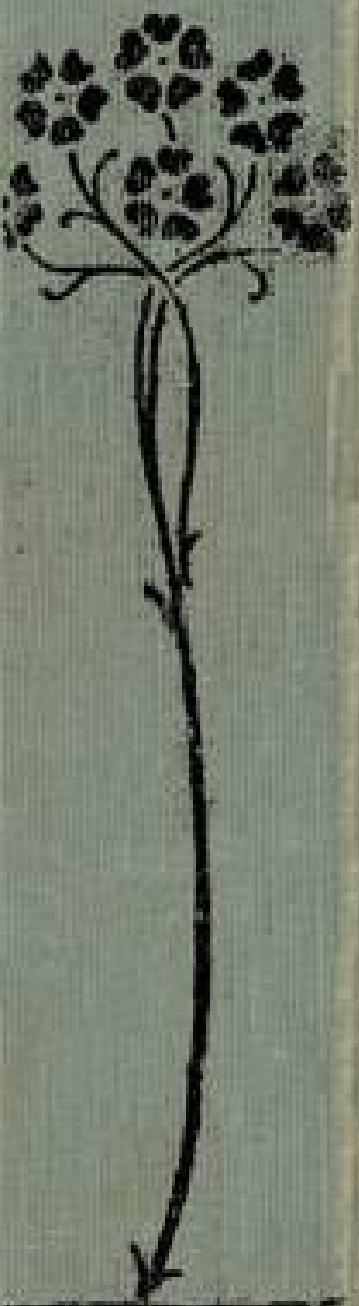
SIX GIRLS

FANNY BELLE IRVING



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# SIX GIRLS

FANNY · BELLE · IRVING

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       A Home Story

Author: Fannie Belle Irving

Illustrator: F. T. Merrill

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# S I X  G I R L S

From Aunt Tremayne and Ralph **FROM AUNT TREMAYNE AND RALPH**

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# SIX GIRLS

*A HOME STORY*

BY

FANNIE BELLE IRVING

ILLUSTRATED BY F. T. MERRILL

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# SIX GIRLS.

# CHAPTER I.

# UNDER THE TREES.

THERE were ripples of sunshine all tangled in the glowing scarlet of the geranium bed and dancing blithely over the grass. A world of melody in quivering bursts of happy song came from the spreading canopy of leaves overhead, and as an accompaniment, the wind laughed and whispered and kept the air in one continual smile with a kiss on its lips, born of supreme contentment in the summer loveliness.

In the cool, deep shade, cast by the grandest of old beech trees, a girl sat, her white dress in freshest relief against the green surroundings, a piece of sewing in her nimble fingers, and the wind tossing her loosened hair all about her face and shoulders. She was quite alone, and seemed just the setting for the quiet, lovely surroundings, so much so, that, had an artist chanced to catch the sight, he would have lost no time in transferring it to canvas,—the wide stretch of grass, alternately steeped in cool shadows and mellow sunshine, the branching, rustling canopy of leaves, the white-robed figure with smiling lips and busy fingers, and just visible in the back-ground an old house wrapped in vines and lying in the shade.

Somebody came from among the trees just at this moment and crossed the grass with a peculiarly graceful and swaying step, as though she had just drifted down with the sunshine and was being idly blown along by the wind, another girl in the palest of pink dresses, with ripples of snowy lace all over it, and a wide-brimmed hat shading her eyes. And speaking distance being gained, she said, with a breezy little laugh: "Sewing? Why, it's too warm to breathe."

"That's the reason I sew," returned the other, with a nod of energy. "I should suffocate if I just sat still and thought how warm it is. Where have you been?"

"Down to the pond, skipping stones, and wishing that I could go in," answered the new-comer, sitting down on the grass with a careful and gracefully effective arrangement of her flounces and lace. "I don't see why papa won't let us take the boat; it did look too tempting. Suppose we go and do it, anyhow, Bea, and just

let him see that we can manage it without being taught. The pond is all in the shade now, and a row would be delicious."

"Why, Ernestine!" Bea said, with a glance of surprise; "You wouldn't, I know. Papa will teach us right away, and then we will have delightful times; but when he has been so good as to get us the boat and promise to have us learn to manage it, I'm sure I wouldn't disobey and try alone."

Ernestine laughed again her pretty saucy laugh and threw her head back so that it caught a dancing sunbeam and held it prisoner in the bright hair.

"I would," she said flippantly. "I'd like to, just for the sake of doing something. Do you know, Bea,"—knitting the arched brows with a petulant air, —"Sometimes I think I'll do something dreadful; perfectly dreadful, you know, so as to have things different for a little bit. It's horrible to live right along, just so, without anything ever happening."

"Well I'm sure," said Bea, laying down her sewing and surveying her sister slowly, "you have just about as good and easy a time as ever I heard of a girl's having. What are you all dressed up so for?"

"Just for something to do. I've tried on all my dresses and hats, and wasted the blessed afternoon parading before the glass," laughed Ernestine, swinging her pretty hat with its shirrings of delicate pink, around on her white hand. "I do think this dress is lovely, so I made believe I was being dressed by my maid and coming out to walk in my park like an English lady, you know."

"English fiddlesticks!" said Bea, with energy. "You are a goosey. Suppose you had to work and couldn't have pretty things and waste your time trying them on?"

"What misery," cried Ernestine, jumping up and whirling around on her heel with an airy grace that the other girls might have practiced for in vain. "I wouldn't want to live; it would be dreadful, Bea," falling into an attitude with the sunshine over her, "wouldn't I do well on the stage? I know I was born for it; now look here, and see if I don't do as Miss Neilson did. Just suppose this ring of sunshine is a balcony and I'm in white, with such lovely jewels in my hair and all that:

"Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?"—

and away went Ernestine with a tragically pathetic energy that made Bea watch and listen, in spite of the disapproving laugh on her lips.

"Don't I do it well?" Ernestine asked complacently, after she had gone through the entire balcony scene, with great success in the management of two characters.

"Yes, you do; how can you?" asked Bea, won from disapproval by wondering admiration.

"Easiest in the world. I've been through it ever so many times since papa took us to the city to see her. Oh, Bea! how happy she must be! I'd give worlds and worlds to be in her place," cried Ernestine, with longing energy, and pacing restlessly up and down the grass. "I wonder if I ever can."

"Indeed!" said Bea with decision. "The idea! what would papa and mama say; you, Ernestine Dering, parading out on a stage before crowds of people, and flying around like she did. Mercy on us!"

"I'd do it in a minute, and if I can't now, I will sometime anyhow," Ernestine exclaimed with emphasis. "I wasn't born to be smuggled up in this little musty town all my life and I won't, either. Some day I'll do something desperate; you see if I don't."

"Well, I do declare!" said Bea slowly, having never witnessed quite such an energetic ending to Ernestine's spells of restless dissatisfaction. "What talk! I think you'd better sit down and cool off now. Where are Olive and Jean?"

"Olive is sketching out on the roof, and crosser than thirteen sticks. Jean is asleep on the porch, and mama is out showing Huldah how to make cream puffings."

"Dear me," said Bea, by way of answer and looking up with a slight pucker to her smooth forehead, "Just look at those girls; I never saw the like."

Ernestine looked up, to catch a glimpse of two flying figures just clearing the fence, and come dashing across the grass like unruly arrows, to throw themselves under the shade of the beech, with a supreme disregard for flesh and bones.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Kittie.

"Gracious goodness!" panted Kat.

"I beat."

"No sir, I did."

"You didn't! I was on this side of the fence before you jumped."

"Just listen! why I was pretty near to the tree before you got to the fence."

"Why Kat Dering! You know better."

"I don't."

"You do."

"Well I'd fight about it," said Ernestine, as the two sat up and faced each other with belligerent countenances. "You are a pretty looking couple anyhow. I'd be ashamed."

"Don't care if you would. I beat anyhow," said Kat with decision.

"Indeed you didn't; I did myself," said Kittie with equal certainty, but smiling more amicably as she fanned energetically with her hat. "Oh girls such fun! I must,——"

"Now Kittie," cried Kat with a warning jump and scowl.

"Bless us, I'm going to tell; indeed I am. You're a trump, Kat, and they shall hear all about it; don't you want to girls?"

"To be sure, go on," said Bea with interest and creasing down a hem with much satisfaction in the thought that her hands looked very pretty and white, almost as pretty as Ernestine's.

"Well you see," began Kitty, as Kat retired under her hat in a spasm of unusual modesty, "when we came in from recess this afternoon, Kat wanted to sit in my side of the seat, and told me to act as if I was she, so I thought it was to be a lark of some kind and did, but dear me——"

"Well go on," said Ernestine with languid curiosity, as Kittie paused to laugh at some recollection.

"Just as soon as we got in Miss Howard told us to put books away; then she

gave us the breeziest lecture and was as solemn as an owl. I couldn't imagine what was up. Susie Darrow was crying with her handkerchief to her nose, Kat looked as if she was sitting on pins and needles, and I really thought that Sadie Brooks and May Moor would eat us up, the way they actually glared at us. Well, the first thing I knew, Miss Howard was saying something about a needle in Susie Barrow's pen, that she had stuck her nose with, and she wanted whoever had put it there to come to her desk. That's the way she always does, you know; never calls a name unless she finds she has to, and bless you! who should I see walking off but Kat, and what does Miss Howard do but take her ruler and give her fifteen slaps on the hand. Kat, I'm meaner'n dirt, and you're a jewel; you did beat, I'll own up."

"No such thing, you beat yourself," came in a sepulchral growl from under the hat.

"Well I'm sure I don't see the point," said Ernestine with impatience. "It was very rude and unlady-like to put a needle in Susie's pen and you deserved your fifteen slaps."

"Just wait 'till I finish, will you," cried Kittie, as the hat maintained perfect silence, "Kat didn't do it, but she heard that I did, and that I was going to be whipped, so she took my seat and jumped up the minute Miss Howard spoke, and the only way I found out was when Miss Howard said, 'Now Kittie you must beg Susie's pardon before the school.' Then I knew something was up, and just popped right out of my seat and said that that was Kat, not me, and didn't it make a hub-bub, and didn't Miss Howard look funny!"

"It was lively," broke in Kat, and coming out from under the hat as if inspired with the recollection, "Miss Howard looked as blank as you please, and like to have never gotten at the straight of it; but after awhile lame Jack told how he had seen Sadie and May fix it themselves, and plan to tell it was Kittie, and oh didn't they look cheap, and didn't they creep off to-night and take every book along?"

"But wasn't Kat just too dear and good to take a whipping to save me," cried Kittie, throwing both arms around her twin in a hug full of devotion. "I'll never forget it, Kat Dering, never!"

"Well you'd better," said Kat, on whom praise and glory rested uneasily, though she looked pleased and returned the hug with interest. "You'd have done it for me, I know, and I would again for you any day. Let's go out on the roof; it's much cooler than here."

"You'd better not," laughed Ernestine. "Olive's out there sketching, and she'll take your head off with her usual sweetness, if you bother any."

"Who cares? I'm going. Come on Kittie."

"No let's not; it's cool here," returned Kittie lazily. "Where have you been Ernestine, all rigged in your best?"

"Been at home pining for some place to go," said Ernestine drawing the sewing from Bea's hand, and leaning over into that sister's lap with a caressive gesture. "Say Bea, dear, Miss Neilson is going to be in New York next week, and I want you to ask pa if he won't take us again; won't you?"

"Not fair," cried Kat; "this is our turn."

"You, indeed; nothing but children! Will you, Bea? He will listen more if you ask because you're not so frivolous as I am."

"Yes, I'll ask. I'd love to go again," said Bea with girlish delight in anticipating such a bliss as the repetition of going to the city and to the theatre. "What play would you like to see?"

"Romeo and Juliet again," cried Ernestine eagerly. "Oh Bea, beg him to, for there are some other parts that I want to see how to do."

"Do!" echoed Kittie, "Whatever do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I'll show you how they do; shall I, Bea?" exclaimed Ernestine, springing gayly into the sunshine and striking an attitude.

"Yes, go on; you do it beautifully," said Bea; so Ernestine plunged blithely into the play, thoroughly entrancing her three listeners with the ease and grace with which she spoke and acted, and receiving showers of applause as she paused.

"How delightful," cried Kittie, in a longing rapture.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Kat, who had listened intently with her nose steadily on the ascent, "It looks all very pretty and nice here, but I should think anybody would feel like a fool to get out on a stage and go ranting about like that."

"Oh! it's too delightful," cried Ernestine, as Bea passed no comment except a little sigh. "I shall run away some day sure as the world and become a great

actress; then I'll be rich and famous and you'll all forgive me."

"I thought you always wanted to sing," said Kittie, chewing grass thoughtfully, as she meditated on this new and startling talent and wondered what would next develop.

"So I do, but I shall sing and act both. Now then pretend that I am Marguerite, in Faust, you know, and see if you don't think I can do both, as well as one." So they all looked and listened, while she sang and sang, 'till the very birds hushed their music in envious listening, and the rustling leaves seemed to grow still in very amaze. The sunshine danced over her bright hair, and the lovely face flashed with a radiant excitement that showed how deep an enjoyment even the pretense was to her.

"O Ernestine, how Lovely!"
**"O ERNESTINE, HOW LOVELY!"**

Rapturous applause followed, and a new voice cried out, "Oh! Ernestine, how lovely; do it over," and turning, they beheld an additional three to the audience. Jean leaning on her little crutch, wild with delight; Olive, tall and still with a curl on her lip to match the scowl on her forehead; and mother,—but what was the matter with mother, Bea wondered. She was very pale, and though she smiled, it did not hide the tremble that hung to her colorless lips.

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# CHAPTER II.

# AROUND THE FIRE.

A SEPTEMBER twilight was coming on slowly, and in the grass the crickets chirped back and forth to each other. The house was all open, and through the windows came a merry chatter, a few rattling notes of the piano, and something that sounded very much like a warm argument, for a game of chess was going on by one window. Out on the broad porch that ran all along the front of the house, and was shrouded with vines, stood a girl, leaning idly against the post and watching the shadows gather across the long walk. She was not a pretty girl, nor one that you would care to look at twice, because of any pleasure it gave you; though had you really studied her face there might have been something found in it after all. There was a drawn, discontented look about her mouth, that made the lips look thin and snappish; it even spoiled the shape of her really pretty nose, which was straight and finely cut. The brows, straight and black, held a heavy frown between them, and the eyes beneath had an unsatisfied, sour look, not at all attractive. Her forehead was altogether too high for beauty of any kind; and as though there was a relief in making herself look just as ugly as possible, all her hair was drawn back painfully smooth, and tucked into a net. Everything about her, from the crooked look of her necktie to the toe of her slipper, with its rosette gone, plainly indicated that she was dissatisfied with herself and aided nature by her own carelessness and indifference, to make herself just as unattractive as possible. Some one came up behind her as she stood there indulging in thoughts anything but pleasing and laid a gentle touch on her arm.

