the measles and give them to him? Was it just to learn how to plant things? I wondered about that the time I watched them do the celery. Well, I could learn so much out of books. I needn't be kidnapped to do it! And why on earth should I feel so sorry now for that woman in there? Just 'cause she loves her son, who's the wickedest man I ever heard of. And that Jim boy! I—I believe I'm going to hate him! Just positively hate. He makes me feel so—so little and mean. Just as if I hadn't a right to sit on this old barn door sill and do nothing but eat my breakfast. A horrid breakfast, too, to match the horrid woman and the horrid house and the horrider man, and the horridest-of-all-boys, Jim!"

With that Dorothy's cogitations came to a sudden end. No poor insignificant

farm lad should put her to shame, in the matter of conscience, or generosity, or honor, or any other of those disagreeable high-sounding things! She'd show him! and she'd pick those old strawberries, if her back did get hot and the sun make her head ache! No such creature as that Jim Barlow should make her "feel all wiggley-woggley inside," as she had used to feel when she had been real small and disobeyed mother Martha.

Why she shouldn't run away and try to find her home, now that Mrs. Stott was out of sight, puzzled even herself. Yet, for some reason, she dared not. She had no idea of the direction in which that home lay, and there was no house visible anywhere, strain her eyes as she might to discover one at which she might ask protection.

The truck-farm seemed to be away off, "in the middle of nowhere." A crooked lane ran northward from it and Dorothy knew that this must strike a road—somewhere. But dear old Baltimore must be miles and miles distant; since Mrs. Stott spent so many hours in going to and from it with her produce, and in her bare feet the child felt she couldn't make the journey and endure. More than that, down deep in her heart was a keen resentment of the fact that, despite her own letters written and sent by the farm-woman, mother Martha had made no response beyond that verbal one conveyed by "Mr. Smith," that everything was "all right" and that, in the prospect of gaining her "fortune" Dorothy was wise to submit to some unpleasant things for the present.

Then would arise that alternate belief that she had been "kidnapped," and instantly following would come the conviction that she might be much worse dealt with if she attempted escape. If "Mr. Smith" was wicked enough to steal her, as she in this mood believed, he would stop at nothing which would save himself from discovery and punishment.

Jim Barlow was tormented by none of these shifting moods. His nature was simple and held to belief in but two things—right and wrong. He must do the one and avoid the other. This necessity was born in him and he could not have discussed it in words, or even thoughts, as did the imaginative Dorothy C. the questions that perplexed her.

At that particular moment he knew that the "right" for him was to save his employer's berries from decay, even though this meant no reward for him save a tired back and a crust of bread for dinner. But rewards didn't matter. Jim *had* to do his duty. He couldn't help it.

Now Dorothy watching from the barn doorway saw this and thought that

"duty" was "the hatefullest word in the English language. It always means something a body dislikes!" Yet, so strong is example, that almost before she knew it the little girl had picked her gingerly way over the rough ground to the lad's side and had petulantly exclaimed:

"Give me some cups then! I hate it! I hate here! I—I want to go home! But —*give me some cups*!"

Jim didn't even notice her petulance. He handed her a pile of "empties" and went on swiftly gathering the berries without even raising his head, though one long hand pointed to the row upon which she should begin. He was pondering how these same berries were to be marketed; whether the anxious woman in the cottage loved money so well she would leave a possibly dying son to sell them for herself; or if she would trust the business to him. The last possibility sent a thrill of pride through him. If she would! If she only would, he would drive the hardest bargains for her, he would bring home more of the beloved cash than she expected, he would prove himself altogether worthy of trust. He knew the way, she had taken him with her once, at a Christmas time, when she needed his help in the extra handling. It had been a revelation to him—that wonderful Christmas market; with all its southern richness and plenitude, its beautifully decorated stalls, its forests of trees and mountains of red-berried holly, and over and above all the gay good nature of every human creature thronging the merry place.

That had been Jim's one glimpse, one bit of knowledge what Christmas meant, and though he knew that this was a far different season, the glamour of his first "marketing" still hung over the place where he had been so briefly happy. Why, even Miranda Stott, moved by the universal good will of that day, had spent a whole cent, a fresh, new, good cent, upon a tin whistle, and given it to her helper. She had done more; she had allowed him to blow upon it, on their long ride home, to the astonishment of the mules and his own intense, if silly, delight. Suddenly, into these happy memories and hopes, broke Dorothy's voice:

"A 'penny for your thoughts,' Sobersides! And see? since you made me pick berries I made up my mind to beat you. I have. I've filled five cups while you've been filling three. Your hands are so big, I s'pose, you can't help being slow!"

Unmoved by her gibes, which he quite failed to understand, he rose and took her cups from her. He had reached the end of his row and must pass to another, else he might not have wasted so much time! But he was glad of her swiftness and felt that she would almost make up for Mrs. Stott's absence from the field; and encouragingly remarked:

"Take the next row, beyond mine, when you get that one done."

"Huh! A case of 'virtue' and its 'own reward'! The more I work the longer I may work, eh? Generous soul! But, I don't work for nothing, as you do. Behold, I take my pay as I go!" and so saying, Dorothy plumped a magnificent berry into her mouth—as far as it would go! For the fruit was so large it easily made more than the proverbial "two bites."

Jim laughed. He couldn't help it. She looked so pretty and so innocent, though he—well, he wouldn't eat a single berry that was not given to him. He didn't even warn her not to eat more, yet, somehow, she no longer cared to do so.

Dorothy never forgot that busy day. Miranda did not appear, except at rare intervals, to give some advice but not once to reprove. Her coarse, masculine face was so sad, so empty of that greed which had been its chief blemish, that tender-hearted Dorothy was moved to lay her hand on the mother's arm and say:

"I'm so sorry for you. Sorry I gave anybody you love the measles."

The market-woman looked at the child half-seeing, half-comforted by this sympathy, till the last words, apparently just penetrating to her consciousness, she rudely shook off the little hand with a look of bitter hatred. Then she went back into the house, and for the rest of that day the boy and girl were left to themselves.

At noon, which he told by the sun, Jim made a little fire in one corner of the field and roasted some potatoes under it. Then he fixed a crotched stick above the blaze, hung on a tin pail and boiled some eggs; and these with some bread made their dinner. Their supper was the same, and both had appetites to give the food a relish.

At dusk Miranda came out, ordered Dorothy into the harness room and to bed, and this time she closed the door upon her, turning the wooden button which fastened it upon the outside. Indignation made no difference—Dorothy's wishes were ignored as if they had not been expressed, and the farm-woman's manner was far harsher than it had been at any time. So harsh, indeed, that the girl was terribly frightened and wondered if she were going to be punished in some dreadful way for her unconscious infection of "Mr. Smith."

The hope that Jim might be sent to market in place of his mistress and that he would take her with him died in her heart. She did not realize, till she heard her prison door slam shut, how deeply she had cherished this hope; even this belief that she was passing her last day on the truck-farm; and when the climax of her

disappointment was reached by hearing Tiger ordered to lie down outside her door and "Watch!" she threw herself on the hay-bed and sobbed herself to sleep.

"H-hsst!"

Dorothy sat up, freshly alarmed by this warning sound.

"Why! It's daylight! I must have slept all night! That's Jim—and nothing's happened! I'm alive, I'm well, I feel fine!"

Delighted surprise at this state of things promptly succeeded her first alarm, and when to the "H-hsst!" there followed the fumbling of somebody with the door's button, she sprang to her feet and asked:

"That you, Jim? Time to get up, already?"

She had not undressed, and hurried to push the door open, but could not imagine what was the matter with the "long boy." He had a newspaper in his hand which he wildly waved above his head, then held at arm's length the better to study, while between times, he executed a crazy dance, his bare feet making no sound upon the hay-littered floor.

A second later, Dorothy had rushed at him, seized the paper from his hand, recognized that it was father John's favorite daily, and found her own gaze startled by the sentence that had caught his:

FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD!

CHAPTER XV

THE FLIGHT IN THE NIGHT

"What does it mean? What does it mean!" cried the astonished girl, scarcely believing the words that were printed so plainly yet seemed so impossible. "It's my own name. I'm Dorothy Chester, called Dorothy C. It's about me—I see it's about me—there couldn't be another right here in Baltimore—and money—all that money—who? Where? What? O long boy, talk, talk, tell!"

He was really as excited as she. For once he forgot caution and was indifferent to the opinion of his mistress, whether that were good or ill. He could not read very well. He had had to study that advertisement slowly before he could make out even its sentences, and to do a deal of thinking before he could actually comprehend their meaning. But he knew that it concerned his new friend even more than himself, and laying his hand upon her shoulder to steady her while he answered, began:

"I did go to market. She went, too. She had to get some things for him, an' soon's the stores was open. I sold the stuff. Some of the things she bought was wrapped up and a pair o' shoes was in this here. I ain't got books. I want 'em. I keep every scrap o' paper ever gets this way, an' I learn out o' them. She fired *this* away, for cattle-beddin'—'cause she can't read herself—an' 'twould save a speck of straw. I called it wicked waste, myself, so I hid it. Then whilst I was milkin' I begun to study it out. Thinks I, mebbe I can learn a hull new word afore I get through; an' I hit fust off on that there 'Dorothy,' 'cause 'twas yourn an' had so many 'O's' it looked easy. I read that, then I read the next—some more—I forgot to milk—I thought you'd never wake up—an'—Pshaw! Pshaw—*pshaw* —PSHAW!!"

Only by that word could the excited lad begin to express his fierce emotions; while for a brief time Dorothy was silent, trying to understand. Finally, and almost calmly, she said:

"I don't know a thing about this printed stuff except that it must mean me. I can't guess who would pay money for me, for just a little girl; though maybe father John would if he had it. But he hadn't. He was poor, he said, real poor; even if we did live so nice and cozy. He hadn't anything but what he earned and out of that he had to buy the food and clothes and pay on the house. I don't

believe he ever had five hundred dollars in all his life, at one time. Think of it! Five—whole—hundred—dollars! Fifty—thousand—cents! My!"

Jim regarded her with awe. Such erudition as this almost took away his breath. That anybody, a little girl so much younger than himself, could "reckon" figures at such lightning speed was away beyond his dreams. More than that it convinced him that now she must be saved, restored to people who valued her at such enormous price. His simple rule of "right or wrong" resolved itself into two questions: Should he be loyal to his employer and help to keep this valuable Dorothy on the truck-farm, and show its owner how to get all that money? Because it wasn't she herself, who had brought the girl here, and if she took Dorothy back the reward would be hers. He reasoned that out to the end.

On the other hand: If Dorothy belonged to somebody who wanted her so much, shouldn't he help to restore her to that person and save them—or him—the money?

It was a knotty problem; one almost too profound for the mind of this honest farm-boy. He would do right, he must; but—which was "the rightest right of them two"?

Dorothy settled it. Dorothy who was the most concerned in the affair and had so much more wisdom than he. She had ceased to wonder at the strange advertisement and had now decided how to turn it to the best account. She was almost positively glad for all her misadventures and suffering since it could result in infinite good to another; and that other none but the "long boy" she had laughed at in the beginning. With a little joyful clap of her hands, she exclaimed:

"I know how! I know how! You have *been*—you can find the way—you must help me back to Baltimore, to my folks, to these Kidder-Kiddery men that offer all that money. I never heard of them. I can't imagine why they want to pay so many good dollars for a girl, just a girl they can't even know. I wouldn't trust them. I wouldn't go into anybody's 'office' again for all the world. But you take me, show me the way to the city and I'll show you the way to Baltimore Street. I know it. I know it quite well. I've been there on a street car. Then I'll stand outside while you go in and ask for the money. If they won't give it to you, bring them to the street and show them—ME! I ought to call myself in capital letters, same as I'm printed there, if I'm so expensive as that! Think of it, Jim Barlow! If you get that five hundred dollars you can live somewhere else and study all the time and go to college and be President, just exactly as I told you! Oh! Oh! O—Oh! Let's start now, this minute! I can't wait, I cannot!"

Jim listened intently. With a slowly growing wonder and delight on his homely features, with a widening of his blue eyes, and—at last with a burst of tears. He was ashamed of them, instantly, but he couldn't have helped shedding them at that supreme moment any more than he could have helped breathing. It was as if the girl's words had opened wide the gates of Paradise—the Paradise of Knowledge—and let him look within.

Then the cottage door opened and Miranda Stott looked forth. The sight of her restored him to the present and the practical side of life. The five hundred dollars wouldn't be his, of course. That notion of Dorothy's was as wild as—as the flight of that chicken-hawk sailing over the barnyard. Nor could he start at once, as she demanded. He had lived here for years and he still owed his employer allegiance—to a certain extent. Less than ever would he leave her alone with all this farm work on hand as well as a sick son. He must find somebody to take his place. Then he would help Dorothy back to town, but they'd have to be careful.

Dorothy, also, had seen Mrs. Stott at the door, but now had a strange indifference to her. How could anybody hurt a girl who was worth five hundred dollars to somebody? She stopped Jim as he was moving away and demanded:

"Are you ready? Can we start now—when she's shut the door?"

"Not yet."

Her face saddened and he hastened to add:

"S-ssh! Don't say nothin'. We'll go. I've got to think it over—how. An' to hunt somebody to work. But—we'll go—*we'll go*!"

He hastily turned away from the sight of her reproachful eyes nor did he blame her for the angry: "You mean boy!" which she hurled after him as he went into the house. But he made a chance soon to talk with her, unheard by Miranda, and to lay his plans before her.

"I know a feller'll come, I guess. He was in the county-farm an' jobs round, somewheres. He don't live nowheres. I seen him loafin' round them woods, yonder, yesterday, an' I'll try find him. If I do I'll coax him to stay an' help whilst I'm gone. Noonin' I'll leave you get the grub, whilst I seek him. Go 'long, just's if nothin' was different an' I'll help you."

Dorothy had made sundry "starts" already, but had feared to go all alone. If Jim would only go with her and knew the way it would be all right, but the day seemed interminable; and when her friend disappeared at noon she was so frightened that she retreated to her barn bedroom and shut the door upon herself.

She could not lock it, for its one fastening was on the outside; but she called Tiger to come inside with her and felt a sort of protection in his company, sharing her chunk of brown bread with him, even giving him by far the larger portion.

Then Jim came back and, missing her, guessed where to find her.

"Open the door a minute. Lemme in."

"Oh! I'm so glad you've come! It seems—awful. That house so tight shut; that man in it; that dreadful woman that looked at me so—so angry! I want to get away, I must—*I must*!"

Tired with his breathless run to the woods and back, the youth dropped down on the floor to recover himself; then informed her:

"I found him. He was fishin' in the run. He'll fish all day if he's let. He'll come. He ain't got all his buttons——"

"Wh-a-t?"

"His buttons. His wits. He ain't so smart as some of us, but he can hoe an' 'tend cattle first-rate. We'll go, to-night, soon's it's dark. I'll tie some rags on your feet so's they won't get sore an' give out. I'll have to muzzle Tige, or, if I can, I'll give him some them powders in his milk she'd ha' used to make you dopy, if you'd give trouble. She won't miss us first off, an' when she does—Why, we'll be gone. Be you a good, free traveler?"

"Why, I don't know. I never traveled," answered Dorothy, perplexed. If they were going to walk, or run, as his talk about trying on rags suggested, how could they travel? To her "travel" meant a journey by boat or rail, and surely neither of these conveniences were visible.

"Pshaw! Fer a smart girl you're the biggest fool!" returned the farm-boy testily. He was tired, body and brain; he was trying to make safe plans for her comfort, yet she couldn't understand plain English. "What I mean is—can you walk, hoof it, good? Course, we can't go no other way. If you can we'll strike 'cross lots—the nighest. If you can't we'll have to take to the road, on the chance of bein' took up."

"Oh! I'll walk, I'll travel, I'll 'hoof' it, fast as you want me to. Till I die and give out; but don't, don't go anywhere near the danger of being took up!" cried Dorothy, pleading meekly.