"Olive?"

"Well?"

"What makes you like to stay by yourself so much, and where it isn't so nice? The yard is getting so dark, and it's real chilly. Don't you ever get afraid?"

"Afraid here on the steps? That's silly, Jean."

"Perhaps 'tis, but I'm such a big coward; I suppose it's because I couldn't run if anything ever was to happen;" and Jean gave a little sigh, as she smoothed the

padded top of her crutch.

Olive gave a little start, half impatient, and turned around to ask, almost wistfully, "Jean, do you never get tired or impatient, or think sometimes that you'd rather be dead than always walk on a crutch and have your back grow crooked?"

"Why, Olive!" Jean lifted her beautiful eyes to look at her sister's restless face, "I couldn't be so wicked as that, could you?"

In the twilight Olive flushed at the question and at the clear eyes searching her face. How many, many times had she wished she was dead, and for nothing except that she was ugly and awkward, and bound to see everything with the darkest side up.

"I'm not as good as you," she answered evasively.

"Oh I'm not good," said Jean, with a little laugh, half a sigh, "I do get real tired sometimes, Olive, and I do want to be straight and well so much; but Miss Willis told me something in Sunday-school last Sunday, that has made me feel so good; she said, 'Jeanie, don't get impatient or discouraged, for God has a reason why he wants you to be lame; it is to be for the best some way, and perhaps sometime you will see it;' and she said that when I tried to be happy and bear my lame back, it made God very happy; and when I was cross and fussy, it made him sad."

Olive gave her eyes a swift brush with the back of her hand, and asked with a little choke, "Do you believe all that, Jean."

"Why, Olive, yes! Don't you?"

"I don't know,—who is that?" was Olive's rather disjointed answer, as the click of the gate sounded through the still evening air.

"It's Ernestine, I know, 'cause she went up town;—yes, there she is;" answered Jean, as a figure appeared under the foliage and came toward the steps.

How different she looked from Olive and Jean. Such a slim, graceful figure, with a proud little head and sunny shining hair, in loose puffs and curls and a jaunty hat. A face like a fresh lily, and beautiful brown eyes, the sweetest voice, and the vainest little heart ever known to a girl of fifteen, had Ernestine Dering; and yet she was a favorite, with all her little vanities, and home, without

Ernestine's face, would have been blank to all the girls. She came running up the steps and stopped.

"Oh, Olive, such laces!" she cried, with a longing sigh. "They are selling out at cost, and the ribbons and laces are just going for almost nothing; if I had just had a little spending money I would have been in clover. One clerk just insisted upon my taking an exquisite lace scarf; oh it was so becoming! but I told him I didn't know they were selling out, and that I would have to come again."

"Pretty way of talking!" snapped Olive ungraciously. "You know you won't have any more money another day than you have this; why couldn't you say no?"

"Say that I couldn't afford it?" cried Ernestine gayly. "Not I. Besides, I reasoned that if one of you would loan me some, I'd have more another day."

"Suppose one of us won't," said Olive, looking darkly over her sister's pretty hat.

"I didn't suppose *you* would," laughed Ernestine "But fortunately for me, I have some obliging sisters," and with that shot, Ernestine went in, singing like a mocking bird, and Jean followed slowly, looking back once or twice to Olive's motionless figure.

Oh how it cut! Olive grew flushed and white, then her brows came together darkly and her lips shut tight. "Ernestine is too frivolous to live," she said grimly; then looked straight off into the evening sky and was silent. But down to her proud, sensitive heart she was hurt, and in it was the longing wonder, "Why don't she come to me and ask as she does of Bea and the others. I would loan it to her;" but this feeling she fiercely refused to countenance, and shut her heart grimly, as she did her lips.

The broad old hall that ran clear through the house was growing quite dark with shadows; the game of chess had ended, and the players left the window, and presently Olive turned slowly and went into the house. Through the sitting-room came a lively chatter, and as she passed the door some one shouted, "Halloo!"

"Well I'm not deaf. Do you want me?"

"Pining to have you; come sit on my lap."

Olive passed in, but disregarded the hospitably inclined young lady who lounged in a big chair, and passed on to a dusky corner, where she curled up on

the lounge.

"Olive," volunteered Kittie, who was in the window-sill, "mama has a plan; she's going to tell us after supper, and we've all been trying to guess what it is; what do you think?"

"I don't think anything."

"What a glorious lack of curiosity," laughed Kat.

"I suppose I'm just as contented as any of you with your guessing," returned Olive.

"Well I wish," said Ernestine with an energy that brought instant attention, "I wish papa was going to increase our allowances. Two dollars a month is a shameful little."

"But it amounts to ten dollars when paid to five girls," added Beatrice quickly, "besides Jean's twenty-five cents."

"A girl isn't supposed to spend two dollars every month for foolishness," said Olive severely. "You might call it a little if you had to live on it."

"I exist on my pretty things almost as much as I do on my food," answered Ernestine flippantly, "and what does two dollars buy?"

"Suppose you go awhile without spending it, then you'll have more," suggested Kittie practically.

"Yes," added Kat with a laugh. "Kittie saved fifty cents last month, and I saved just three; why *don't* you do as we do and economize."

"How much have each of you saved altogether since papa began paying us?" asked Beatrice. "I have nine dollars and thirty-four cents."

"Whew!" whistled Kittie. "I've got just three. I tell you caramels are disastrous to my pocket money."

"I wear out my gloves, love butter-scotch, and lost my head over a certain pair of slippers; consequence, two dollars and eight cents in my treasury," moaned Kat, with great self reproach.

"Well, I do everything that is frivolous, and unwise, and extravagant, but I have a good time, and the result is that I haven't a cent, and am in debt a dollar,"

laughed Ernestine, kicking out her pretty foot with its fancy little slipper, as if in defiance to anyone's criticisms or reproofs.

"Two more to hear from yet," said Beatrice, as silence fell. "Jeanie, have you spent all your quarters?"

"No," said Jean slowly and with much hesitation, "I had two dollars and spent one for a sash."

"And I borrowed the other," interrupted Ernestine, seeing that the child did not want to tell on her. "How much have you, Olive?"

"I made no promise to tell," leaped to Olive's lips; but instead of speaking it, she electrified them by saying, with a quiet smile of satisfaction, "Thirty dollars."

It did more than surprise them; it was almost a stun for a minute or two; then Ernestine slowly opened her lips: "Why, Olive Dering! wherever did you get it? If you'd never spent a cent of your allowance, papa hasn't been paying us long enough for it to amount to that."

"I suppose, for a girl that isn't a fool, there are more ways of getting money than sitting down with her hands folded and letting her father give it to her," retorted Olive with a snap.

"That's so, Olive," echoed Beatrice, with a heartiness that made them jump. "But what did you do? tell us quick; see every one of us stiff with curiosity."

It just occurred to Olive to let them remain stiff with curiosity, but perhaps an amount of satisfaction in the way she had earned her money is what changed her mind; at any rate, she began more readily than the others expected: "I sold the old iron out in the barn, and several bags of rags; then I've done some writing for papa's clerk, because he was hurried; and last week I sold my picture. Of my allowance I only spent enough for two pairs of gloves, that have lasted me with mending; so that's how I made my money."

"Blessings on you!" cried Kat enthusiastically. "I look upon you as a model, Olive, a living——"

"Nothing of the kind," interrupted Olive sharply, and rising up out of her corner, as if warming to the subject. "I'm only trying to be sensible; we're all old enough to be that, and be something more too. I wonder if we are never going to

do anything but sit here at home, with papa to feed and dress us, besides giving us an allowance for little things and nonsense. I think it's wrong, and lazy, and a namby pamby way of being a useless thing, just because you are a girl! Besides, papa is worried and troubled; yes he is;—" warming still more at the breathless attention given her. "The other night, he and mama talked for hours, and I couldn't help hearing a little, because the transom was open. His voice was troubled, so was mama's, and sad, and he said something about 'lessening expenses,' and the difficulty of getting any ready money, and all that, and I believe in my heart that we ought to help him!"

Into the stunned silence that followed this outburst from short-spoken, reticent Olive, there came a new voice; such a sweet, lovely voice with a tender ring that made every one start to welcome the speaker.

"How dark you are, dears. Are all my steps here?"

"All here, solemnly engaged," answered Kat, unfolding herself from the big chair to make a seat for mother.

"And *just* think," cried Kittie, with a lurch that pretty near tipped her out of the window. "Olive——"

"Has done wonders," interrupted Beatrice. "Be still all of you! Let's not tell mama yet."

Mrs. Dering laughed cheerily, at the sudden popping of a secret into the air, but announced that supper was ready, at which there was such a stampede as only a lot of hungry, healthy girls can make, and the sitting-room was left dark and still.

You see there were six of them—five strong bright girls, and one little lame sister, to laugh and sing, and make that big, roomy, comfortable, old home happy. Beatrice, seventeen; Ernestine, sixteen; Olive, fifteen; then Katherine and Kathleen or Kittie and Kat, twelve, and lastly, little Jean, with her flower-like, patient face and poor crooked little back. To help and guide them, was the dear, loving mother who called them her 'steps;' and the strong, helpful father, who romped and played, or read and studied with them and called Kittie and Kat 'his boys;' Olive his 'right hand man;' Ernestine, 'his picture;' Beatrice, his 'little woman,' and Jean his 'little pansy.' So now that you know them a little better, let us go into the dining-room and see what they are doing. Meetings at the Dering table are always lively ones, "Good for digestion and spirits," said papa Dering,

so everybody talked and laughed and ate heartily, and went away without sour faces or sour stomachs. To-night, though, there is a change. Mr. Dering had a remark for each of the girls as they came in, then lapsed into silence, and stirred his coffee absently. Even Mrs. Dering could not hide a little anxiety, though she tried to be gay and interested in the girls' talk, as usual. With Olive's words fresh in their minds, the rest closely watched the faces of both parents, and each girl had thoughts and made plans, in every way characteristic of their respective selves.

Mr. Dering presently broke a silence by asking to be excused, as he must go back to the store—two most unusual things; for he always sat and talked at supper 'till all were through, and rarely ever let anything take him away from an evening at home; so no wonder the meal was shortened, and the party broke up.

"Oh how nice!" cried Jean, as they returned to the sitting-room, where in their absence, a bright fire had been built in the grate, and filled the room with a warm rosy glow. "Here's my seat."

"We'll tell our secrets by the first fire of the season," said Mrs. Dering, as the girls all followed Jean's example, by pulling their chairs into the circle of warmth and light. "I thought it was so chilly this evening that firelight would be more cosy and cheerful than a lamp. Now then, who shall begin?"

"Oh you, please," cried Kittie. "We are so anxious."

Every face warmly seconded her words, so Mrs. Dering began, after a moment's silence.

"When you were all little children mama never let anything worry or disturb you if she could help it, and if anything ever did, you came right to her to be comforted and helped. Papa never let you be cold or hungry, and without clothes, or be sick, if he could help it, and they both loved you tenderly, didn't they?"

"Why goodness, yes!" cried Kat, with glistening, astonished eyes.

"And now that you have become such big daughters, they love you none the less, but more if possible; because now they must give you more thought as you grow to womanhood. Now if——"

"Oh you needn't say another word!" cried Beatrice impulsively. "You look as if you didn't know how to tell us; but we know. Your secret is the same as ours; papa is worried, and we are all, every one of us, ready to help him!"

"Why my dear girls!" cried mama, with her eyes full of tears. "How did you know?"

"Olive saw, and then heard the other night," cried Kittie excitedly. "She's got thirty dollars already, and was giving us a regular lecture just before supper. Now I'm going to——"

"Wait a minute, dear," said mama, laughing as she shook her finger. "I knew Olive was saving her allowance, and that she had earned some money, and I was very much pleased; but I am more than happy to find that she was doing it for papa."

To every one's surprise, Olive grew scarlet and turned her face clear away from the light; but she brought it back in a minute, and said, with lips that tried to be stiff and firm—for praise was dear to Olive—"I didn't do it for papa—I didn't know then—I——" and then, sooner than cry, Olive stopped, and left them to think what they would.

"But you are willing for it to go to papa now," finished Mrs. Dering, smiling brightly, and bringing some of the cloud from Olive's eyes. "That is just as noble, dear," and with these skillfully thrown in words, mother smiled again, for only she understood her daughter's peculiar disposition.

"When I was a girl," went on Mrs. Dering, "Grandpa was very wealthy, you know, and of course gave me every advantage. I took music from the most distinguished professors, also painting and the languages, and at the age of eighteen, was handed over to society as finished in every way. I loved the gayeties that surrounded me, just as well as ever a girl could, but after a while, it struck me as being such an idle, aimless life, for a well educated, sensible girl to live, so I determined to make use of all that I had received. I had a small class in music, and one in painting and drawing; some of them paid, and some, members of my Sunday-school class, did not. After that, I felt so much happier and more contented, and enjoyed all my fun so much more, so I decided that if ever I had any daughters, they should be fitted to be independent, whether it was ever necessary or not. I have never been able to supply you with masters as I was, but I have taught you thoroughly myself, and while I did not intend that you should begin quite so early, the time has come suddenly, when we must all help. So you, my older girls, I want you to choose as your choice lies, and fit yourselves so as to make it your stand-by, in this and other times of trouble."

"Oh," exclaimed Ernestine, with a sudden smile; she had looked very much

worried, for work or self-denial was distasteful, and yet it seemed so near. But now she smiled and nodded brightly, "I know what I will do, mama. I'll go on cultivating my voice and work hard, so that I may take a position in some city church, where everything is so elegant and prima-donnas get such immense salaries."

"Yes, dear, music is unmistakably your talent," said Mrs. Dering, and if they had only noticed it, she did not smile, and her eyes, fixed on the fire, were tinged with deep sadness for a moment. "Cultivate your voice, and your fingers too; for the positions as prima-donnas are sometimes lacking, then you have a little class to fall back on."

When no one was looking, Ernestine gave her head a decided little shake. It would be altogether touching and delightful, to stand up in a choir before a beautiful congregation, with a pale lily in your hat, the sunlight through a stained glass falling all around, and sing something pathetic, that would make people cry, and then have everyone say: "Such a noble young girl, she does it to help her father." But a class! A lot of little children to talk to, and teach, no one to ever see, or compliment;—no! Ernestine would never cultivate her fingers; that was sure.

"I'm a sort of jack at all trades," said Beatrice breaking a thoughtful pause with a little sigh. "I play a little, sing a little, draw a little, but I've no talent for either, or anything else."

"I know some one who is very fond of books and children," said Mrs. Bering, with a suggestive smile.

"Oh! to be sure," cried Beatrice, brightening. "Teach, so I could. Well now, I'll go right on, harder than ever with my studies, and work up the French; I never can get German; I haven't the necessary twist to my tongue."