Again these two young Americans had failed to understand each other's

speech. To the city-reared girl, being "taken up" meant being arrested by the police; to the country-grown boy it was giving a ride to a pedestrian by some passing vehicle. He looked at her a moment and let the matter drop. Then he rose, advising:

"You better go to work an' not waste time. To-morrow's Sunday. We gen'ally pick all day, so's to be ready for Monday mornin' market. Stuff fetches the best prices a-Monday. I'd like to leave her in good shape agin I didn't get back. But I'll take you. You can trust me."

And as she saw him return to that endless weeding in the garden, Dorothy knew that she could do so; and that it was his simple devotion to the "duty" she disliked that made him so reliable.

"But oh! what a day this is! Will it never, never end? Do you know, Jim Barlow, that it seems longer than all the days put together since I saw my mother?"

"Yep. I know. I've been that way. Once—once I went to—a—circus! Once I got to go!" answered the lad, carefully storing the baskets of early pease he had picked in the depths of the schooner. He made the statement with bated breath, remembering the supreme felicity of the event. "She went. She'd had big prices an' felt good. She told me 'twas a-comin' an' I could; and—Pshaw! I never seen a week so long in all my born days, never! An' when it got to the last one of all—time just natchally drug! I know. But we'll go. An' say, Dorothy. The faster you pick an' pack an' pull weeds, the shorter the day'll be. That's the onliest way I ever lived through that last one afore that circus," comforted Jim, himself toiling almost breathlessly, in order to leave Miranda in "as good shape" as he could. He knew how she would miss him, and that she had depended upon him as firmly as upon herself.

But all days come to an end, even ones weighted with expectations such as Dorothy's; and at nightfall Jim announced that they might stop work. Leaving the girl to wait in the harness-room he went to the house, secured a whole loaf of bread and two of the sleeping powders he had seen administered to the crying boy, and a bundle of rags, with some string. In carrying the milk to the dairy he had reserved a basin full; and into this his first business it was to drop the powders. Then he called Tige to drink the milk, and the always hungry animal greedily obeyed.

"That seems dreadful, Jim! Suppose the stuff kills him? He isn't to blame and I should hate terribly to really hurt him," cried Dorothy, frightened by the deed to

which she had eagerly consented but now regretted—too late.

Jim sniffed. He supposed that all girls must be changeable. This one veered from one opinion to another in a most trying way and the only thing he could do was to pay no attention to her whimsies. He had carefully explained the action of these powders and their harmlessness and wasn't going to do it the second time. Besides, he was delighted to find them promptly affecting the mastiff, who might have hindered their flight. So he merely motioned Dorothy to sit down on the door sill, at the rear of the barn and out of sight from the cottage, then bade her:

"Hold up your foot. I'll fix 'em. Then we'll go. We can eat on the road. Ain't so dark as I wish it was but she's asleep—right on the kitchen floor—an' it's our chance. She's slept that way ever since he was so bad. He don't 'pear to know nothin' now. I'm sorry for her."

"Why, that's real ingenious! That's almost like a regular shoe! And a good deal better than a shoe too small!" laughed the girl, wild with pleasure that her helper had, at last, begun to do something toward their trip. She found, too, that with these rude sandals tied on she could walk much faster than in her tender bare feet, although Jim cautioned:

"Ain't nothin' but rags an' paper. Remember that. Ain't no call to go scuffin' 'em out, needless."

Whereupon Dorothy ceased to dance and prance, as she had been doing to work off some of her excitement, and became quite as sober as he could desire. Also, though she had been so anxious to start, it came with suddenness when he said:

"Ready. Come!"

She glanced at Tiger, who very closely resembled a dead dog as he lay beside the basin on the floor, then toward the house. Utter silence everywhere; save for the fretful fussing of some hens, settling to roost, and a low rumble of thunder from the west where it now looked quite dark enough to satisfy even Jim Barlow.

They struck off across lots, past the teeming garden which the active young farmer really loved and which he felt that he would never see again. He held Dorothy's hand in one of his, while the other carried a stick and bundle thrown over his shoulder. The bundle was a bit of old cloth, containing his beloved spelling book, the newspaper with the alluring advertisement, and their loaf of bread. Nothing else; and thus equipped, this uncouth, modern knight errant turned his back on all he had ever known for the sake of a helpless girl, and with

as true a chivalry as ever filled the breast of ancient man-at-arms.

For some distance neither spoke. The hearts of both were beating high with excitement and some fear; but after a time, when no call had followed them and they had reached the little run where Jim had sought the half-wit, the farm-boy said:

"Best eat our grub, now. Can't travel fast on empty stummicks. Mebbe your feet need fixin' over, too. I brung some more rags in my jumper, case them give out. Here's a good place to set. We can get a drink out the brook."

"I'd rather go on. I'm not a bit hungry!" pleaded Dorothy, who already felt as if her mother's arms were folding about her and who longed to make this fancy prove the dear reality.

"I be, then. I didn't eat no noonin', recollec'?" returned Jim, and dropped down on the bank with a sigh.

"Oh! I'm sorry I forgot. Of course we'll stop—just as long as you want," returned the girl, with keen self-reproach, and sat down beside him. As she did so, there came a fresh rumble from the west and the pale light which had guided them so far was suddenly obscured, so that she cried out in fear: "There's going to be a fearful gust! We shall be wet through!"

"Reckon we will; here's a chunk o' bread," answered the matter-of-fact youth, reaching through the gloom to place the "chunk" on her lap, and, to his surprise, to find her wringing her hands as if in fright or pain. "Why, tell me what ails you now."

"No-nothing—only—ouch! Don't—don't worry—it's—Ooo-oh!"

Despite her fierce will to the contrary Dorothy could not restrain a bitter groan. She had not meant to hinder their flight by any breakdown on her own part. She had intended to "travel," to "hoof it" just as rapidly and as "freely" as her guide could; but something had happened just now, though her feet had hurt her almost from the first moment of their walk; but this was worse, and reaching down she felt what she could not see—one end of a great thorn or splinter projecting from the ball of her foot.

"What's the matter, I say?" demanded Jim, quite fiercely for him. He had no fear but that her pluck would be equal to any strain put upon it, but of her physical endurance he wasn't so sure.

"It's a thorn—or a splinter—and oh! it hurts! put your hand here—feel!" Yet

as she guided his fingers to that queer thing sticking from her wonderful "sandals" she winced and almost screamed. "I guess you mustn't touch it. I can't bear it. I've run something in and I daren't pull it out—I can't—it's awful!"

Indeed the agony was making her feel faint and queer and the boy felt, rather than saw, that she swayed where she sat as if she were about to sink down on the ground.

Here was plainly another case of "duty" and an unpleasant one, from which the lad shrank. He would much rather have borne any amount of pain himself than have inflicted more on this forlorn little girl who depended upon him; but all he said was: "Pshaw!" as setting his teeth, he suddenly gripped her foot and—in an instant the great bramble was out!

It was heroic treatment and Dorothy screamed; then promptly fainted away. When she came to herself she was dripping with water from the brook, with which Jim had drenched her—not knowing what better to do; and from a sudden downpour of rain which came almost unhindered through the branches overhead.

"Pshaw! I'd oughter 'a' took to the road. I hadn't no business to try this way, though 'tis nigher!"

That was the first thing Dorothy realized; the next that her foot was aching horribly, but not in that sickening way it had before; and lastly that, as the only means of keeping it dry, Jim had thrust their loaf back into the bundle and was sitting upon that! A lightning flash revealed this to her, but did not prepare her for her companion's next words:

"We got to go back!"

CHAPTER XVI

A GOOD SAMARITAN

"Never! Never! I'd rather die right here in the woods!" cried Dorothy, aghast. "Dead or alive that man shall never get me in his power again. But I'm not afraid. God is good to orphan children—He will take care of me—He will, He will!"

In some way she managed to get upon her knees and the next flash of lightning showed her thus, with her face uplifted and her hands clasped, while an agony of supplication was in her wide brown eyes.

Religion was an unknown thing to poor Jim Barlow, whose simple integrity was of nature, not culture. His Sundays had been merely days on which to toil a little harder against the morrow's market, nor had he ever been inside a church. But something in the sight of this child kneeling there in the night and the storm touched an unknown chord of his soul, and before he knew it he was kneeling beside her. Not to pray, as she did, but to hold her firmly, to comfort her by his human touch for this fresh terror he did not understand.

After a moment she turned and sat down again and said just as firmly as before, but quite calmly now:

"If you want to go back you may. I shall not. God will take care of me, even if you leave me all alone. I've asked Him."

"Leave you alone? I hadn't thunk of it. What you mean?"

"You said we must go back. I shall not."

"*Pshaw!*" It was several seconds before honest Jim could say anything more, but those five letters held a world of meaning. Finally, he was able to add to them and to help her seat herself again on the ground, and he is scarcely to be blamed if he did this with some force. From his point of view Dorothy was stupid. She should have known that he never gave up doing that to which he had set his hand. He had promised to get her back to Baltimore, some way, and he would keep his promise. With another, rather milder "Pshaw!" he explained:

"Go back an' try the road, silly! These cross-cuts are dreadful onsartain. Full o' blackberry bushes an' thorny stuff would hurt a tougher foot 'an yourn. More'n

that: shoes made out o' rags an' paper ain't much good in a rain storm. We'll get back to the road. Even that's a long way off, but it's over open medders an' it's so dark nobody won't see us er stop us. It ain't rainin' nigh so hard now. You eat a bite, then we'll try agin."

"Oh! forgive me, Jim Barlow, for thinking you would be so mean. I'll trust you now, no matter what happens, but I don't want to eat. I can't—yet."

"Does your foot hurt bad?"

"Not—not—so very!"

"Well, hold on. I'll break that there sapling off an' make you a stick to help walk on. 'Tother hand you can lean on my shoulder. Now, soon's you say the word we'll go. Not the way we come, but another, slatin'er. Try?"

They stood up: Dorothy with more pain than she would acknowledge, but putting a brave face on the matter, and Jim more anxious than he had ever been about anybody in his life. He didn't speculate as to why all these strange things had come into his life, as Dorothy had done, but he accepted them as simple facts of which he must make the best. The best he could make of this present situation was to get this lamed girl to a public highway as soon as he could. Even that might be deserted now, on a rainy Saturday night, but he hoped for some help there.

"Now—come."

Dorothy made a valiant effort and managed to get ahead a few inches. Then, half-laughing, half-crying, she explained:

"I can't manage it. I can't walk on one foot and drag the other. I—Can't you hide me here, somewhere, and go on by yourself, then send somebody back after me? Would it be safe, do you think?"

"No, 'twouldn't, an' I shan't. If you can't walk—then hop!"

So, resting one hand on his shoulder and the other upon the stick he had broken, the girl—hopped! It was very awkward, very painful, and very slow; but it was only the slowness that mattered. This was exasperating to one whose blood was in a ferment of anxiety to be at her journey's end. Even Jim lost patience after they had gone some distance and stopped short, saying, with a sigh:

"This won't do. I'll have to haul you. You're limpin' worse all the time, an' it'd take a month o' Sundays to travel a mile this gait. Now, whilst I stoop down, you

reach up an' put your arms 'round my neck. Make yourself light's you can, an' we'll try it that way a spell. When I gin out we'll wait an' rest. Now ketch hold!"

He took her staff in one hand, stooped his back like a bow, and Dorothy clasped her arms about his shoulders. Then he straightened himself and her feet swung clear of the ground. Fortunately, she was slight and he strong, and for another little while they proceeded quite rapidly. Also, he knew perfectly well the direction he ought to take, even in this darkness of night; and he was accustomed to walking in the fields. Then, suddenly, he had to stop.

"Guess we better rest a spell. 'Twon't do to get *all* tuckered out first off;" and with that he dumped her on the wet grass, very much as he might a sack of meal. Then he sat down himself, while she merrily cried:

"That's the first time I've been carried pick-a-back since I was ever so little! How splendid and strong you are! Do you suppose we have come half-way yet?"

"Half-way? Pshaw! We ain't got no furder 'an the first half-mile, if so fur. My sake, girls are orful silly, ain't they?"

Dorothy's temper flamed. She felt she had been very brave, for her foot had swollen rapidly and pained her greatly, yet she had suppressed every groan and had made "herself as light as she could," according to Jim's command. Now she would have none of his help. No matter what she suffered she would go on by herself. Then some evil thing tempted her to ask:

"Do you know where you're going, Jim Barlow, anyway?"

And he retorted with equal spirit:

"D' you s'pose I'd haul such a heavy creatur' 's you so fur on a wrong road?"

After which little interchange of amenities, the pair crawled forward again and came at last to a hedge of honeysuckle bordering a wide lane. The fragrance brought back to Dorothy's memory her own one, carefully tended vine in the little garden on Brown Street, and sent a desolate feeling through her heart. Sent repentant tears, also, to her eyes and made her reach her hand out toward her companion, with a fresh apology:

"Jim, I've got to say 'forgive me,' again and—I do say it—yet I hate it. You've been so good and—Smell the honeysuckle! My darling father John told me there were quantities of it growing wild all through Maryland, but I never half-believed it before. It makes me cry!"

"Set down an' cry, then, if you want to. I just as lief's you would. I'm tired."

This concession had the remarkable effect of banishing tears from Dorothy's eyes. She had tottered along on one foot and the tips of the toes of the other, till the injured one had become seriously strained and pained her so that rest she must, whether he were willing or not. It was comparatively dry on the further side the hedge, and the vines themselves, so closely interwoven, made a comfortable support for their tired backs. As she leaned against it, the girl's sense of humor made her exclaim:

"That's the funniest thing! I felt I must cry my eyes out, yet when you said 'go ahead and do it,' every tear dried up! But, I'm sleepy. Do you suppose we dare go to sleep for a few minutes."

"Pshaw! I'm sleepy, too. An' I'm goin'—s'posin' er no s'posin'."

After that, there was a long silence under the honeysuckle hedge. A second shower, longer and more violent than the first, arose, and dashed its cool drops on the faces of these young sleepers, but they knew nothing of that. The storm cleared and the late moon came out and shone upon them, yet still they did not stir. It was not until the sun itself sent its hot, summer rays across their closed lids that Jim awoke and saw a man standing beside them in the lane and staring at Dorothy with the keenest attention.

Instantly the lad's fear was alert. He had not spoken of it to Dorothy, but he knew that many others besides himself must have seen that wonderful advertisement in the daily paper; and though he was not wise enough to also know that every wandering child would suggest to somebody the chance of earning that five hundred, he had made up his mind that nobody should earn it. Dorothy should be restored without price, and he had promised her his should be the task. There was that about this staring stranger which made him throw a protecting arm over the still sleeping Dorothy and say:

"Well! Think you'll know us when you see us agin?"

"Come, come, boy! keep a civil tongue in your head. Who is that little girl?"

"None o' your business."

"Hold on. I'll make it my business, and lively, too, if you don't look out. Where'd you two come from?"

"Where we was last at."

"You scallawag! Your very impudence proves you're up to some mischief, but I'll ask you once more, and don't you dare give me a lying answer: Where did

you two come from?"

"Norphan asylum," said Jim, patting Dorothy's hand to quiet her alarm; for she had, also, waked and was frightened by the stranger, as well as by that strange numbness all through her body and the terrible pain in her foot.

"Girl, what's your name?"

Dorothy did not answer. She did not appear even to hear, but with a stupid expression turned her head about on the honeysuckle branches and again closed her eyes. Part of this dullness was real, part was feigned. She felt very ill and, anyway, there was Jim. Let him do what talking was necessary.

Again the stranger demanded:

"Who is that girl? Where did you get her? Is she deaf and dumb—or just a plain everyday fool?"

"Dunno, stranger. Give it up," said Jim, at the same time managing to nudge Dorothy unperceived, by way of hint that that suggested deaf-and-dumbness might serve them well.

The man who was quizzing them so sharply had been riding a spirited horse, which now began to prance about the lane in a dangerous way, and for the moment distracted his attention from the children. Indeed, in order to quiet the animal he had to mount and race it up and down for a time, though he by no means intended to leave that place until he had satisfied himself whether this were or were not the missing little girl, of whose disappearance all the papers were now so full. If it were and five hundred dollars depended on her rescue from that country bumpkin—he was the man for the rescue! Being none other than a suburban "constable" with a small salary, as well as a local horse jockey, exercising a rich gentleman's new hunter—also for hire.