Olive was studying the fire with an intense dreamy gaze. She did not say what she would do, but every one knew, or at least supposed they knew. Olive's talent lay in her pencil. Such wonderful pictures as she could rapidly sketch, when the different moods took her!

"Well, I should like to know," cried Kittie abruptly. "What will Kat and I do? We haven't got a shadow of a talent of any kind, and don't really know how to behave ourselves yet; why, mama——,"

"I have you all fixed, dear," interrupted mama. "Just wait a minute."

"There isn't anything that I can do either," said Jean, with a pathetic little smile. "But I will give up my quarter every month; perhaps that will help papa a very little bit."

"That's it, Jeanie," cried Kat, with a startling suddenness. "We'll do it too, Kittie, and that will make four dollars and a quarter less for papa to hand over every month. Second the motion, Kittie?"

"Done!" echoed Kittie, and every body had a hearty laugh as the twins shook hands violently over the table.

"But, mama," said Olive's quiet voice, breaking in upon the racket, "You say papa is worried now, and yet what the girls have decided to do, they can only do when they have fitted themselves for it; can't we do anything to help right away?"

"Quite right, dear," answered Mrs. Dering. "You can all help right away; though in a way that papa will strongly object to, for he does not like to deprive home of any pleasures, or little luxuries that he can afford. But we will go ahead and make our plans and take him by storm. First, there is the horse and carriage; it will seem hard and strange for a while without it, but it is a great expense, together with Jack's wages. Papa has an opportunity of selling the buggy, and Mr. Phillips will take 'Prince' until we can afford to keep him again. Are you willing?"

"Yes, mama," in a rather feeble chorus, with Ernestine's voice lacking. 'Prince' was such a pet—O dear!

"And then, Lizzie," continued Mrs. Dering, apparently not noticing the way all faces were going down. "We can get along with one girl, if we all make up our minds to work. The house is large and it will take all of our hands to do the necessary cleaning; but we can, can't we?"

"Yes, mama." A little more energy this time. Only Ernestine sighed dolefully, and laid her hands out on her lap. Such slim little hands and so white. It was perfectly horrible to be poor and have to go to work; yes it was, and she privately resolved to shirk just as much as possible.

They had a long evening's talk over the coming change and how they were going to do, but at ten o'clock, as Mr. Dering was still absent, they separated for

the night, and mama carried sleepy little Jean off to bed in her arms.

Beatrice and Ernestine roomed together in the front room, the twins in one next, and Olive alone across the hall. Generally, while getting ready for bed, the doors were left open, and a merry conversation carried on; but to-night, they were full of thought, and had not much to say, so everything settled into quiet very soon after the "good nights" had been spoken.

In the front room, the girls were wakeful. Beatrice, as the oldest sister, felt, in her quiet thoughtful way, that perhaps, the way she did in the coming change, would act as an example to the others; and that an extra duty rested on her, to be as patient and willing as possible, in whatever might be necessary for them to do, and to be all to mother, that an elder daughter should be, in time of trouble. Ernestine was also deep in thought, and had twisted her pillow into such a position, that the moonlight made quite a halo around her yellow hair and made her face, with its beautiful eyes, look like a cameo in golden setting. She knew it, too, just as well as Beatrice, who at that moment, turned and looked at her, and furthermore, she knew just how to go on with what she wanted to accomplish.

"Bea," she said, with her voice dropped to its sweetest, "I want you to do something for me."

"What?"

"You said you had nine dollars, will you loan me five?"

"How? I was going to give it to papa to-morrow."

"You know he wouldn't take it," began Ernestine, impatiently; then smoothed her voice carefully again, and went on: "Papa won't have us give up everything, Bea. We are all willing to lessen expenses at home, but we are not to scrimp and pinch ourselves all to pieces. I'll pay you back just as soon as——"

"It isn't that," interrupted Bea, "But I don't see how you can want to spend it now."

"But I do; there are the loveliest lace scarfs——"

"Lace scarfs;" cried Bea again, in shocked surprise. "Would you, Ernestine?—Five dollars?"

"Certainly! Since we've made my old black silk over, it looks so nice, and I've

nothing fit to wear around my neck. I'm sure its not much and I'm going to work this winter, am I not?"

Bea turned her pillow over and laid her head down thoughtfully. Was Ernestine selfish, or had she much heart? The question had often come silently up, and been put as silently down, but now it lingered persistently, though Bea moved her head restlessly, as if to get rid of it. If Ernestine wanted anything, she left no avenue untried, and got it if possible, no matter at whose expense or self-denial. All through fifteen years of her life, she had kept a clear unfaltering eye on herself, her wants, and her welfare, and after they were all supplied, she was ready and willing to help any one else; but no one must ever ask, or expect it at the expense of her personal comfort or plenty. Yet with her candies, the girls had lion shares; her pretty things,—and somehow all of Ernestine's things were so pretty and graceful,—she loaned willingly, and was never too tired or unwilling to help the girls' dress on great occasions; for though Olive was the artist, Ernestine had the artist's quick eye for graceful draping, harmony of colors, and picturesque structures of hair. Moreover, she was always good natured, nothing ever ruffled her, except for a passing moment, and any hour of the day, you might hear her voice, just like a bird's, filling the house with music, while her lovely face made sunshine; so it came, that she received the credit for making home happy, when she did it with no such intention, or exertion, only because she loved to sing, and it was perfectly natural for her to be gay and untouched by anything.

"I'm sure," she said, speaking suddenly, as Bea gave a restless twist to her head. "You needn't, if you don't want to, Bea. Perhaps you want to buy——"

"You know better," cried Bea, flying up from her rumpled pillow. "I don't want to buy anything, and if you want to spend five dollars for a lace scarf, why you're welcome to my money. That's all. Good night."

Next Sunday, when the girls went to church, Ernestine wore a cob-webby scarf of ivory white over her "made-over" silk, and put a creamy day lily in her yellow hair, and the girls looking at her, silently thought: "No wonder papa calls her his picture!"

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# CHAPTER III.

# A FOUNDATION THAT BROUGHT KAT TO GRIEF.

SLAM! went the gate, knocking the dead leaves right and left, and whiz! went two girls up the walk, like unruly sky-rockets, with the odd ends flying. Rattle-de-tap, went four feet with steel-capped heels over the old shady porch, and bang! went the door back against the wall; then:——

"Mama,——"

"Bea,—Er,——"

"Nestine, Olive,——"

"Jean, hurry;—let me tell first. Miss——"

"I beat to the steps, I ought to tell," shrieked Kat, as Kittie choked for breath. "Miss Howard is going to give us a,——"

"Nutting party!" shouted Kittie, with a triumphant breath. "Hurrah, three cheer-r-s!"

"Mercy on me," cried a voice from up stairs. "What is the matter; what are you doing?"

"Kittie's dancing a jig, and Kat's sliding down the bannisters," exclaimed a horrified voice from somewhere else. "Mercy! Bea, call mama; I think they've gone crazy."

"Nutting party," cried Kittie, dancing furiously and nodding her head like a demented monkey. "To-morrow,——want to go?"

The girls had all collected by this time around the boisterous pair, and Bea flapped her sewing warningly, as Kat came whizzing down the bannisters for a final time, and landed with a dexterous jump, in the middle of the group.

"I'm going down town," said Ernestine, after hearing of the near and great event. "I can't go."

"Of course not," said Kittie, with great scorn. "You'd rather go down town, and be all the afternoon buying a shoe string, than get a Saratoga trunk full of nuts; but you'll want some of mine this winter."

Olive was busy on a picture, Bea had some sewing, so the twins must represent the Dering family, and accepted the matter quite blissfully, to judge from the way they raced off for parts unknown, and remained absent for some time, as if strange and wonderful preparations were necessary, and being undergone for to-morrow. They came back when the tea-bell rang, at least Kittie did, slowly and solemnly through the back yard, and lingered several minutes on the porch, with many mysterious signals to some one, down where the long yard sloped to the pond, and a fringe of willows shaded the water.

"Where's Kathy," inquired Ernestine, who strongly objected to the extremely abbreviated form of 'Kat.'

"Down at the pond, she's coming," answered Kittie, with a strangely worried look; but Ernestine flitted by without noticing it, and pretty soon Kittie quit leaning over the lattice and went in slowly.

Just as Mrs. Dering was leaving her room to go down to tea, she heard a peculiarly suspicious noise out in the back hall, unmistakably the careful opening of a window, as of someone on the low roof without, and pausing to listen, Mrs. Dering became convinced, that someone was surely making entrance to the house in that questionable manner. A midnight burglary was a rare occurrence in Canfield, but one in the early fall of evening, was beyond imagination, and yet Mrs. Dering was conscious of a little trepidation, as she tiptoed her way round to the back hall, and fancy pictured a man, with sly intent, coming over the window-sill. Whoever the intruder was, he was working with great care, and wholly unconscious of any one's approach, for when Mrs. Dering reached the corner and peeped around, the intruding head was just leveled, and coming through, carefully followed by a nimble body, but not clothed in the habiliments usually donned by burglars; instead, there appeared a blue calico much drenched and ornamented with wet weeds, an apron wholly unrecognizable as to color or design, and a drabbled hat hanging to the intruder's neck. As this queer apparition landed on the floor, Mrs. Bering stepped around the corner, whereupon the bold burglar jumped and screamed faintly, and the

lady laughed, though she said with grave inquiry:

"Why Kathleen! What does this mean?"

"Oh, mama!" gasped the burglar, with a despairing glance at her dripping self. "I didn't want you to see me."

"Nor any one else, from the way you came in I should think. What is the matter?"

Kat grasped her wet hat, and looked desperately sorry and resigned all at once.

"Why, I went out in the boat," she said, twisting the wet ribbons around her fingers and dropping her eyes to the floor, with a little flush of shame, "and it upset, and I had to wade in, but I couldn't get it, and it's sailing upside down, way out in the pond. I don't know whatever you'd better do to me, I'm sure."

"Disobeyed papa. O Kathleen!"

"Well I didn't mean—," there Kat stopped, and swallowed several times very hastily; she would rather have been shaken, than to have heard that grieved tone. "I was only going to ride a little ways, but the wind blew me out; I know it was wrong, though, cause pap said, not to touch it."

"Go to your room and get off your wet clothes as quickly as possible, and after supper I will come and talk to you about it," said Mrs. Dering, turning away to hide the smile, that poor, dripping, shame-faced Kat could not but provoke.

The announcement that "Water-Rat" was face down out in the pond, caused dire dismay at the supper-table, so that when the meal was finished, and Mrs. Dering went up to talk to repentant Kat, the rest of the family all hurried down to the pond to view the disaster. There was the gayly painted boat, floating idly back and forth with the wind, out in the pond, and the girls expressed their great dismay in a dismal chorus of "Oh's," long prolonged, as it floated farther away. "Never mind," said papa Dering, briskly. "We'll get her all safe again, a little bath won't hurt her. Here Kittie, you're the best runner, go to the house and bring me the largest hammer and longest nails in the tool-chest. Be quick now." Kittie was off like a flash, and when she came back, there were three or four logs lying ready for use, with some planks and a long pole, and Mr. Bering with coat off, fell to work with a will and such speed, that in ten minutes, a small raft lay in the water, and Mr. Dering was making preparations for his voyage, by pulling off his boots and tucking his pants up.

"You don't suppose you could get drowned, do you papa," questioned Jean, somewhat overcome with these unusual proceedings, and clinging to her seat in a low willow with some trepidation.

"Not much, little one. I guess if Katty can wade out of this water, papa can, providing he's tipped in. Now good-bye, girls. Wish me well."

Kittie in the willow, and Bea and Ernestine on a log, gave three parting cheers with such force, that Kat, crying forlornly up in her room, ran to the window to see the fun, and watched with great interest the rescue of the "Water Rat," which Mr. Dering effected with great skill and many flourishes, to the delight of his audience. After being pulled out on the grass, face up again to dry, the rescued "Rat" was left to the twilight, while the party returned to the house.

The new arrangements had been in hand about a week, and so far, the girls were delighted and enthusiastic over "helping," though they did miss "Prince" and the buggy very much. As Mrs. Dering had said, papa decidedly objected to any such arrangements and privations, but one man against seven determined women!—oh, my! just think of it! So they had their way, and it was such a comfort to see, that already he began to look a little less worried and anxious when out of the store.

That night, when the girls went to bed, Kat was very much subdued, and kept her face quite persistently out of sight. Kittie administered comfort in broken and complete doses, but without much effect, for just now, when under the new enthusiasm, every one was doing her best in all ways, Kat felt her disgrace, more deeply than was customary for her, who fell into it, and out again pretty nearly every day, and so she refused to be comforted. Perhaps there was another reason for the complete and deep contrition. At any rate, she whispered to Kittie with a choke, that fought against being a sob,—before they went to sleep; "Oh, Kittie! —I can't go—go, nutting!"

Sure enough. Kat ate her breakfast with red eyes and a poor appetite the next morning, while the sun shone, as it surely never did before, and Kittie gayly laughed and chatted, but trying to be not too happy, as was consistent with the deep sympathy felt and expressed for suffering Kat, who had vanished beyond the power of sight or search, when at eight o'clock, a merry party halted at the gate, and the home girls, gayly escorted Kittie and her baskets down the walk.

That was a dismal morning to be sure. Kat did her portion of the work before any of the other girls came up stairs, and no one saw her again that morning, for

with a volume of history, "St. Elmo," and six apples, she departed for the back roof, where she sat down and cried as hard as ever she could for five minutes, then opened the history, and took a fierce bite out of the biggest apple.

"There, I won't cry another tear, it's a blessing that I wasn't shut up for the day, instead of being allowed to roam around, when I can't let things alone that I'm told to. I'm going to learn a chapter of this history, now, before I read a word of 'St. Elmo,' though I don't see the use. Whatever do I care about the Edwards' and Henrys' and all that!" And then Kat shook herself, opened her book, and valiantly attacked Henry the Fifth, with every possible intention of doing just exactly what she said; but in about ten minutes a little puff of wind sailed across the roof, tossed open the cover of 'St. Elmo,' fluttered the leaves, then flew away, leaving them open, just where Edna goes to the old church for the last time, and Kat's eyes strayed right down to the tempting words, and somehow they did not come back at once.

That old roof was just like all the rest of the house, roomy, shady and cool. The flourishing top of a huge apple-tree reached over one side of it, with tempting seats in its boughs, and on another side, was the wide roomy window, with its worn sill, that led into the garret of the main part of the house. Solid comfort had it always been to the girls, and sometimes on warm Sunday afternoons, all the family might be found, distributed over its flat, roomy surface, with old comforts and pillows, and a good supply of books and fans.

Crash! went something suddenly and away sailed "St. Elmo," to bump his villainously fascinating head against the chimney, while Kat jerked her history open again and heard the profoundest and most melancholy sigh.

"What's the use! 'Henry the Fifth was born,'—I wonder who cares, dear me, I wish Kittie was here! 'Was born on'"—But, as if in answer to that wish so heartily uttered, there came two arms around her neck, and there was Kittie, laughing gayly as she nodded her head.