As he galloped past them, to and fro, Dorothy grew more and more frightened and ill. Her long sleep in her water-soaked clothing, added to the pain in her foot and her lack of food, affected her seriously; and a bed with warm blankets and hot drinks was what she needed just then. Finally, when to the thud of the racer's feet there also sounded the rumble of approaching wheels, she felt that her doom was sealed and let her tears stream freely over her wan, dirt-streaked cheeks.

Jim, also, felt a shiver of fear steal through his long limbs, and instinctively drew his young charge closer to him, resolved to protect her to the last. But, as the wheels drew nearer, there was mingled with their rumble the notes of a good old hymn, and presently both wheels and music came to an abrupt halt before the

hedge and the forlorn pair half-hidden in it.

"Why, bless my heart! Younkers, where'd you hail from? and why should a pretty little girl be crying on the first Sunday morning in June? When everything else in God's dear world is fairly laughing with joy! Why, honey, little one—what—what—what!"

It was a tiny, very rickety gig from which the singer had leaped with the agility of youth, though his head was almost white, and green goggles covered his faded old eyes; and he had not finished speaking before he had climbed upon the bank to the hedge and had put his fatherly arms around the sobbing Dorothy.

She opened her own eyes long enough to see that benignant, grizzled countenance close to her, and—in an instant her arms had clasped about the stranger's neck! With the unerring instinct of childhood she knew a friend at first glance, and she clung to this man as if she would never let him go, while the astonished Jim looked on, fairly gasping for the breath that he at last emitted in the one word: "P-S-H-A-W!!" Here was another phase of that changeable creature—girl! To cry her eyes out at sight of one stranger and to fling herself headlong into the arms of another—not half so good looking!

Leaning back among the vines and coolly folding his arms, the farm-boy resigned himself to whatever might come next. He had most carefully planned all their trip "home" and not a single detail of it had followed his plan. "Give it up!" he remarked for the second time, and was immediately answered by the old man:

"No, you don't. Nobody decent ever does give up in this sunshiny world of God's. That isn't what He put us in it for, but to keep right on jogging along, shedding happiness, loving Him, being content. How did this poor little darling ever hurt her tiny foot like that?"

Already the old fellow had Dorothy on his lap and was examining with careful tenderness the angry-looking wound she had received, while her curly head rested as contentedly against his breast as if it had been that of father John himself.

She opened her lips to tell, but she was too tired. Indeed, if she had felt equal to the labor of it she would have poured forth her whole story then and there. But it is doubtful if he would have tarried to hear it, for he rose at once, carrying the girl in his arms so gently, so lovingly, that a great wave of happiness swept over her, and she flashed her own old beautiful smile into his goggles:

"Oh! you good man. God sent you, didn't He?"

"Sure, sure! To you, one of His lambs! Come, son. We'll be going! This poor little foot must be attended to right away, and this is my 'busy day.' On my way to preach at an early service, for the poor colored folk who can't come later. Then to another one for scattered white folks—the rest of the day at the hospitals—Why, bless my heart! If my Sundays were fifty times as long I could fill every minute of them with the Master's work!"

More nimbly than Jim could have done, the happy old man scrambled back into the gig, never once releasing his hold of Dorothy, gathered up his reins, bade the lad "Hang on behind, some way!" chirruped to his sleepy nag, and drove on singing out of the lane.

> "Bringing in the sheaves! Bringing in the sheaves!
> We will come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves!"

Once, in a pause of his song, Dorothy reached up and stroked his cheek, saying:

"You're taking me home, aren't you!"

"Sure, sure! To my home, first, to your home next—if I can;—to your heavenly home, when the Master wills."

His home came soon; a tiny, one-storied building with but two rooms, a kitchen and bedroom; smaller, even, than the cottage of Miranda Stott, but far neater and cozier. At its door the old minister sprang from the gig and directed Jim to leave it where it stood.

"Old Nan won't move unless she's bid. I'll fix up this little one's wound while you get breakfast. Happens I haven't had my own, yet, and I know you haven't had yours. The coffee's in that canister on the shelf. The fire's ready to the match—and the match right here! There's boiled ham in that cupboard, potatoes to fry, in the ice-box in the shed, bread and butter in the cellar, as well as a pail of milk. Show yourself a man by setting the table, my boy. How glad I am to have company! I try to have somebody most the time; but I don't often get them so easily as I've gotten you two. Young folks, besides; you ought to eat lots! which will give me extra appetite—not that I need it, oh no! A fine digestion is another of my Father's good gifts to me; and do you know, laddie, that I rarely have to buy the food to feed my guests? Always comes in of its own accord, seem's if. Of the Lord's accord, more truly. He's not the One to bid you feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty without providing the means. 'Old St. John's' is known as

a free 'hotel' in all this countryside, and my children—In His Name I bid you welcome to it this glorious Sunday morning!"

Dorothy was on the bed in the inner room, and all the time he was talking her jolly host was also attending to her as well as to Jim. She was better already, simply from the cheer of his speech, and that sense of perfect security that had come to her so promptly. Such a well-stored little house as that was! From somewhere, out came a bundle of bandages already prepared, a box of soothing ointment, and a basin of soft warm water to bathe the jagged wound.

"Learned to be a sort of doctor, too, you see. Never know when a body may come limping up, needing care—just as you have. Tear my bandages evenings when it rains. Never have to buy the muslin or linen—neighbors all save it for me. Boy—what's your name?—just turn those potatoes again. The secret of nice fried potatoes is to keep them stirred till every bit is yellow-browned, even and tasty. It's a sin, the way some people cook; spoiling the good gifts of the Lord by their own carelessness. Put into everything you do—milking, plowing, cooking, preaching, praying, the very best that's in you! That's the way to get at the core of life, at its deepest-down happiness and content. That's good! I reckon you're the right sort, only want a little training. The way you slice that ham shows you're thorough. Now, watch me settle this coffee and then—for all Thy Mercies, Lord, we humbly thank Thee."

Such a breakfast as that had never been spread before Jim Barlow. Dorothy had enjoyed many fine ones in her own happy home, but even she found this something out of common; and from the chair of state in which she had been placed at the head of the little table, beamed satisfaction on the others while she poured their coffee, as deftly as if she were, indeed, the "little woman" the old man called her.

When the meal was over, said he:

"Lad, I'm a busy man, you seem to be an idle fellow. I'll leave you to wash the dishes and put away the food. Carefully, as you found it, against the need of the next comer. My name is Daniel St. John. My pride it is to bear the name of that disciple Jesus loved. Good-bye. Tarry here as long or as short a time as you will. I never lock the door. Good-bye. If we do not meet again on earth, I shall look for you in Heaven."

He was already passing out into the sunshine but Dorothy cried after him:

"One moment, please. You have told us your name, but we haven't told you ours. Yes, Jim, I shall tell! It's right and this dear man will help us, not hinder. So

you needn't hold up your finger that way. Mr. St. John, I thank you, we both thank you, more than we can say. That boy's name is James Barlow. He's an orphan. I'm an orphan, too. My name is——"

"Thank you for confidence. If my day didn't belong to the Master, not to myself, I'd drive you home in the gig. If you stay here till to-morrow I will do so, anyway. Now, I am late about His business, and must be off at once!"

With that he jumped into his gig, shook the reins over old Nan's back, who went ambling down the road to the music of "Throw out the life line!" sung to the surrounding hills and dales as only old Daniel St. John could sing it.

For some hours the two wanderers rested in that sunny little home, both most reluctant to leave it, and Dorothy's own wish now being to remain until the Monday when, as he said, their new acquaintance would be at liberty to take them to the city. Jim was not so anxious to remain. It was not until his companion's entreaties grew more persistent, that he told her the truth:

"Dorothy, we *can't* stay. We mustn't. I dassent. You was scared o' that feller on horseback. Well, he's been ridin' by here two, three times, an' he's fetched another feller along. Them men mean bad to us. I've studied out 't they ain't sure the old man ain't to home. If they was they wouldn't wait to ketch us long. The first man, he seen us come with St. John. He must. He couldn't have rid so fur he didn't. Well, I feel's if *he* ketched us, 'twould be out the fryin'-pan into the fire. We couldn't get shet o' him—till he got that five hundred dollars. We've got to go on, someway, somewheres. An'—go *now*, whilst they've rid back agin, out o' sight."

CHAPTER XVII

A SUNDAY DRIVE

Mrs. Cecil was extremely restless. She had been so ever since her visit to Kidder & Kidder. She would roam from room to room of her great house, staying long in none, finding fault with everybody and everything, in a manner most unusual. For though she was sharp of speech, at times, the times were fortunately at intervals, not incessant; but now she had altered and her dependents felt it to be for the worse.

"I declar' my soul, Ephraim, looks lak ouah Miss Betty done got somepin' on her min', de way she ca'y on erbout nottin er tall. Jus' cayse cook, she done put sallyratus in dem biscuits, stidder raisin' 'em yeas' cake way, she done 'most flung 'em offen de table. All de time fussin' wid some us boys an' girls, erbout some fault er nother; an' I lay out it's her own min' is all corrodin' wid wickedness. What's yo' 'pinion now, Ephraim, boy?"

The old colored man pushed away his plate and scratched his white wool. He was loyalty itself to his Miss Betty, but in his heart he agreed with Dinah that the house of Calvert had fallen upon uncomfortable times. Fortunately, he was saved the trouble of a reply, by the sharp ringing of the stable bell.

"What now!" cried Dinah, hurrying away.

Dinner had been served as usual. As usual Mrs. Cecil had attended service at old St. Paul's, but had felt herself defrauded because the rector had invited a stranger to occupy the pulpit: "when he knows as well as I do that this is my last Sunday in Baltimore, before the autumn, and should have paid me the respect of preaching himself," she had confided to her next-pew neighbor. Whereupon that other old member had felt herself also aggrieved, and had left the edifice for her carriage in a most unchristian state of mind. As usual, the one church-going and the stately dinner over, the household had settled into a Sunday somnolence. Ephraim had a comfortable lounge in the carriage-house loft and was ready for his afternoon nap. Cook was already asleep, in her kitchen rocker; and having finished her own grumble, Dinah was about to follow the universal custom, and seek repose in the little waiting-room beyond her mistress's boudoir, while that lady enjoyed the same within. For that stable bell to ring at this unwonted hour was enough to startle both old servants, and to send Dinah speeding to answer it.

"Bless yo' heart, Miss Betty, did you-all done ring dat bell? Or did dat Methusalem done it, fo' mischievousness?"

"I rang it, Dinah. Tell Ephraim to harness his horses. I'm going out for a drive."

Dinah delayed to obey. Drive on Sunday? Such a thing was unheard of, except on the rare occasion of some intimate friend being desperately ill. Instantly the maid's thought ran over the list of her mistress's intimates, but could find none who was ailing, or hardly one who was still in town.

"Lawd, honey, Miss Betty, who-all's sick?"

"Nobody, you foolish girl. Can't I stir off these grounds unless somebody is ill? I'm going to drive. I've no need to tell you, you've no right to ask me—but one must humor imbecility! *I—am—going—to—drive!* I—I'm not sleeping as well as usual, and I need the air. Now, get my things, and don't stare."

"Yas'm. Co'se. Yas'm. But year me, Miss Betty Somerset, if yo' po' maw was er libin' you-all wouldn't get to go no ridin' on a Sunday ebenin', jus' if yo' didn' know no diff'rent. Lak dem po' no-'count folks what doan' b'long to good famblies. You-all may go, whuther er no, cayse yo' does most inginerally take yo' own way. But I owes it to yo' maw to recommind you-all o' yo' plain, Christian duty."

With that Dinah felt she had relieved herself of all obligation either to duty or tradition, and proceeded with great dignity to bring out her lady's handsome wrap and hat: while down deep in that old gentlewoman's breast fluttered a feeling of actual guilt. It was a lifelong habit she was about to break; a habit that had been the law of her parents in the days of her youth. When one was a privileged person of leisure, who could take her outings on any week-day, she should pay strictest honor to the Sabbath.

However, Miss Betty had made up her mind to go and Miss Betty went. Not only thus endangering her own soul but those of Dinah and Ephraim as well; and once well out of city limits and the possible observation of friends, the affair began to have for all three the sweet flavor of stolen fruit.

"It's delightful. It's such a perfect day. 'Twould be more sinful to waste it indoors, asleep, than to be out here on the highway, passing through such loveliness. We'll—*We'll come again*, some other Sunday, Dinah," observed Mrs. Cecil, when they had already traveled some few miles.

But it was Dinah's hour for sleep, and having been prevented from indulging

herself at home in a proper place and condition, she saw no reason why she shouldn't nod here and now. The carriage was full as comfortable as her own easy-chair, and she had been ordered to ride, not to stay awake.

So, finding her remarks unheeded, Mrs. Cecil set herself to studying the landscape; and she found this so soothing to her tired nerves that when the coachman asked if he should turn about, she indignantly answered:

"No. Time for that when I give the order. It's my carriage, as I often have to remind you, Ephraim."

"Yas'm. Dat's so, Miss Betty. But dese yere hosses, dey ain' much usen to trabelin' so fur, cos' erspecially not inginerally on a *Sunday*."

"Do them good, boy, do them good. They're so fat they can hardly trot a rod before they're winded. When we get into the country, and they have to climb up and down those hills of the highlands, they'll lose some of their bulk. They're a sight now. I'm fairly ashamed of them. Touch them up, boy, touch them up. See if they can travel at all. They had a good deal of spirit when I bought them, but you'd ruin any team you shook the reins over, Ephraim. Touch them up!"

Ephraim groaned, but obeyed; and, for a brief distance, the bays did trot fairly well, as if there had come to their equine minds a memory of that past when they had been young and frisky. Then they settled down again to their ordinary jog, quite unlike their mistress's mood, which grew more and more excited and gay the longer she trespassed upon her old-time habits.

Nobody, who loved nature at all, could resist the influence of that golden summer afternoon—"evening" as southerners call it. To Mrs. Cecil as to little Dorothy, hours before, came the sweet, suggestive odor of honeysuckle; that brought back old memories, touched to tenderness her heart, and to an undefinable longing for something and somebody on which to expend all that stored-up affection.

"Tu'n yet, Miss Betty? Dat off hoss done gettin' badly breathed," suggested Ephraim, rudely breaking in upon Mrs. Cecil's reflections.

"Oh, you tiresome boy! One-half mile more, then turn if you will and must. For me—I haven't enjoyed myself nor felt so at peace in—in several days. Not since that wretched plumber came to Bellevieu and stirred me all up with his—gossip. I could drive on forever! but, of course, I'm human, and I'll remember you, Ephraim, as well as my poor, abused horses! One mile—did I say a half? Well, drive on, anyway."

It was at the very turn of the road that she saw them.

A long, lanky lad, far worse winded than her fat bays, skulking along behind the honeysuckle hedge-rows, as if in hiding from somebody. As they approached each other—she in her roomy carriage, he on his bruised and aching feet—she saw that he was almost spent; that he carried a girl on his back; and that the desperation of fear was on both their young faces. Then looking forward along her side of the hedge, down the road that stretched so smooth and even, she saw two men on horseback. They were riding swiftly, and now and then one would rise in his stirrups and peer over the hedge, as if to keep in sight the struggling children, then settle back again into that easy lope that was certain of speedy victory.

Mrs. Cecil's nerves tingled with a new—an old—sensation. In the days of her girlhood she had followed the hounds over many a well-contested field. Behold here again was a fox-hunt—with two human children for foxes! Whatever they might have done, how deserved re-capture, she didn't pause to inquire. All her old sporting blood rose in her, but—on the side of the foxes!

"Drive, drive, Ephraim, drive! Kill the horses—save those children!"

Ephraim had once been young, too, and he caught his lady's spirit with a readiness that delighted her. In a moment the carriage was abreast the fleeing children on that further side the hedge, and Mrs. Cecil's voice was excitedly calling:

"Come through! Come through the hedge! We'll befriend you!"

It had been a weary, weary race. Although her foot had been so carefully bandaged by Daniel St. John, it was not fit to be used and Dorothy's suffering could not be told in words. Jim had done his best. He had comforted, encouraged, carried her; at times, incessantly, but with a now fast-dying hope that they could succeed in evading these pursuers, so relentlessly intent upon their capture.