"I just wonder if you thought I would go to a nutting party, when you couldn't," she exclaimed. "I guess I haven't forgotten who was whipped in school the other day to save me. Bless me! Studying history!"

"Why, Kittie Dering!" was all the answer, she received from astonished Kat, "Didn't you go!"

"Looks as if I didn't, don't it?"

"And just for me?"

"Just for you!"

Thereupon, Bea, who was watching at the window, went down stairs, and reported that Kittie and Kat were having a "love feast" out on the roof.

That afternoon, amusements flagged. It was unusually warm for so late in the year, and Kat stretched lazily out on a bench, under the trees, while Kittie sat on the grass, and enjoyed herself pleasantly with nothing. "I tell you," exclaimed the latter, with a hearty jump, occasioned partly, by a new idea, partly by the sight of a huge spider, that was lumbering over the grass towards her. "Let's go over to the new church."

"What for?"

"Walk on the foundation; it's all finished and splendid to race on all the way round."

"Jolly idea," cried Kat, jumping from her bench, forgetting a previous assertion, that it was, "too hot to move!" and away they went, down the walk, at the usual break-neck speed taken by them, when in a hurry; Kittie rushing through the gate, while Kat nimbly cleared the fence.

Nobody was around to see, or be horrified, for it was on the edge of town, and anyhow, it seemed utterly impossible to convince these girls that they were nearly thirteen years' old, and ought to stop being such hoydens. Bea's little cautions, Ernestine's careful talks and examples of grace and dignity, Olive's open ridicule, and Jean's childish wonder, were all set aside, by a quiet smile from mama, or papa's hearty exclamation of—"let them alone—they're the only boys I've got." So Kittie and Kat romped to their heart's content, while mama took care that it did not make them too rude, and mended their torn clothes, with a patient smile, sometimes saying to herself: "Never mind, it makes them happy and strong; so, as long as I am well, and have the time, I'll not complain of a few rips and tears."

The new church, was only around the corner in a large green field, and the foundation, broad, and not too nigh, was a tempting place to run; so they clambered up, and raced back and forth, and all around several times, 'till out of breath, then Kat paused, and looked about with a contemplative and venturesome air.

"See here, Kittie, I'm going to walk across that narrow wall, where they haven't finished."

"Pretty high; you'd better not;" replied Kittie, measuring the proposed walk with a careful eye. "How will you get up?"

"Climb; it's only a step or two higher than this."

Kittie leisurely followed the more adventuresome twin, and called out suddenly: "Kat, there's an immense mud-hole at one side; looks as if it might be deep too; better hold on."

"Hurrah!" shouted Kat, in answer, as she balanced herself on the top of the narrow wall. "Here I go!" And there she did go, sure enough, for turning to nod triumphantly at Kittie, away went her balance, and after two or three of the wildest, most fearful struggles, down came Kat, head and heels right into the mud-hole.

"Oh, my goodness,—ha, ha,—my gracious; Oh-h! Kat Dering!" shrieked Kittie, dancing wildly up and down. "Oh, Kat; if I ever—what a—a sight! Oh—my!" and away went Kittie in another shriek, that pretty nearly knocked her off the wall, and even made Kat smile while the tears trickled down her muddy cheeks.

"I'm sunk clear to my knees," she cried despondently. "And my wrist feels so funny; Kittie, come, help me."

Kittie jumped down in a hurry; examined the limp and already swelling wrist with anxious gravity, and then nearly strangled with laughter when, after several vigorous tugs and struggles, Kat came out of the mud, leaving both her slippers hopelessly buried, and her clothes so heavy she could hardly walk.

"Oh, Kittie! what shall I do," she cried, giving up entirely, between the sharp pain in her wrist, and the speedy arrival of this second disgrace. "It's only yesterday, that I crawled into the house in this fix; I can't go again."

"Never mind; I'll go," said Kittie, lost in sympathy. "Everybody is in the front part of the house, and I'll slip in the back way, go in over the roof, and bring you some clothes. Just sit down here and wait; I'll hurry, and it'll be all right."

So Kat sat down, quite pale with the painful wrist, and meditated, in a desperate fashion, on her inability to keep out of trouble and mischief; But Kittie was back in an incredibly short space of time, all flushed and panting, and with a little bundle of clothes tucked under her arm.

"Here Kat is a skirt, and dress, and stockings, and my slippers," she cried, running inside the wall where Kat sat forlornly.

"No one saw me; here hurry. How's your wrist?"

"Hurts," said Kat briefly, finding tears inclined to obstruct her utterance; and then they were silent, while the muddy garments were hastily laid aside and the dry ones slipped on; and the two started round-a-bouts for home.

A little while later, Kittie appeared at the sitting-room door, where the girls were sewing with mother, while Ernestine trilled and warbled at the piano. Mrs. Dering came out to the hall in answer to Kittie's beckon, and received this somewhat incoherent report:

"Kat's upstairs; we walked the foundation, and she fell off the high part; I took her some clothes, but I don't know what she's done to her wrist;" and Mrs. Dering did not waste any time trying to get a straighter report, but hurried up stairs, where Kat was lying on the bed, moaning and trying not to cry, with the painfully swollen wrist, laid out on a pillow. Twenty minutes' later the doctor was there with splints and bandages, and Kat, looking into his eyes with a vague alarm, asked, after he had examined it: "How long before I can use it?"

"Many weeks, Kathleen."

"Why, is it badly sprained?"

"Worse, I think, my dear little girl, for it is pretty badly broken."

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# CHAPTER IV.

# IN CONFIDENCE.

OLIVE'S door was locked.

Jean saw her go in, and heard the bolt slide swiftly across after the door shut, and just the glimpse that the little girl had of her sister's face, showed tears on the sallow cheeks, and hanging to the lashes. Olive was bitterly opposed to having any one know that she cried, and above all things to have any one see her employed in that manner; she herself, could not have told why perhaps, except that she did not want it. All of her feelings were so carefully hidden, and herself so wrapped in a cloak of reserve, that the surface was as delicately sensitive, as gossamer, and at every touch that left its impress, she retired farther within herself, and left less room for touch of any kind. Now, when she caught a glimpse of Jean's face, she shut the door sharper than was necessary, and going over to the window, sat down and stared moodily off into the yard, where the scarlet tops of the maples nodded to a golden, glowing sky. Surprised and curious, Jean lingered a moment, with her hand on the bannister, surveying the door thoughtfully, then limped carefully across, and knocked softly.

"Who is it?" came tartly from within.

"Me, Olive. Are you sick?"

"No."

Jean turned away a little hurt. "Why need Olive speak so shortly?" she wondered, with the usual after-thought "Bea, never does, or the others."

Olive listened to the little crutch going slowly down stairs, and waited until everything was quiet, then she went over to a small trunk and sat down before it, lifted the lid, and supporting her chin in her hand, looked steadily into it, all the moody bitterness in her eyes changing slowly to a sadness that was almost despair.

"Oh, I don't see why it is!" she cried suddenly, laying her head down on the

trunk's sharp edge, and breaking into a passionate sobbing, all the stronger for having been long denied. "I surely try, but, they are unkind; they are, I know." And then the thick sobs broke vehemently forth, and echoed out into the quiet hall; but Olive was alone upstairs, and she knew it; besides, I doubt if she could have controlled herself now, even had the whole of the amazed family confronted her. Poor, sensitive, unfortunate Olive; was it her fault wholly, that her sisters seemed able to be happy, quite regardless of her, and that she seemed to fill no place in home except as "that queer, homely Olive," as she had once heard herself called? This afternoon, the girls had all dressed gayly, and gone for a ride behind "Prince" with Mr. Phillips. He had said, "all the girls," when asking for them, but Olive so seldom joined in any of their little gayeties outside of home, that it really seemed strange and out of place for her to go with them; so she waited, when the time came to dress, wondering, and half hoping that one of them would express a little desire that she should go. Such a thought, however, occurred to no one; for so many times had she flatly refused to go, that they had all gradually ceased asking, supposing that she would do as she pleased. Once, to be sure, Bea did run up to the arbor, seeing her there, with the question on her lips, but Olive saw her coming, and fearing that the new desire and expectation would show in her face, bent her eyes to her book, quite unconscious of the heavy scowl on her brow; so, after one glance, Bea withdrew in a hurry, remembering frequent complaints for disturbance. At the hasty disappearance, Olive looked up with a bitter little smile, that would have instantly disclosed to an observer, how she was construing the act, and how she was hurt in spite of herself.

"There! she was afraid she'd have to ask me something about it, if she came in, so she got out in a hurry. But they needn't worry; I'll not force myself in; I'm queer, and ugly, and had better stay by myself;" and with that, Olive shut her lips fiercely tight, and did not once lift her eyes, when, a little while later, they all went laughing down the walk, never heeding her or once regretting her absence. It often happened so now, and Olive missed the coaxings with which they had once tried to draw her out, never once dreaming that she had done away with them herself, by shortly, tersely, and repeatedly asking, to "be let alone."

No, this never occurred to her, as she sat there crying bitterly, but her broken words revealed the track of her thoughts.

"They never let Ernestine stay home! Indeed not, and there's the greatest commotion raised if she speaks of such a thing. She's pretty and graceful, and loves to dress up like a doll, while I'm ugly, and awkward, and always do things

wrong, and disgrace them, I suppose. I don't see what I'm crying for, I'm sure. I can be happy without them as well as they without me!" and Olive raised her head defiantly, and flung the tears from her lashes, for having cried; the burden seemed lighter, and the little hurt and loneliness less hard. "I've plenty to think of besides them, and I might as well go to work." So out of the trunk came a box, and Olive's tears were as quickly gone as they had come. This box held a collection of sketches, many of them originals, some of them copies, but all bearing marks of a strong talent, rude and somewhat hasty as yet, but capable of much, when the young artist should have studied, and brought a few happy ideas to color the faces and scenes that grew from under her fingers. Now they clearly betrayed the unhappy spirit that prompted them, for there was not one glad sunshiny picture among them; instead, there were several faces of women, in various attitudes of defiance or despair, with a stern relentless sorrow darkening their eyes, and hardening their lips; then there was an old boat over-turned in the shadow of a half-broken tree, and various sketches of home scenery from the different windows of the house. Olive had selected one, somewhat larger than the rest, and had gone to work rapidly, pressing her lips tightly in the earnestness of her work and thoughts, and the room was perfectly silent for a long time. Presently she stopped abruptly, and balancing her pencil on her finger, looked out of the window with a troubled longing in her eyes.

"I wonder if I ever can," she murmured slowly. "How hard it is to be patient, and wait, it's three months yet until I am sixteen, and they never will let me I know, because it's too dangerous for a girl. I'm sorry I am one anyhow; it makes everything go wrong. Now, there's my money, I'm glad I've got it to give to papa. Dear papa, I don't believe he or mama cares because I'm so ugly; I'll give it to him to-night, and then while I'm waiting, I'll work and earn some more, so as to have enough;" and, after ending this slightly enigmatical speech with an abrupt nod, Olive looked a little brighter and fell to work so rapidly, that she shaded a dimple until it looked like a bullet-hole in the cheek of her fair subject

Nothing further was heard for over an hour, then there came chattering voices, the slam of the gate, much laughter, and much spattering and crunching of gravel, that announced a race up the walk, between the festive twins, for though Kat's disabled arm swung gracefully in a sling, she had, after the first day or two, returned to all her romping with undiminished ardor, thereby keeping the family in constant terror, lest the necessary appendage be forever disabled. Jean had reported to Bea, the fact that Olive had locked her door and was crying, and with her conscience reproving her, Bea ran hastily up stairs, and knocked at the door.

"Olive, may I come in?"

"What for?"

"Well, just to talk a little," Bea replied, knowing better than to give Jean's report.

Olive unlocked the door, after having first surveyed her face to see that no tears were visible.

"Come in, if you want to; I'm drawing," and Bea accepted the ungracious invitation, thinking to herself, as Olive straightway took her seat and pencil, and returned to work—

"Now Olive's in one of her moods, I wonder if I can say anything," for though not yet seventeen, Bea was womanly and thoughtful, and Mrs. Dering had sometimes talked with her, about the unfortunate peculiarities of this sister's disposition, and asked her help in being patient, and trying to overcome it.

"We had a delightful time," began Bea, anxious to work aright. "'Prince' was such a dear old fellow and Mr. Phillips so kind. I'm so sorry you didn't go, Olive."

Nothing but pride kept Olive's face from brightening a little at this; she turned away, made a fierce dab at her subject's nose, and thought grimly:—"It's all very well to be sorry now, when the thing's all over; I wonder if she thinks that I believe she's sorry, anyhow."

"We went around by the river, and way up on the hill," continued Bea, after waiting a reasonable length of time for an answer. "Mr. Phillips says we may ride often."

"Did he?"

"Yes, wasn't it kind? you know Mrs. Phillips and the girls are going away and 'Prince' will need exercising."

"Of course."

"Hasn't mama come home yet?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps Mrs. Dane is worse."

No answer.

"It's almost supper time, I should think she would be here," and with that, Bea got up, somewhat discouraged with the one-sided conversation; but paused again at Olive's side.

"Oh! what a lovely face," she exclaimed, bending over the artist's shoulder. "Where did you get it, Olive?"

"Made it up."

"Well, I really envy you such a talent; I have none at all. Why do you make her look so sad?"

"That's the way she looked to my mind and I drew her so. Perhaps it's because she has no sisters," answered Olive, spoiling the meaning conveyed in the words by the sarcasm that crept into the voice, and Bea drew back, hurt and half inclined to be angry; but with her, a tender heart always went ahead of a quiet temper and ruled, so she walked to the door, saying as she went out: "You better put up your things; supper's nearly ready."

After tea Olive whispered something to Mr. Dering, and to everyone's curiosity, they went off together to the library. This was only a small room, but very cozy, with a dark green carpet on the floor, the chairs of various shapes, with the previous covering worn threadbare, neatly covered with green cloth, a cover of like shade on the table, and one side of the wall well packed with books; for Mr. Dering having never been wealthy, had only by care, and much time, collected the books which now formed a faultless, small library. It was Ernestine's idea, having the room green, and bestowing upon it the important sounding name of "library," for it suited her fancy by sounding stylish, and pleased her artistic eye by being all of one shade; so after much patient drilling, she got them all to call it "library," excepting Olive, for that sister, disapproving of Ernestine's notions in general, did not like to yield to this one, and insisted on calling it "study."

Well, in here came Mr. Dering, Olive following with a light, saying, as she placed it on the table:

"Papa, this is to be a secret."

"Oh! oh! and you expect me to keep it?"

"Of course, at least a part of it," and Olive looked so serious, as she came and stood by his chair, that he became attentive in an instant, saying heartily: —"Well, go on dear, I'm listening, and promise to keep the secret."

Olive hesitated an instant, but she always hated to show any feeling, especially of embarrassment, so pitched into her subject abruptly, with her eyes down. "You know, papa, that we know that you have been troubled with the hard times, and wanted to help you."

"Yes, Olive, and I can never forget the way that my girls and their dear mother anticipated, and have done to help me."

"No," Olive answered, almost impatiently. "We have done nothing; it most all falls on mama; she helps us with the work, and as for 'Prince,' of course, we loved him, but we girls are able to walk, it's only mama, who is denied; so all the help it is, she gives, not we."

"Then we should love her all the more, dear," said

Mr. Dering; and the tenderness and love that shone in his face would have gladdened the heart of the wife of thirty years, had she seen it.

"I don't think we can ever love her enough," answered Olive heartily; then hesitated again, while her hand went slowly into her pocket, and came slowly out again.

"Hold your hand, papa."

He did so, and after placing a little roll in it, and closing his fingers over it, she said hurriedly: "It is only a little, papa; just thirty dollars that I have saved, but I want you to take it, and——"

"But Olive, my dear child——"

"Don't, please;" she interrupted hastily. "I know what you want to say, but it's not denying me anything, and what if it was? I want you to have it. You never gave us our allowance to buy our clothes with, and as for fancy things, I don't care for them; I don't care to go out as the other girls do, and I do not need it for anything. I only wish it was more."

There may have been many reasons why Mr. Dering said nothing as he drew her on to his knee, and kissed her tenderly, but the right one would not have been

hard to guess had any one seen his eyes full of tears. Olive's heart was beating happily, and she went on quite gayly: "And another thing, papa; now don't say anything until I finish; I want to have all my own way to-night. You know, sometime ago I helped Mr. Hess with some writing, and he said that if I would draw his little girl's head, he would teach me how to keep books; well, he did, you know, and now I want you to dismiss him, and let me be your book-keeper. It would help you, and oh, I should love to so much; it seems as if I wasn't a bit of use the way I live now, with nothing in particular to do."

"Why, my dear little girl," cried Mr. Dering, as she paused for breath. "Do you think they could spare you to me all day, down in that dusty old store?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" and into Olive's brightened eyes crept a little of the old bitterness, as she recalled the afternoon.

"And I'm to pay you——"

"Nothing of course, papa."

"No, my dear, I cannot consent to that."

"Please; I want to help you now. You may pay me when you are not troubled any more about business."

"Ah, yes; when!" said Mr. Dering sadly to himself.

"Papa," Olive put an arm about his neck. "Is it so bad as that? I'm not sixteen yet, but oh, I feel so much older, I can understand if you tell me."

It really seemed so, as he looked into that grave, serious face, so unlike a merry, careless girl; and while a sigh crossed his lips, his eyes looked trustingly into hers.

"Yes, dear, I think you can. You deserve, and I am happy to give you, my confidence; besides, I want to show you how you have helped me to-night. I am troubled very seriously, I have a note of six thousand to meet within sixty days, or the store goes, I see no way of raising it. There is four thousand in the bank in mama's name, but I do not want to touch it, because if anything should happen to me, you would not have one cent left in the world. Still, if one or two ways which I have in mind now, do not yield me something, I shall be obliged to take it, so as to save part of my business, and replace it as soon as possible. Thank God, the home is safe; it can never be taken from you, and never would I

consider it my duty to rob my wife and children of home and happiness, to liquidate my debts. I owe my creditors a duty which I will work to fulfill, while I live; but, I owe my family a greater one; so Olive dear, the old home is always safe. To-night I am more thankful to hold thirty dollars, than two months ago, I would have been to hold a hundred, and only to-day I told Mr. Hess that I would have to do without him, and that I would try the book-keeping myself."

He paused here, and the joy that mastered trouble in Olive's face, found vent as she laid her head on his shoulder and cried heartily, "Oh papa I am so glad, so glad!"

"You know more now, dear, than mama," continued Mr. Dering, appreciating the caress, knowing how rare they were for any body from Olive. "I see she is just as careful of home expenses as though she knew it all, and I do not want to give her the added trouble until I see that I cannot fight my way through, and that it must be known."

"Papa, isn't there some other way that I can help you?"

"My noble little girl, no, the load is already too heavy for your young shoulders; but, I do so warmly appreciate your womanly interest, and your desire to help is precious indeed, while you see how great a help it is to me."

Olive was smiling happily, even while her heart was filled with anxiety and many thoughts; so they sat there for some time in silence, then there came a tap on the door, and a sepulchral voice through the keyhole:

"If you don't want the whole family to come swarming over the transom, you'd better come out and tell us what that tremendous secret is. Speak quick, a single word."

"Shovels!" shouted Mr. Dering, implicitly obeying the threatening command.

"Very good; you may live, providing you come out immediately and give me a dime to buy some butter-scotch," returned the voice.

"The request betrays the speaker," laughed Mr. Dering as he stood up and unlocked the door. "Clear out, you begging Kat; you always——"

"Hurrah," cried the beggar shrilly. "Can't tell us apart yet; there's Kat on the stairs; now, whenever we demand it, you have to give us a dime a piece; fine, you know."

"Yes; I know, you mercenary little monkeys; come in the sitting-room if you want to hear our secret."

Kittie and Kat rushed promptly in, and Mr. Dering spoke, indicating Olive by a wide flourish.

"Ladies and gentlemen—I suppose I must represent the gentlemen:—Let me introduce you to my future book-keeper and business confidante."

Olive lifted her eyes, as he bowed again, and first saw her mother's face so happy and pleased, then Ernestine's so full of something that was almost ridicule, and in an instant, without looking farther, her own darkened, and withdrawing her hand, she walked over to her accustomed corner, thinking bitterly, while they all commented and applauded.

"There! now every one but mama, thinks I'm a fool, and they needn't be saying, 'how splendid' and 'oh! Olive,' for didn't Ernestine look as if she wanted to laugh, and as if she would be ashamed of me if I worked, even in papa's store. But I don't care what any of them say or think," and having turned bitterly against all the girls, merely because of the unconscious smile on Ernestine's astonished face, Olive crushed all the joy from her own face, and nearly all from her heart.

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# CHAPTER V.

# ONE DAY.

"WELL, surely there never was such a pokey family," exclaimed Ernestine, lounging into the room where the girls were gathered, one bleak dreary morning, early in November. "Nothing ever happens, any more than as if we were in back-woods. Kittie, I'll change seats with you."

"I suppose you will," returned Kittie, keeping her chair and frowning over her slate and book. "You'll always change if you get the best by it; get out of my light will you."

"I wish you'd shut the door, Ernestine," growled Kat over the top of a bandage bound round her head and face; "I wish your tooth was ready to jump out of your mouth, and some one would leave the door open on you."

"I'd try and set you a good example, by being polite at least," laughed Ernestine, who really never could be cross or blue, very long at a time. "How grum we are; what's the matter Bea?"

"I've an awful headache," answered Bea, who shared in the general depression, and was considerably ruffled over not being able to set a puff straight on her skirt. "Be quiet, please, and sit down; it was still enough before you came in."

"So I should think, from the way you all look like tomb-stones. Nobody looks peaceful, but Jean, and she's asleep; and Olive is the only one that looks natural, because she always looks solemn and cross, no matter what's up."

Olive turned from the window with a jerk. She had such a cold, that she could not go down to the store, and her face was swollen most unbecomingly.

"Perhaps if you had a little more sense, you might be able to look at least reasonably solemn sometimes," she said sharply.

"Oh, mercy," cried Ernestine, with her gay laugh, far more tantalizing than the sharpest words. "If having sense would make me look like you, I'd never want it,

—never."

Olive jumped from her seat with a force that knocked the chair over, and startled the whole company.

"Ernestine Dering," she cried fiercely, and as though the words almost choked her. "You are the most heartless, selfish, senseless creature, that ever lived; I never will forgive you! You haven't got a thought above looking like a wax doll, and acting like a ninny, and I hate you;—there!"

"Well—if—I—ever," cried Kittie, as Olive vanished with a bang of the door that woke Jean and made Bea clap her hands to her aching head.

"You ought to be ashamed," exclaimed Kat, glaring over her bandage. "Olive's the best one of the lot, and I've three minds to go and tell her so."

"And have your head taken off for your pains," said Ernestine, walking over to the glass, and smiling at her own unruffled image. "Olive's a touchy goose, but I didn't mean to hurt her feelings, and I'm sorry for it; so that's the best I can do now, isn't it?"

"I suppose so, unless it is to think once in a while, that there is some one in the world with feelings, besides yourself," answered Bea, jerking her unruly sewing, and getting crosser than ever as she ran her needle into her finger.

"Dear me," cried Ernestine, throwing her hands up, and admiring them in the glass. "It's a sure sign that something is going wrong with this family, when you get cross, Bea."

"I'm not an angel," grumbled Bea, then threw her sewing down, and gave herself a shake, both mentally and physically. "But there's no need of my acting like a bear, and I'm really ashamed. Come sit on my lap, Jean, you look terribly grieved."

"Well, 'tisn't very pleasant with mama gone, and you all fussing so," answered Jean, limping over with her crutch, and laying her head on Bea's shoulder with a sigh. "If you all were lame awhile, you'd be so glad to get straight again, that you never would fuss or scold, never."

Bea sucked her bruised thumb, and thought more heartily than ever, that they ought to be ashamed; but a little witch of impatience and petulance lurks in the gentlest of feminine hearts, and though Bea had resolved to hush talking, and be

patient, the little meddling temper was wide awake, much aggravated at the gloomy weather, and bound to make mischief if possible. Ernestine turned away from the glass in a moment, and strolled over to the lounge.

"I don't see," she exclaimed, "why everything should be denied us. I'd like to live for awhile just as I want to."

No one answered, for just then Kittie threw down her slate, and burst into impatient tears.

"What's the use! I can't understand such fractions, and I never will; I'd like to smash that slate, and burn this old book!"

"Doesn't Miss Howard show you?"

"O yes, she shows and shows, and talks and explains, 'till my head spins like a top; but I can't understand, and after a while she says, in such a surprised way, as if she thought I was the biggest dummy in the world—'Why, Kittie, don't you see it yet?' and I don't see it any more than ink in the dark, but I'm ashamed, so I pretend that I do, and that's the way it always is," and Kittie cried despairingly.

"How the cheerfulness increases," laughed Ernestine, jumping up. "I'm going down stairs, and I sha'n't come up again until I can say something that will please you all. By-by," and away she went, nodding brightly.

The morning wore slowly away. Jean, with a pain in her back, lay in Bea's arms until she fell asleep again; then after laying her down, Beatrice went back to her sewing, made patient and penitent by contact with that frail, peaceful little sister, and, after viewing her unmanageable puff determinedly for a few minutes, saw her mistake, and immediately went to work and finished it with no trouble. Kat, after much grumbling, finally brought her tooth to comparative submission, and went to sleep, while Kittie fled from the field of fractions, and spent her morning in the swing, which hung in the shed.

Just before dinner, the door-bell rang, and in a minute Ernestine came flying up stairs.

"There," she cried, waving a tinted paper. "I've something to please you with. Just listen:—'Mrs. Richards would be pleased to see Miss Dering, Miss Ernestine and Miss Olive for tea next Wednesday Eve!' I expect they'll dance. Won't it be fun?"

"I don't see any use of your waking me up, I'm not invited;" exclaimed Kat, sinking back on to her pillow, when she found that she was not included in the coming bliss.

"I hope you didn't expect it, only a child," said Ernestine, as Bea took the magic paper in great delight.

"Child, indeed!" cried Kat. "I'm tall as you."

"More's the pity, for you're only twelve, and as wild as a boy."

"I don't care; I'm going if mama says so; can't I Bea?"

"Why no; Mrs. Richards didn't ask you."

"What's the difference? She likes me just as well as she does you and would be just as glad to see me."

"Of course; but girls of twelve are never invited out in the evening," expostulated Bea, re-reading the delightful invitation, for events were rare in Canfield, and then it was so nice to be called "Miss Dering."

"I don't care, I think it's real mean!" and Kat vented her resentment by punching her pillow into a helpless knot.

"Go, call Olive, Ernestine," continued Bea, all smiles and complacency; "and just say, by the way, that you're sorry you hurt her feelings; it's quite the proper thing to do, you know."

"All right," and Ernestine ran down the hall.

"Oh, Olive! come with us; here's an invitation from Mrs. Richards. I'm sorry I hurt your feelings; come on."

"I don't care for anything that you said, and I've something to think about besides invitations. Go away, will you?"

"Oh, certainly," and having glibly uttered her penitent speech, Ernestine cared nothing about its reception, but hurried back to discuss their dress with Beatrice.

"But mama has not said that we can go," said Bea, caressing the tinted paper, as she interrupted an enthusiastic speech that was making Ernestine's eyes glow like diamonds.

"But she will; why shouldn't she? Any how I'm going to believe that she will, I will wear my silk and my new scarf, and borrow mama's laces for the sleeves, and her white comb, and jewelry with the bracelets, if she will loan them;—do you suppose she will?"

"No, I know she won't; she'll think it's too much dress for a young girl. Wear flowers."

"Nonsense! I won't. I want the jewelry. What will you wear?"

"My cashmere; it's all I've got," and Bea sighed a little, for she did love to look nice. "The sleeves are dreadfully worn, and the over-skirt isn't the latest; but it can't be made over again, and I can't afford to spend a cent."

"Never mind," said Ernestine, who could, and did readily advise what she disliked to practice. "Brush it up good, put ink over the little hole in the sleeve, and I'll loop the over-skirt so that it looks later in style, and loan you my blue bows."

"I suppose you will," returned Bea petulantly, for the temper, though appeased, was still awake and alert. "You're quick enough to loan me what you don't want yourself, and to say for me to go in an old-fashioned dress, with the holes inked up, and no jewelry; when you want silk and laces, and all the jewelry; you are generous."

"Oh, well, you may have the—the things if she will loan them; don't get fussy," said Ernestine, not a trifle abashed. "Who do you suppose will be there?"

"Whoever she invites, I suppose," answered Bea, still ruffled.

"And I expect Dell will be dressed beautifully; oh, dear, how nice it would be to be rich," sighed Ernestine.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have so much, and others to have to scrimp and pinch, and then have nothing," cried Bea, exaggerating her woes, as is usual, when one is determined to think one's self the worst abused of all mortals. "I wonder if Olive is going, and how she will dress."

"Just like she always does, I suppose, in that old green, with a big white collar, and her hair pulled straight back, and as smooth as a door-knob, no ornaments, and look fierce enough to chew every body up. I do wonder what Olive is good for anyhow, she isn't any comfort to anybody," and, as Ernestine spoke, her eyes

went slyly over to the glass, where her pretty attitude in Jean's chair, and the sunshine lying warm on her hair, were reflected.