"It's the money, Dorothy, they want. They mustn't get it. That's your folkses'—do try—you *must* keep on! I'll—they shan't—Oh, pshaw!"

Wheels again! again added to that thump, thump, thump of steel-shod hoofs along the hard road! and the youth felt that the race was over—himself beaten.

Then he peered through a break in the honeysuckle and saw a wonderful old lady with snow-white hair and a beautiful face, standing up in a finer vehicle than he had known could be constructed, and eagerly beckoning him to: "Come!

Come!"

He stood still, panting for breath, and Dorothy lifted her face which she had hidden on his shoulder and—what was that the child was calling?

"Mrs. Cecil! Mrs. Cecil! Don't you know me? John Chester's little girl? 'Johnnie'—postman 'Johnnie'—you know him—take me home!"

The two horsemen came riding up and reined in shortly. There was bewilderment on their faces and disappointment in their hearts; for behold! here were five hundred dollars being swept out of their very grasp by a wealthy old woman who didn't need a cent!

And what was that happy old creature answering to the fugitive's appeal but an equally joyful:

"Dorothy C.! You poor lost darling—Dorothy C.! Thank God you're found! Thank Him I took this ride this day!"

Another moment and not only Dorothy but poor Jim Barlow, mud-stained, unkempt, as awkward a lad as ever lived and as humble, was riding toward Baltimore city in state, on a velvet-covered cushion beside one of its most aristocratic dames!

This was a turn in affairs, indeed; and the discomfited horsemen, who had felt a goodly sum already within their pockets, followed the equipage into town to learn the outcome of the matter.

Dorothy was on Mrs. Cecil's own lap; who minded nothing of the soiled little garments but held the child close with a pitying maternity, pathetic in so old and childless a woman.

But, oddly enough, she permitted no talk or explanation. There would be time enough for that when the safe shelter of Bellevieu was reached and there were no following interlopers to overhear. Even Dinah could only sit and stare, wondering if her beloved "honey" had suddenly lost her wits; but Ephraim comprehended that his mistress now meant it when she urged "Speed! speed!" and put his fat bays to a run such as they had not taken since their earliest youth.

Through the eagle-gateway, into the beautiful grounds, around to that broad piazza where Dorothy had made disastrous acquaintance with the two Great Danes, and on quite into the house. But there Jim would have retreated, and even Dorothy looked and wondered: saying, as she was gently taken in old Dinah's arms and laid upon the mistress's own lounge:

"Thank you, but I won't lie down here, if you please. I love you so much for bringing me back, but home—home's just around the corner, and I can't wait! Jim and I will go now—please—and thank you! thank you!"

Yet now, back in her own home, it was a very calm and courteous old gentlewoman—no longer an impulsive one—who answered:

"For the present, Dorothy C., you will have to be content with Bellevieu. John Chester and his wife have gone to the country. To a far-away state, and to a little property she owns. Fortunately, I am going to that same place very soon and will take you to them. I am sorry for your disappointment, but you are safe with me till then."

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCLUSION

Mr. Kidder, of Kidder & Kidder, had by request waited upon the lady of Bellevieu. He was prepared to explain some uncertain matters to her and had delayed his own removal to his country place for that purpose. The heat which had made Baltimore so uncomfortable had, for the time being, passed; and there was now blowing through the big east-parlor, a breeze, redolent of the perfumes of sweet brier and lily-of-the-valley; old-fashioned flowers which grew in rank luxuriance outside the wide bay-window.

Presently there entered the mistress of the mansion, looking almost youthful in a white gown and with a calm serenity upon her handsome features. She walked with that graceful, undulating movement—a sort of quiet gliding—which had been the most approved mode of her girlhood, and the mere sight of that was restful to the old attorney, who detested the modern, jerky carriage of most maidens.

Dorothy attended her hostess and she, too, was in white. Indeed Mrs. Cecil considered that to be the only suitable home-wear for either maid or matron, after the spring days came; and looking critically upon the pair, the old lawyer fancied he saw a faint resemblance.

Each had large brown and most expressive eyes; each had a hand and foot, fit subject for feminine pride, and each bore herself with the same air of composed self-sufficiency. Well, it was a fine experiment his client was trying; he could but hope it would not end in disappointment.

She seemed to know his thoughts without his expressing them; and as she sat down, she bade Dorothy lay aside her cane and sit beside her. The injured foot had received the best of medical treatment since the child's arrival at Bellevieu and was now almost well, though some support had still to be used as a safeguard against strain.

"This is the child, Mr. Kidder. I think she has intelligence. A fine intelligence," began the lady, as if Dorothy had not ears to hear. Then feeling the girl's eyes raised inquiringly, added rather hastily: "It's on account of 'Johnnie,' you understand, Mr. Kidder. He was one of the most faithful persons I ever knew. That was why he was selected. Why I am going to take his little Dorothy C. back

to him as fast as to-morrow's train will carry us. Have you learned anything?"

"Yes, Madam. I came prepared—but——" He paused again and glanced at the girl, whom her hostess promptly sent away. Then he proceeded:

"It is the same man I suspected in the beginning. He was a clerk in my office some years ago, at the time, indeed, when I first saw your ward. He listened at a keyhole and heard all arrangements made, but—did not see who was closeted with me and never learned your identity until recently. That is why you have escaped blackmail so long; and he is the author of the letters you sent me—unopened. He had his eye upon Dorothy C. for years, but could use her to no advantage till he traced—I don't yet know how, and it doesn't matter—the connection between yourself and the monthly letters. He has been in scrapes innumerable. I discharged him almost immediately after I hired him, and he has owed me a grudge ever since. But—he'll trouble Baltimore people no more. If he recovers from the dangerous illness he is suffering now he will be offered the choice of exile from the state or a residence in the prison. By the way, isn't it a case of poetic justice, that he should be thus innocently punished by the child he stole?"

"It is, indeed. As to the boy, James. 'Jim,' Dorothy calls him. He seems to be without friends, a fine, uncouth, most manly fellow, with an overpowering ambition 'to know things'! To see him look at a book, as if he adored it but dared not touch it, is enough—to make me long to throw it at him, almost! He is to be tested. I want to go slow with him. So many of my protégés have disappointed me. But, if he's worth it, I want to help him make a man of himself."

"The right word. Just the right, exact word, Madam. 'Help *him* to make a man of himself.' Because if he doesn't take a hand in the business himself, all the extraneous help in the world will be useless. Well, then I think we understand each other. I have all your latest advices in my safe, with duplicate copies in that of my son.

"You leave to-morrow? From Union Station? I wish you, Madam, a safe journey, a pleasant summer, and an early return. Good-morning."

On the very evening of Dorothy's arrival at Bellevieu, now some days past, she had begged so to "go home," and so failed to comprehend how her parents could have left it without her, that Mrs. Cecil sent for the plumber and his wife to come to her and to bring Mabel with them.

"Why, husband! I fair believe the world must be comin' to an end! Dorothy found, alive, and that rich woman the one to find her! Go! Course we'll go—

right off."

Mr. Bruce was just as eager to pay the visit as his wife, but he prided himself on being a "free-born American" citizen and resented being ordered to the mansion, "on a Sunday just as if it were a work-day. If the lady has business with us, it's her place to come to Brown Street, herself."

"Fiddle-de-diddle-de-dee! Since when have we got so top-lofty?" demanded his better half with a laugh. "On with your best duds, man alive, and we'll be off! Why, I—I myself am all of a flutter, I can't wait! Do hurry an' step 'round to 77 an' get Mabel. She's been to supper with her aunt, an' Jane'll be wild to hear the news, too. Tell everybody you see on the block—Dorothy C. is found! Dorothy C. is found! An' whilst you're after Mabel, I'll just whisk Dorothy's clothes, 'at her mother left with me for her, into a satchel an' take 'em along. Stands to reason that folks wicked enough to steal a child wouldn't be decent enough to give her a change of clothing; and if she's wore one set ever sence she's been gone—My! I reckon Martha Chester'd fair squirm—just to think of it!"