Usually, Bea would have taken up her sister's cause, and uttered some conclusive defence, but now she felt abused, and didn't care much what was said of anybody, so after a moment, Ernestine went on—

"I wish I knew the 'German,' I'm going to ask Dell to teach me, she does it beautifully. I think it is so hateful in Olive not to dance, it spoils a set for us, so that we can never dance quadrilles ourselves."

"I suppose she has a right to do as she pleases," answered Bea, revelling in the questionable luxury of being as cross as she could. "I don't care whether mama lets us go or not, I haven't a thing to wear, and of course if I don't go, you can't."

"Oh, but she will, I'll fix you so pretty, that you'll blush to look at yourself, and you know Mrs. Richards said last summer, that you looked like an angel in white, and you may have quillings off my bolt of footing to put in your basque, and around the pleatings;" and, with these skilfully thrown in words, Ernestine ran off to look over her little collection of ribbons and laces, while Bea turned her eyes slowly to the glass, just as her pretty sister had done a moment before, only not with such an air of perfect satisfaction.

"How pretty Ernestine is, and even if she is selfish, she's always so willing to loan things, that any one doesn't think that it's just because she doesn't happen to want them herself. I hope if Olive does go, she will fix up a little," and with a sigh Bea turned away from her reflection, and after covering Jean with a shawl, went down to see if dinner was not nearly ready.

If they could have seen Olive, they would never needed to have asked if she was going. All the afternoon she walked slowly up and down her room, sometimes increasing her gait, as the thoughts crowded and doubled the deep trouble in her face; and, in her mind was one thought that mastered every other, and that often formed itself into words and crossed her lips in a whisper of shivering dread.

"The sixty days are almost gone, and papa has not got the money! What will he do? oh! what will he do?"

Being with him constantly in the store, Olive saw, what he struggled to hide from those at home,—the utter despair that was mastering a patient hope;—and

she knew that as the days went so swiftly by, that to him, the end was growing more certain. Once she saw him eagerly tear open a letter, and after reading a few lines, drop his head on his hands, and, unconscious of her nearness, groan despairingly. It weighed on her mind terribly, and her great desire to be of help, faced by the fact of her perfect inability, made her almost desperate, at times.

Beatrice spent the afternoon in fussing with her dress, and Ernestine in watching for her mother, who was spending the day with a sick friend, so as she was still absent, when the tea-bell rang, the meal was rather gloomy; for the three older girls were busy with thoughts; Kat's tooth still ached, Kittie had caught cold, and their resentment at not being included in the invitation, being mutual, they devoted themselves exclusively to each other, and Jean dismayed at the unusual silence, ate her bread and milk with a pathetic air of loneliness, quite touching.

"Ernestine, won't you sing just a little something," she asked, as they went into the sitting-room, where the fire burned low. "It's *so* lonesome without mama, when you're all so still. Seems to me everything has gone wrong all day, what's the matter?"

"Everybody's in the blues, it's in the air," laughed Ernestine, sitting down to the piano, and skimming the keys. "Sit down chickie, and I'll sing 'Three Fishers.'"

Jean curled in a chair, with a pleased smile, and Ernestine began the plaintive song, with the firelight flitting over her face, showing that she sang with more feeling than usual.

"For men must work, and women must weep,
And the sooner 'tis over, the sooner to sleep."

The door-bell rang just there, and made them jump, then Bea went to the door, for though quite dark, it was not seven yet.

A man stood just outside, a stranger, and as Bea opened the door with no light, but the fire from the sitting-room, he did not seem to know what to say.

"Is Mrs. Dering here,—that is,—is she home?"

"No, she is not, but will you come in, perhaps I will do," answered Bea, peering beyond him, and starting, as she caught the outline of other figures on

the steps.

"I do not think you will, I,—in fact we,—" and there he paused, and looked behind him, and a vague chilling alarm struck Bea, and made her voice tremble as she asked—

"Is it anything so particular, any——,"

"Bad news," he said, as she hesitated. "Yes Miss,—Dering, I presume, I do bring bad news, your father——;"

Ernestine stood in the sitting-room door, and as the words were uttered, she saw Bea rush out, heard a faint scream, and a strange voice say, "catch her, she's falling;" then there came a tramp of feet across the porch, and four men crossed the hall, and came into the room with a strange burden; a rude litter, with a motionless figure on a mattress! Bea had fainted, for she had followed it, but as the men set their burden down with pitying faces, there came a shrill scream and a fall, for Ernestine dropped to the floor, and Jean continued to scream with her face hid. The three girls from up stairs came flying down, Huldah ran from the kitchen, and in the dire confusion, the strangers stood, not knowing what to do, or whom to address, for every one seemed to have lost self-possession in the overwhelming shock. So thought the gentleman who seemed to be leader, but at that minute a hand touched his arm, and a voice startlingly hushed, asked: "Is he *dead*?"

"He is, madam."

A spasm of pain crossed her set-white face, as her lips opened slowly, and the next question came with a gasp of dread:

"By—by his own hand?"

"Oh, no, madam, no indeed," cried the gentleman eagerly, glad to give that relief. "He was on the train going down to the city, which was wrecked twenty miles this side of it. His death was instant and painless, a blow on the left temple."

"Thank God!"

She uttered it slowly, and almost below her breath, then lifted her eyes from the peaceful face so life-like in death, and looked around the room. Ernestine lay moaning on the lounge, Kittie and Kat locked in each others arms crouched in

the corner, tearless, because paralyzed with fright, Jean shook as with a spasm in Bea's lap, while Huldah stood by the lounge, with her apron over her head; and the men stood hushed and abashed with their eyes down.

"Take Jean out," Olive said again in that strange still voice. "Huldah carry Ernestine to her room, and Kittie, you and Kat go out to the steps and watch for mama."

How instantly they all obeyed her, as though recognizing one with authority, and how curiously the gentleman scanned her stonily white face, so worn in this brief moment of suffering, and listened to her last words with wonder.

"Then you are not Mrs. Dering?"

"No!" Olive did not seem surprised at the question, but her eyes went to his face slowly, and her lips began to twitch. "How will we ever tell her; oh! how will we?" she murmured, clasping her hands tightly; but the stranger heard the low words, and spoke hurriedly, with his eyes on the dead face.

"If you are expecting her, some one had better go to prepare her, for the shock might prove——"

Olive did not wait for more, but snatching a shawl from the chair, saying as she vanished:

"I will go, only stay 'till we come back."

The moon was coming slowly through a bank of clouds, and the wind sighing mournfully through the bare treetops, as she sped swiftly down the path and through the gate, whose familiar slam sounded dreary and dull, though it hardly reached her, as she ran down the quiet street.

In just a few minutes she saw another figure wearing a familiar shawl in the moonlight.

"Why, Olive," cried Mrs. Dering. "Were you all worried about me. Mr. Dane wanted to walk home with me, but I told him I would stop at the store for papa, and when I got there, the boy told me he had taken the afternoon train to the city; some sudden business I suppose. Why dear, how you have run!"

"Oh, mama!" it was Olive's only utterance, but it told its own story, for Mrs. Dering instantly grasped the hand held out to her and inquired sharply:

"What is it, quick,—any trouble at home?"

"Yes,"—gaspingly.

"What,—I heard them talking of an accident,—Oh! Olive!"

"Papa," said Olive, growing calm as she saw her mother blanch and tremble in the pale light; but Mrs. Dering waited for no more; grasping Olive's hand still tighter, she broke into a swift run, that did not slacken, until the steps were reached, and the sobbing within reached their ears; then Olive forcibly held her back an instant.

"Oh, mama,—wait,—let me tell you,—"

"No,—he is dead, I know it;" and breaking from the detaining hold, Mrs. Dering ran in, and when Olive reached the door, she was kneeling beside the litter, with one dead hand pressed to her hidden face.

In a moment they knew that she was praying, and feeling in the presence of something sacred, each man bent his head reverently, and covering her face, Olive too, tried to pray, and shed her first tears.

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# CHAPTER VI.

# A STRANGER.

On the day of the funeral, the sun came up and flashed over the grey chill earth, with a spring-like warmth and radiance, and crept through the open windows with a broad glad smile, as though no sorrow darkened the home and hushed the merry voices.

Many times in these three days of crushing sorrow, when heart and hand seemed powerless to act, had Ernestine thought in a vague, wondering way, of her words: "I wonder what Olive is good for, she is no comfort to any one." Why, she herself, shivering and white, clung to her; Bea went to her; Mrs. Dering turned to them all for comfort, but to Olive for help and advice; Huldah came to her for orders; callers with offers of flowers and help saw her, and all said when questioned; "ask Olive, she can tell you;" "where is Olive?" "Olive knows all about it, don't disturb mama;" and so for once, home without Olive, would have known its greatest need.

On the evening of that last day, when all the sorrowful farewells were over, and the grief stricken family had returned to their saddened home; there came a stranger into Canfield, and after inquiring the way, stalked briskly out to the Dering house. All the heavy foliage being gone, Jean saw him coming through the gate, and turned from the window.

"Some one is coming, Olive," and Olive reached the door, just as the stranger gave a vain pull at the muffled bell. He was a strange, odd looking old gentleman, erect as a picket, scrupulously dressed, and looking at her with fierce grey eyes from under the bushiest lashes.

"Is Mrs. Dering in?" he inquired with a tap of his cane.

"Yes, sir, but——,"

"Well, that's all I want to know now, I'll ask the rest after I get in," and emphasizing the words with another sharp tap of his cane, in he walked.

"But, sir, my mother cannot see you to-night," said Olive, somewhat startled, but speaking with decision, and still holding the door open.

"Tut, tut, tut! I haven't come three hundred miles to be turned out into the night. Come, come, young woman, lead the way to where there's a fire and light, then take this card to your mother, and if she won't see me, give me a good comfortable bed, and I'll wait 'till morning for her."

Olive began to feel as though she had little to say in the matter, besides, he stamped his cane and looked at her so fiercely, that she thought he might be an escaped lunatic, and perhaps she had better humor him. So she led the way into the sitting room, poked the fire till it glowed brightly, then the old gentleman sat down, but jerked his head around quickly as the sound of Jean's retiring crutch fell on his ear.

"Ha, hum; come here little girl;" and his voice sharp and rough, softened wonderfully; but Jean only lifted her tear-stained pale little face, for an instant, then vanished; whereupon he pulled out a scarlet silk handkerchief, and blew his nose fiercely, then turned to Olive as if he expected to demolish her instantly with the card in his fingers.

"Here girl, take that to your mother and be quick."

Olive took it and unconsciously dropped her eyes to the name—

Even the old gentleman started as she looked up, for pale as her face had been before, it was positively ashy now, and her eyes glared at him like a young lioness at bay. Somewhat amazed the old man rose and approached her; but she started back, threw the card at his feet, crying chokingly with a frantic gesture of her hands:

"Go away, go away, don't touch me,—oh, how I hate you!" and vanished through the door as if she had been shot.

"God bless my soul!" cried the astonished man, dropping into his chair and apostrophizing the fire with startled energy. "If I ever saw the like,—where's my snuff-box,—I never did to be sure; streak of insanity, must be attended to; fine eyes, but ferocious young woman; hum, ha!—I'll sit here till somebody comes."

A movement of several persons in the room above, would indicate that the family were gathered there; as indeed they were, sitting around mother, feeling nearer and dearer than ever in their mutual loss, each one drying her eyes slowly, as she talked lovingly of the dead, trying to make them feel as did she, that father was not lost, but just gone home a little sooner than they. Into this peaceful, loving group came Olive, with ashy lips, and excited eyes, and a few minutes later, the old gentleman down stairs, arose from his waiting seat, as the door opened, and a lady came towards him. Just while she crossed the little distance lying between them, he scrutinized her, with almost savage intentness, and his survey ended in a slightly astonished, "humph," as she paused before him, and bent her head slightly, but with due respect for his age.

"Mr. Congreve. Will you be seated, sir?"

"Humph! Well, I suppose I will," and down he sat, with more force than was necessary, perhaps, but then he was excited.

"I'm too late for Robert's funeral, I hear," he said, in a moment, as gruff and short as though she were to blame for the fact, and he was come to deliver a verbal chastisement.

"Yes, sir, a few hours."

"Humph! His death was very sudden."

"Very sudden indeed."

"Humph!"

Very plainly, Mr. Congreve did not know exactly what to say next. He hadn't expected this kind of a widow; his mind had pictured one in bushels of crape, with a drenched, woe-begone face, who would scream when she saw him, fall on his neck, in lieu of his purse, and gasp out dramatically: "Dear, dear Uncle Ridley, now all my troubles are over," after which, he would have to pet her into quietude, when there was nothing, next to walking out of the window in his sleep, that he dreaded more than a crying woman; then he would have to kiss all the children, and so greatly did he object to such an osculatory performance, that after the act he looked as though he had made way with a quart of alum. Now, there was the pleasing, but slightly astonishing fact, that nobody was going to want to kiss him, and this pale, sweet-faced woman, with her quiet eyes and determined mouth was Robert's widow, that he would have to talk to; and it was very evident, that if he had anything to say, she was waiting quietly to hear it.

"You have quite a large family,—madam," he said, hurriedly rushing in to break a pause.

"Yes, sir, six daughters."

"Six! Bless my soul,—six girls," and Mr. Congreve hastily took some snuff to settle his nerves. "Astonishing, I declare. Pity they're not boys,—great pity."

"I would not have it otherwise than it is, sir."

"Humph! well, they're your burden, not mine," said the old man, testily, and twisting uneasily in his chair.

"A burden I am happy and grateful to bear, if burden it be," answered the widow, calmly. "I am thankful they are all mine, my comforts and helps at all times."

"One of them is lame, is she?" and as he spoke, the old man's voice softened, as it had done when he called to Jean.

"Yes, sir, my little one, lame from babyhood."

Mr. Congreve resorted to his handkerchief again, and waved its scarlet folds

back and forth in much agitation for a few seconds, then, as he put it back in its capacious pocket, and sniffed once or twice, as if in defiance to some internal commotion, Mrs. Dering remembered that he had once had a little lame girl, who died before reaching womanhood.

He was regarding her intently, and now as she lifted her eyes, softened with this sudden remembrance, he bounced out of his chair, and set his cane down sharply on the hearth.

"Elizabeth Dering, you're not the woman I thought you were. You're not like your father, and I'm glad of that. I came here to offer you help, because I know for a certainty that Robert was in trouble, and I see that you are no more pleased to see me, than I was at the prospect of seeing you. That I have been angry with my nephew for many years, you know well enough, but there's no use denying that his sudden death has touched me, and I want to do something for his family. To-night you are in no condition to talk, no more am I; so if you will show me my room I will go to it immediately."

Mrs. Dering arose also, with relief plainly visible in her face, and after finding that he had taken an early supper before leaving the city, excused herself to arrange for his comfort during the night.

Several hours later, when the household had forgotten its grief in slumber, and nothing disturbed the stillness of the night, but an occasional frog, and the lonesome sighing of the wind through the bare trees, two persons found it extremely difficult to sleep. In Mrs. Dering's room the fire lay in dying embers on the hearth, and in a low chair before it, sat the pale mother and widow, with no need now to hide her grief, lest other hearts were made sad, for no one was near but Jean, and she slept soundly, with sorrow lost in the oblivion of dreams. So feeling for the first time, the liberty of tears, that poor, aching heart broke its stern control, and burying her face, the sorrowing woman wept, praying, as the tears rolled down her cheeks, that they might not be shed in bitterness or rebellion, and that her heart, through all its pain, might still feel and know, "what is, is best." When the violence of her grief had expended itself, and she could lift her face to view calmly her loss and new responsibilities, the unvoiced prayer of her heart was: "O God, help me; I cannot work alone; let me know what to do; help me to think and act aright, and strengthen my trembling faith, that whatever may come to me, I can say: 'God knows it is for the best.'"

Even as she prayed, help came to her, for Olive could not sleep, and feeling

assured that her mother was awake, had come noiselessly in, and now stood by her.

"Mama, I cannot sleep either; let me stay with you."

"Olive, my child, it is past midnight."

"I know, mama," and as Olive spoke, she pushed a stool to her mother's feet, and sat down, for something in the voice assured her that she was welcome.

"Why couldn't you sleep, dear?"

"Thinking," answered Olive, gravely. "And I wanted to talk to you, mama, when we could be quite alone."

"Yes, dear."

"Will you tell me about Mr. Congreve, please?"

No curiosity prompted the question; that her mother knew; so, looking down into the grave, thoughtful face, she lowered her voice, and began:

"Mr. Congreve took papa when he was left an orphan at eight years old, and raised him, expecting to make him his heir, as he is very wealthy. When Mr. Congreve and my father were boys they were great friends; but in early manhood, had a bitter quarrel that has never been forgiven either side, and they have hated each other fiercely ever since. When Mr. Congreve found that his nephew was in love with his enemy's daughter, he was furious with anger, and my father also objected to the match, but not so bitterly and blind to reason, as his enemy. Your father was threatened, plead with, and sworn at; but while he remained firm to his intention of marrying me, he really loved his fiery uncle, and disliked to come out in open rebellion; but a final move of Mr. Congreve's was more than he could bear. He locked him up. Of course no man of age and reason could stand such an indignity as that, so, making his escape at night, he left without a word of any kind, and has never seen his uncle but once since. A little while after we were married, we received a letter from him, very short and bitter, saying that he could tread the path he had chosen unmolested; that we were no more to him than strangers, and that his new will left his property entire, to a cousin's child, Roger Ridley Congreve, his namesake. He says now, that when he saw papa's death in the paper, that he was touched by it, and that he has come to help us, though I don't see how he knows we need it."

"I do, mama."

"You, Olive?"

"Yes, mama." Olive's fingers were interlaced nervously and her eyes were flashing warmly as she lifted them from the low fire to her mother's face. "I know all about it, mama. Do you remember the night I talked with papa in the study about two months ago?"

"Yes."

"Well, he told me a great deal that night about his business, that he never told you, because he said he did not want to worry you with it unless he had to; he had a note of six thousand to meet in sixty days, and he was trying every way to raise it without touching your money in the bank. He said if he could not pay it, the store would go, that the home was ours, and must never go for his debts. Just a few days ago a letter came, and he snatched it so eagerly, that I knew it was very important; it was very short, and when he finished reading it he laid his head down and groaned. He didn't know I was near, and I did not speak then, but that letter has haunted me ever since, and yesterday when you thought I was asleep, I was down at the store, and I found it in his private drawer. O mama, it was from Mr. Congreve, and so short and cruel, oh, so bitterly cruel, and I tore it all to shreds, and burnt it, and never meant to tell you, at least, not for awhile. He refused to loan papa a cent, and said he didn't care if he lost both business and home, and when I read it I believe I could almost have killed him. To-night when he came and gave me his card I threw it in his face, and told him I *hated* him!"

"Olive! Olive!"

"I did, I did, and I'm glad; I felt as if it would choke me to sleep with him in the house to-night, and I never want to look at him again. I would rather work my fingers off than ever have you take one penny of his money, or let him help us in any way," cried Olive, excitedly, almost forgetting the sleeping household in her energy.

Mrs. Dering put her hand to her head, bewildered with the sudden news, and Olive saw, and comprehended the look of startled trouble that rested on her face.

"We are very poor now, aren't we, mama?"

"Yes, child, yes; indeed I am quite bewildered," exclaimed Mrs. Dering, anxiously. "Did you say sixty days, Olive?"

"Yes, mama, the time is out next Friday."

"Is it possible? What shall we do!"

"Isn't letting it go, the only thing we can do?" asked Olive.

"I suppose so, but really I can hardly think, it all seems so sudden," and truly her sad, troubled face echoed her words.

"I have been thinking about it so long," said Olive, as though relieved to speak her thoughts. "The home is ours, and you have four thousand in the bank. It seems to me a very little for seven people to live on, but we are all strong and well, and can work."

"Yes, all strong and well but Jean," and Mrs. Dering's eyes went wistfully to the little unconscious face resting on the pillow. "She will have to be so neglected in more ways than one, if home is broken up and every one's hands and work belonging to some one else."

"Dear me," cried Olive, reproachfully. "How could I forget her! There's something more to think over, now."

"But you must think no more to-night, dear, nor must I, or we will not be fit for to-morrow's work and thought. Go to bed, and remember, God will not send us more than we can bear; we must only do the best we can and all that is left, He will provide a way for us. Good night, dear."

Next morning after breakfast, Mr. Congreve stood pulling his gloves on and eyeing the six girls from under his fierce, bushy brows, and there was something almost like amusement in the quizzical look as it swept from one face to the other.

Whatever he thought, he put it into no words, but caught up his cane, then stooped down over Jean, lying on the lounge, and whispered something in her ear. It must have been something magical, indeed, for Jean got up, took her shawl and crutch, and walked with him down to the gate, and there the astonished girls, who all rushed to the window, saw them pause, and the old gentleman lifted Jean up on the post, put her shawl up over her head, and then began talking earnestly.

"Did you ever!" cried Kittie, falling back at the amazing sight. "I thought she was afraid of him!"

"She is the only one that he has looked at kindly," said Bea, with some indications of resentment in her voice. "Was he always so fierce and queer, mama?"

"Always," answered Mrs. Dering, who was watching from another window. "He has a kind heart, but a most exceedingly violent temper, which he seems to have under no control.

"If thwarted or vexed, he stops at nothing, but most always repents his rash acts as soon as they are committed, and, sometimes, if the humor so strikes him, there is nothing he will not do as reparation."

Olive, understanding that this little explanation was especially for her, shut her lips tightly, whereupon Kate exclaimed, "You never looked at him when you were introduced, Olive, and if you could have seen the way he frowned and glared at you, you would have shook all over."

"I don't care how he looked, nor how much he frowned. I don't like him, and I wish he was back in Virginia."

"If he isn't stingy as a miser, he'll give us something, and perhaps ask us to visit him," said Ernestine, who looked languid and pale from excessive and violent weeping, and really seemed to be the only one who was not trying to be cheerful for the others' sake.

The Old Gentleman lifted Jean up on the Post.
**THE OLD GENTLEMAN LIFTED JEAN UP ON THE POST.**

"I should like to see where papa lived when he was a boy, but I wouldn't care to have Mr. Congreve there," said Bea, who had that morning began being more womanly than usual by relieving mama of coffee-urn duties.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Kittie, from the window. "Now for the secret! What did he say, Jean?"

"I'm not to tell," answered Jean, looking quite excited and rather pale, as she hurried in; then amazed them all again by hiding her face in Mrs. Dering's dress and bursting into tears.

"What ever has he done?" cried Kat, bouncing excitedly out of her chair. "Was

he cross?—or perhaps he pinched you or something."

"No, he didn't," said Jean, trembling but smiling through her tears. "He was very good and kind, and didn't look near so cross as he did in here. He said that a great many years ago he had a little girl just like me, and he kissed me, too."

"Did I ever!" cried Kat, quite carried away by curiosity. "And is that all that he said?"

"No, but I can't tell the rest, now, but he's going to bring me some candy and I'll give you all some."

Perhaps it was because Mrs. Dering turned her head away just then, finding control of her face impossible; or because Jean looked so pathetic, as she gave her little promise; at any rate, Ernestine broke into a quick sob, and the next moment they were all crying, while Kittie threw herself on the lounge, and hid her face, as though she never cared to show it again, and Kat followed her example in the rocking-chair.

For several minutes the sound of weeping filled the room, then Mrs. Dering wiped her eyes and tried to steady her voice.

"Children, do you think it would make papa happy to see us all so miserable and wretched?"

Something in the voice hushed the sobs, and caught attention, except from Ernestine, who continued to cry wailingly.

"If papa had gone to Europe, made a great fortune, and built a grand, beautiful home for us all to come to, would we all sit down and cry about it, and say it wasn't right?"

Even Ernestine listened a little at this, and Kittie lifted her drenched face to look in amaze at her mother.

"I don't think we would, but that our happiness would hardly wait for the time 'till we started to join him. Now, instead of going to any country to build us a home, he has gone home himself, to the beautiful glorious home that was waiting for him, and waits for us; and isn't it lovely to think how glad he'll be to see us when we come, and it may not be long, either. I can almost imagine how happy he is to-night, and I should hate to feel that we made him sad by sitting here and crying, as though we regretted his perfect joy. We miss him sadly

indeed, but it will make our time of waiting seem shorter, if we busy ourselves in doing what we know he would have approved and enjoyed, had he stayed with us. You, my girls, know how proud and fond he was of you; you know just which of your little faults grieved him, so work to overcome them, and try to become the noble, splendid women he always prayed you might be. As for me, I know how he always trusted me in raising our girls, and now that he has gone home, and left it all to me, don't you suppose it is a duty made doubly precious? None of us can complain of idle hands, and so with busy hearts we can find no time to complain and weep. Now let's go to our morning work, and all be as happy and cheerful as you can; just remember, God loves us so much that He has put some one who is dear to us all in our home above, so that we cannot forget it, even if we are tempted to do so."

There was a general putting away of handkerchiefs, and many resolves written on the girlish faces, that were facing their first grief, and found it hard to do so with a patient faith. As they all left the room for morning duties, Bea lingered behind the others, and throwing her arms about her mother, looked up with full eyes and a loving smile. "Mama, you are such a comfort; you talk about heaven and papa, as if they were just around the corner, and make me feel as if he knew, and was interested in all that we did, just as much as ever. I know what will make him the happiest, and that is for us to be just like you, for he did love and trust you so perfectly."

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# CHAPTER VII.

# MR. CONGREVE SURPRISES HIMSELF AND EVERYBODY ELSE.

WHEN Mr. Congreve came back from his walk, which had been a very lengthy one, for he was much unsettled in mind, he came very slowly, and began an uneasy soliloquy as he neared the house.

"How I just hate to go back there, I do; seven women,—God bless my soul! and I'll wager my best hat they're all crying like water-spouts, and haven't made my bed yet. I won't sit down in a room that isn't cleaned up, and bless my soul, —where's my snuff box? I'd sit out doors, sooner than be in the room where they're all sniffling, with the curtains pulled down, as if Robert's going into eternal bliss, was a thing to turn yourself into a wailing dungeon over;" and, ending his mutterings with a revengeful snap of the gate, he stamped fiercely up the walk, scattering the gravel right and left, and scaring a stray cat almost into fits, by the way he swung his cane at her. Something in the looks of the house when he glanced up, brought him to a sudden stand still. The blinds were all open, with the sun shining warmly on the glass, one window was thrown up, and through it came the merry whistle of a bird, giving forth a musical defiance to the coming of winter, and when Mr. Congreve rather slowly opened the front door, there met him a warm, cheery odor, and,—yes, actually; some one laughed upstairs! In the sitting-room a jolly fire leaped and shone in the shining grate, the piano stood open, the room was full of sunshine, and under Mr. Dering's large portrait, was a bracket, and there on it, a graceful little vase filled with pansys and a tea-rose, from Jean's little window garden in the dining-room.

Mr. Congreve gave a surprised and emphatic "humph," and tramped away to his own room, which was in apple-pie order, then tramped back, without having seen any one but Huldah flying around on the back porch.

Presently Jean came through the hall, and seeing him sitting there and frowning at the fire, as though trying to study out some new and astonishing puzzle, she stopped at the stairs to call,—"Mr. Congreve is here, mama."

"Humph! *Mr. Congreve*, if I ever, if I ever," exclaimed that gentleman, with some energy, and whirling about in his seat.

"Come here, Jeanie; here's your candy."

It really was quite astonishing how his voice could change when he spoke to her, and how his face brightened when she came in without hesitation and received the package with a pleased,—"Thank you, sir."

"Well, I declare,—quite right, to be sure; but don't you know who I am, and what my name is?"

"Yes, sir, you're my papa's uncle, and your name is Mr. Congreve," answered Jean, just a little startled at being lifted on to his knee, and having his arm around her.

"So I am, to be sure; quite true; but if I'm your papa's uncle, I'm your great-uncle, and there isn't such an immense amount of difference; don't you suppose you had better call me Uncle Ridley, as he did?"

"Why, I don't know, perhaps I had. I'll ask mama," answered Jean in earnest simplicity.

"Well, you do that, and tell her if she's not busy, I'd like to talk with her awhile. Do you remember what I said to you this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'm going to talk to her about it now."

Jean slipped down in a hurry, and departed with her big bundle of candy, looking both pleased and frightened.

Mrs. Dering came down in a moment, and not having entirely given up his imaginary widow, Mr. Congreve looked up in some trepidation to see if she was crying. But no; her face, though pale and sad, was perfectly tranquil, and her dress was cozy, comfortable brown.

After a few remarks about his walk, and the attractions of Canfield, conversation sank into an uneasy pause, and for some unknown reason, Mr. Congreve grew as red as a lobster. He had expected when he came that all he would have to do would be to fill out a check for several thousand, assure the demonstrative widow that she should never want, graciously allow the children

to call him Uncle Ridley, submit to be kissed at coming and going, then get out of the way, and confine his further acquaintance with them to the medium of occasional checks and a few letters, when,—well, did you ever!—here he sat, blushing like the most bashful lover in Christendom, and couldn't get up his courage to offer the widow help of any kind; had actually requested the youngest child to kiss, and call him Uncle Ridley, and was now entertaining an idea, which, had it been broached to him before leaving home, would have aroused his fiercest ridicule and amaze.

"You know, perhaps," he began, with a preparatory and strengthening sniff of snuff, "that I heard from Robert, some days ago?"

"Yes, sir, but I did not know it until last night."

"Humph!" he remembered his first greeting, and looked at her sharply. "Perhaps you did not know until then, just how his affairs stood?"