Now, as has been stated, in his heart the honest plumber was fully as eager to see Dorothy C., as his wife was, and long before she had finished speaking he was on his way to number 77. It was such a lovely evening that all his neighbors were sitting out upon their doorsteps, in true Baltimore fashion, so it was easy as delightful to spread the tidings; and never, never, had the one-hundred-block of cleanly Brown Street risen in such an uproar. An uproar of joy that was almost hilarious; and all uninvited, everybody who had ever known Dorothy C. set off for Bellevieu, so that even before the Bruce-Jones party had arrived the lovely grounds were full to overflowing and the aristocratic silence of the place was broken by cries of:

"Dorothy! Dorothy Chester! Show us little Dorothy, and we'll believe our ears. Seeing is believing—Show us little Dorothy!"

These, and similar, outcries bombarded the hearing of Mrs. Cecil and, for a moment, frightened her. Glancing out of the window she beheld the throng and called to Ephraim:

"Boy! Telephone—the police! It's a riot of some sort! We're being mobbed!"

But Dinah knew better. She didn't yet understand why her mistress should bother with a couple of runaway young folks, but since she had done so it was her own part to share in that bother. So she promptly lifted the girl in her strong arms and carried her out to the broad piazza, so crowded with people in Sunday attire, and quietly explained to whomsoever would listen:

"Heah she is! Yas'm. Dis yere's de pos'man's li'l gal what's gone away wid de misery in his laigs. Yas'm. It sho'ly am. An' my Miss Betty, she's done foun' out how where he's gone at is right erjinin' ouah own prop'ty o' Deerhurst-on-de-Heights, where we-all's gwine in a right smart li'l while. Won't nottin' more bad happen dis li'l one, now my Miss Betty done got de care ob her. Yas'm, ladies an' gemplemen; an' so, bein's it Sunday, an' my folks mos' tuckered out, if you-all'd be so perlite as to go back to yo' housen an' done leab us res', we-all done be much obleeged. Yas'm. Good-bye."

Dinah's good-natured speech, added to the one glimpse of the rescued child, acted more powerfully than the police whom her mistress would have summoned; and soon the crowd drifted away, pausing only here and there to admire the beautiful grounds which, hitherto, most of these visitors had seen only from outside the gates.

But the Bruce family remained; and oh! the pride and importance which attached to them, thus distinguished! Or of that glad reunion with these old friends and neighbors, when Dorothy was once more in their arms, who could fitly tell? Then while Mabel and her restored playmate chattered of all that had happened to either since their parting, Mrs. Cecil drew the plumber aside and consulted him upon the very prosaic matter of clothes—clothes for now ill-clad Jim Barlow.

"I've decided to take him with us to New York State when we go, in a very few days. I shall employ him as a gardener on my property there, but he isn't fit to travel—as he's fixed now. Will you, at regular wages for your time, take him down town to-morrow morning and fit him out with suitable clothing, plain and serviceable but ample in quantity, and bring the bill to me? I'd rather you'd not let him out of your sight, for now that Dorothy is safe, the boy has ridiculous notions about his 'duty' to that dreadful old truck-farming woman who has let him work for her during several years at—nothing a year! And anybody who's so saturated with 'duty,' is just the man I want at Deerhurst, be he old or young."

To which the plumber answered:

"Indeed, Mrs. Cecil, I'm a proud man to be selected for the job and as to pay for my time—just you settle with me when I ask you for that. Pay? For such a neighborly turn? Well, I guess not. Not till I'm a good deal poorer than I am now. And if there's anything needed for Dorothy C., my wife'll tend to that, too, and be proud."

So with that matter settled, these good friends of the rescued children departed

to their home and to what sleep they might find after so much delightful excitement.

Next day, too, because the doctor called in said that Dorothy must attempt no more walking until the end of the week, Mrs. Cecil had a pony cart sent for, and Ephraim with Dinah took the child upon a round of calls to all whom she had ever known in that friendly neighborhood. Mabel was invited to accompany her, and did so—the proudest little maiden in Baltimore. They even went to their school, and Miss Georgia left her class for full five minutes to go out and congratulate her late pupil upon this happy turn of affairs. But at number 77 Dorothy would not stop; would not even look. She felt she could not bear its changed condition, for underneath all this present joy her heart ached with longing for those beloved ones who had made that little house a home.

Also, now that it was drawing certainly near, it seemed as if the day of their reunion would never come; and when some time before, old Ephraim was sent on ahead with the horses and carriages, and the great heap of luggage which his lady found necessary to this annual removal, the child pleaded piteously to go with him.

"No, my dear, not yet. Two days more and you shall. You may count the hours. I sometimes think that helps time to pass, when one is impatient. They've been telegraphed to, have known all about you ever since Sunday night. They'll have time to make ready for you—and that's all. But, Brown Eyes, a 'penny for your thoughts!' What are they, pray, to make you look so serious?"

"I was thinking you're like a fairy godmother. You seem so able to do everything you want for everybody. I was wondering, too, what makes you so kind to—to me, after that day when I was saucy to you."

It came to the lady's mind to answer: "Darling, who could be aught but kind to you!" but flattery was not one of her failings and she had begun to fear that all the attention of these past days was turning her charge's head. So she merely suggested:

"I suppose I might be doing it for 'Johnnie.' I am very fond of him."

Thus Dorothy's vanity received a possibly needful snub; for a girl who was well treated because of her father couldn't be so much of a heroine after all!

The railway journey from Baltimore to New York was like a passage through fairyland to Dorothy C. and the farm-boy Jim. The wonders of their luxurious parlor-car surroundings kept them almost speechless with delight; but when at

the latter great city they embarked upon a Hudson river steamer and they were free to roam about the palatial vessel, their tongues were loosened. Thereafter they talked so fast and so much that they hardly realized what was happening as Dinah called them to listen and obey the boat-officer's command:

"All ashore what's goin'! Aft' gangway fo' Cornwall! A-L-L—A-S-H-O-O-R-E!"

Over the gangplank, into the midst of a waiting crowd, and there was Ephraim with the carriage and the bays; and into the roomy vehicle bundled everybody, glad to be so near the end of that famous journey, and Dorothy quite unable to keep still for two consecutive moments.

"Up, up, up! How high we are going! Straight into the skies it seems!" cried the girl to Jim Barlow, whom nobody who had known him on the truck-farm would have recognized as the same lad, so neat and trim he now appeared.

But he had no words to answer. The wonderful upland country through which their course lay impressed him to silence, and the strength of those everlasting hills entered his ambitious soul—making him believe that to him who dared all high achievements were possible.

"Will—we never—*never* get there?" almost gasped Dorothy, in the breathless eagerness of these last few moments of separation from her loved ones. But Mrs. Cecil answered:

"Yes, my child. Round this turn of the road and behold! we are arrived! See, that big place yonder whose gates stand wide open is Deerhurst, my home, to which I hope you will often come. And, look this way—there is Skyrie! The little stone cottage on a rock, half-hidden in vines, empty for years, and now—Who is that upon its threshold? That man in the wheeled chair, risking his neck to hasten your meeting? Who that dainty little woman flying down the path to clasp you in her arms? Ah! Dorothy C.! Father and mother, indeed, they have proved to you and glad am I to restore you to them, safe and sound!"

Happy, happy Dorothy! At last, at last she was in the arms whose care had sheltered her through all her life; and there, for the time being, we must leave her. Of her life at Skyrie, of its haps and mishaps, of the mystery which still surrounded her birth and parentage, another book must tell.

Or how beautiful Mrs. Cecil, gay and satisfied as that veritable fairy godmother to which Dorothy had likened her, drove briskly home to Deerhurst and its accustomed stateliness, with humble Jim Barlow too grateful for speech, already beginning his new and richer life.

All these things and more belong with Dorothy Chester at Skyrie, and of them you shall hear by and by. Till then we leave her, well content.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

Obvious printer and typographical errors have been corrected without comment. In addition to obvious errors, the following changes have been made:

Page 218: "t'was" was changed to "'twas" in the phrase, "... t'was to find out dat."

Page 251: "need less" was changed to "needless" in the phrase, "... scuffin' 'em out, needless."

Page 297: "the" was added to the phrase, "Glancing out of the window...."

With the exception of the above corrections, the author's original spelling, punctuation, use of grammar, etc., is retained as it appears in the original publication.

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