"No, sir, I did not. Our daughter Olive was her father's book-keeper and confidante; she knew all; but with his ever thoughtful consideration, he hoped to settle his business difficulty without worrying me, and I did not know until after I left you last night, how deep had been his trouble."

"Olive,—hum, ha!" said Mr. Congreve, nodding decidedly, and really looking pleased. "She's the one that said she hated me last night; good! I'll wager my hat she saw my letter; I like her spunk; she's a thorough Congreve. Your oldest, I suppose?"

"Oh no, she's quite a child in years, not yet sixteen."

"God bless my soul! you don't say so; only fifteen, and a book-keeper, and shares her father's troubles, and flies like a tiger into a man's face who don't do to suit her!—hum!

"I should like to see her again. I should, indeed."

Mrs. Dering could not restrain a smile at the utter amazement depicted in his face. He looked like a man who was undergoing a constant shower-bath, and didn't know what to make of it.

"I am very sorry," she said. "It grieves me that Olive has an exceedingly peculiar and unforgiving disposition. She was devoted to her father, and you are quite correct in your supposition that she saw your letter."

"And consequently don't want to see any more of me," said Mr. Congreve, with a quick nod, and as Mrs. Dering made no denial, he got up, and seizing his cane, began to walk up and down the room, and Mrs. Dering watching his face, saw therein a struggle of some kind. In truth, he was turning over in his mind a confession, which his obstinate pride struggled against, but which a new, strange feeling, that told him he did not want this family's contempt and hatred, claimed and conquered. He stopped in his restless walk, and faced her suddenly.

"I have been angry with my nephew for years, you know that, and you know my nature," he said sharply, all the more so to hide his feelings. "When I wrote that letter I meant every word of it, and as many more of the same kind, but some womanish weakness afterwards possessed me, and on the day that I heard of his death, I had a letter written to him, containing the check for six thousand."

Knowing him, as she did, Mrs. Dering well understood the feelings attendant upon this confession, and her face softened wonderfully as she said:

"I most regret, Mr. Congreve, that Robert did not live to know that you repented the cruel words that so grieved him. You know how proud and sensitive he was, and what a struggle it must have been to ask help of you. Your kindness, though too late, we all appreciate sincerely."

"Too late? The time is not out."

"But I shall let the store go. I have no sons, and I cannot have the care of it on my mind."

"Humph! May I ask what you intend to do?"

"Certainly. I have some money, four thousand in the bank, which will only be taken out in great necessity. As soon as possible, myself and children will begin to work. I am quite sure that I can secure a situation in the seminary three miles out of town, perhaps one also for Beatrice, my oldest daughter, and I hope before long to find something for the others."

Mr. Congreve opened his lips to speak, but was amazed beyond all comprehension, to find that he had no voice, he tried it again, then again, then broke abruptly into a hurried walk up and down the room, and flourished his scarlet handkerchief furiously.

"It was very kind of you to undertake such a long tiresome journey for our sakes, Mr. Congreve," said Mrs. Dering, beginning to feel a strange sympathy

for the old gentleman who could not hide how deeply he was moved.

"Not half what I ought to do," sputtered the inconsistent old man. "I always want to help where I see it is so worthy. I am proud indeed, to see,—where's my snuff-box—that Robert's wife and daughters are so worthy of him; I—I—will you allow me to settle four thousand per annum on you and your children?"

"Oh, no; thank you so gratefully; but I could not, so long as we are well; we can work and live quite comfortably, but if I am ever in trouble, if sickness drains our savings low, I will come to you gladly, and Robert will be so pleased."

It was no use to try and hide a sniff, so Mr. Congreve made a savage thrust at his eyes and wiped them both, blew his nose long and earnestly, coughed several times without any apparent necessity, and then subsided into a chair.

"I suppose you are right, Elizabeth Dering, and I like you better for it, though,—God bless my soul!—to think of you and the little girls working for bread and butter, while I count my hundreds of thousands and lay up in ease and laziness. Why, it makes me feel as I never supposed I could feel over any sorrow or privation that might come to Daniel Lathrop's daughter. But you're not like your father, no, you're not, and I'm glad of it, and if I had it to do over again, I would not banish Robert for marrying you."

If Mrs. Dering felt any resentment at the thrust against her father, she gave no evidence of it, but only thought with a quiet joy, mingled with a little longing, "If Robert was only here to hear him say it."

"I want to make another offer to you," said Mr. Congreve, tapping his stick lightly on the floor, and keeping his eyes averted, "and before I make it, I want to ask that you do not decide too quick. Take all the time you want, and whatever your decision will be, it will affect my happiness quite as much as it does yours."

He stopped there, and looked at her closely, as though contemplating a possible refusal; then went on interrogatively:

"You are going to work at something that will take all of your time, and, perhaps, keep you away from home; your daughters are going to work, such of them as are able, but, from my observation, there are three of them who can do nothing in a business line. Two of them, the twins, are strong and healthy and can look after themselves, but the third, Jean, what will you do with her?"

"You have touched the point that constitutes my greatest worry and

perplexity," answered Mrs. Dering, quite unconscious of the thoughts in his mind. "Jean is so delicate and frail that she requires constant attention; she is a child, and must be amused, and because of her affliction she can never be unattended. I have always taught her, and being fond of her books, she is much farther advanced than most children of her age, and I regret beyond all expression that she will have to fall behind now, she——"

"No, she won't," cried Mr. Congreve, who had been growing more excited as the speech progressed, and who now jumped out of his chair with every indication of breaking into a jig. "I assure you she won't, only let me have her; she shall have the best governess and attendant that money can bring. Every luxury and comfort that can be thought of, every wish gratified as soon as expressed and I—I—"

He was obliged to stop to get his breath, and grow a little more quiet, for Mrs. Dering was leaning back in her chair, quite white with amaze and contending emotions; so Mr. Congreve settled abruptly into a chair and smoothed his voice and manner down several degrees.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he continued. "I know it is sudden and, indeed, I am quite as astonished as you are; I am, indeed; but the moment I looked at the child last night, there was something in her face and manner, that reminded me so strongly of my own little Mabel, that my heart, old and dried up as it is, went right out to her. You know, Elizabeth Dering, how I loved my child. She would have been a woman now had she lived, but the Lord saw fit to take her, and—and—I—where's my snuff-box?—I suppose, of course, 'twas best; but here's your little one, yours and Robert's, afflicted like my little Mabel, and I am able to do everything by her that the sick and afflicted need. She shall travel, have the best of medical attention, and if the dear good Lord sees fit, perhaps she may be cured."

His fierce gray eyes were completely softened and full of tears, and the way that scarlet handkerchief flew about would have puzzled the closest watcher, but Mrs. Dering saw nothing, heard nothing but his last words:—"perhaps she may be cured." Almost unconsciously she stood up and held out her hands.

"Oh, Mr. Congreve, do you mean it, indeed?"

"God bless my soul! mean it? Yes, I do, indeed. I do, with all my heart. I'll feel like there was something for me to live longer for, and it will put new, strong life into my dried-up old being, to see a child's sunny face around my quiet home

and to know that it is for her good that I live. Ha! mean it? Yes, my dear madam; I should rather say I did mean it."

It really seemed as though Mrs. Dering could not speak for the many emotions that oppressed her, but after one or two glances at her face, which caused the old gentleman to scout at the idea of her refusing, he exclaimed with a fatherly benignity which sat oddly on his crusty abruptness:

"There, there, dear child, go right off up stairs and think about it. I'll just take a snooze right here by the fire, and then after awhile we'll talk again. I don't think the little girl will object. I said a few words to her this morning, and the idea pleased her, I am quite sure."

So Mrs. Dering retired after a few inarticulate words of thanks or joy, and after taking a tremendous tiff of snuff with such haste that it nearly strangled him, Mr. Congreve settled into a comfortable, dreamy state, where a face, long since gone from his home, looked out at him from the fire with a smile, and then beside it came another, sweet and patient, with soft eyes, and the two seemed to know each other, and as they smiled, the one that was now an angel faded slowly and left the other there looking at him with beseeching eyes.

There was the greatest commotion up stairs when Mrs. Dering told the assembled girls of Mr. Congreve's proposition. Jean instantly hid her face and began to cry, and influenced by this, the girls instantly pounced upon Mr. Congreve, and declared it should not be.

"Why do you cry, dearie?" asked Mrs. Dering.

"I don't know," answered Jean, somewhat bewildered, as she looked around on the indignant faces. "Because it seems so queer, I guess. I always thought I would be crooked, and have to go on a crutch, and Uncle Ridley,—he asked me to call him that,—says, perhaps, all the doctors can cure me, and—and it seems so good that I don't know how to be glad enough, so I just cry, you see."

Everybody "saw," figuratively speaking, for actual sight was quite impossible with the quick sympathetic tears that sprang to every one's eyes. Opinions flew about like papers in the wind, and Mrs. Dering could not make herself heard in the babel of tongues.

"Wait, girls, listen a moment," she exclaimed at last, and the commotion quieted, somewhat, to hear what she had to say.

"You know," she began, drawing Jean to her side, "I have been telling you this morning how very differently we would have to live, now; it will take all of us, working hard, to keep home comfortable, for the expenses of a family of such size are very heavy. Since realizing this, I have prayed long and earnestly to know what was best to do about Jeanie, for if I can secure the position at the seminary, I can only come home twice a week, and in the meantime, I could not bear the worry of her being here alone with you girls, even though I know you would be faithful and careful of the trust. Now comes Mr. Congreve's offer, with the promise that she shall have every attention, care and luxury, and better than all, that she shall see eminent and skillful physicians, whom we could never afford. I feel as though it was God's answer to my prayer, and that it is wicked to hesitate a moment, however much we all love our little girl, and hate to have her go so far away."

"But, oh, mama," cried Jean, with a sob of ecstatic joy and excitement, "just to think of my being straight and well, like Kittie and the rest! I would feel like I never could thank God and Uncle Ridley enough. Oh, I *may* go, mayn't I?"

"Yes, darling, you shall go."

So briefly was it settled.

Everybody was in raptures excepting Olive. She frowned severely, and looked bitterly pained, but she said nothing until the rest had left the room, then she came to Mrs. Dering's side. "Oh, mama, are you really going to let her go?"

"Yes, dear."

"How can you? Such a cruel, selfish, unfeeling—"

"Hush, Olive."

Olive did so instantly, and stood with her hands folded and eyes down, the very picture of bitter defiant distrust, and Mrs. Dering saw in an instant that any thing she might say in Mr. Congreve's behalf, would be wasted words, as Olive was fully prepared to misconstrue anything that the old gentleman might say or do. Nevertheless, she laid her hands on those tightly folded ones, and said gently: "Olive dear, we must be charitable and forgiving. Remember, Mr. Congreve is old and very peculiar; he always was, and one's peculiarities increase as they grow older. You heard what I said about him this morning, and you see he must be kind at heart, to have taken such a long journey, just for our

sakes."

Olive made no answer, and her mother sighed a little.

"In regard to the estrangement between him and papa, I think he went to extremes, as hot passionate tempered people are apt to do; and yet, he is not wholly at fault, for I grieve very much to say, that in the quarrel between my father and Mr. Congreve, father was much to blame; he did very wrong, and it was quite natural for Mr. Congreve to feel a violent hatred for all his family, and to object to his nephew marrying into it. That Mr. Congreve has many times repented his harsh treatment, I know to a certainty; but he is proud, as well as hasty, and pride in an old man is harder to battle with than in a young one. In speaking of papa a few minutes ago down stairs, he could not restrain the tears. He says he wrote that letter, and meant it, but that on the day he heard of papa's death, he had another letter, and the required check ready to send to him."

"I don't believe it!" interrupted Olive passionately. "If he did, he wrote it after he heard, just so as to tell you so."

"Oh, my child!" exclaimed Mrs. Dering, sadly, "how your hasty, distrustful spirit grieves me. You cannot conceive of the misery it will cause you, when you are brought to face the world, where there is so much to distrust, and so much that must be overlooked and blindly believed in. Can't you allow for others, some of the pride, the wilful temper and bitter hastiness that you know so well what it is to battle against, when I tell you that the greatest point of difference between your own and your great-uncle's disposition, is, that he is as hasty one way as you are the other; can't you be more charitable to him?"

"Oh, mama! *I*, like *him*?" cried Olive.

"Yes, dear, except that when you are once angry or hurt, you nurse your pride, and repel every advance towards a reconciliation. Mr. Congreve is more generous; if he really sees he is wrong, he is as impulsive to mend as he was passionate to break. He is bitter and distrustful from a long and often sad and disappointed struggle with the world; you are bitter and distrustful—for what, my dear child, I never could imagine, for we all love you most tenderly, and in this grief and trouble which God has sent for some good reason, you have been an inexpressible comfort to us all."

Olive withdrew her hand from her mother's clasp, and hurried away without a word. Mrs. Dering thought she was hurt, perhaps angry, and sighed deeply; but

Olive had gone to hide her tears, and resolve to do differently, but all her resolves were made without asking for higher strength and help.

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# CHAPTER VIII.

# ODDS AND ENDS.

"My patience alive!" exclaimed Kittie, slamming the stove door open, and poking in among the ashes and cinders with wrathful haste, "if this abominable fire hasn't gone out; I never did in all my life! burnt up a bushel of kindling, too, dear me; water in the tea-kettle stone cold, not a blessed thing cooking; no more stuff in here to start the fire up, and Olive waiting for her breakfast this minute to go to the store, good *gracious*!" and having freed her mind, Kittie ran to the back stairs, jerked the door open, and shouted with much unseemly energy, —"Kathleen Dering!"

"Just so; don't strain your lungs that much again, I'm coming, clear the track," responded Kat cheerfully, and came clattering down with her shoes unlaced, and her nose as red as a beet.

"Bless the people, but isn't it cold, though. Whew! Jupiter Ammons! What a relief it is to say something when you're most friz. You don't look cheerful, sister mine."

"I don't care; it's your week to build the fire and mine to set the table, and I think you were real mean, to go to sleep again, when you know Olive has to have her breakfast at seven," grumbled Kittie, flying about distractedly, while Kat sat on the floor and whistled "Down in a coal-mine," as she laced her shoes.

"That's the truth, my dear, melancholy like the present days. But you just skip into the dining-room and set your table, and I'll have a few words to say to this stove in private, if I don't freeze stiff beforehand;" and Kat jumped up briskly, having compromised on a lace with one shoe, by tying the strings about her ankle. "No kindling to begin with! Oh, this is bliss! Now for a trot to the woodshed," and away went Kat flying down the yard and back again in a minute with her arms full.

"I'll be late," said Olive, putting her head in the door, just as the fire began to snap with its new supply of kindling.

"Sorry, but doing the best I can," answered Kat, pausing a minute to warm her numb fingers. "Can you get along on bread and coffee for this morning?"

"I suppose I'll have to," answered Olive, none too graciously, and shut the door again with a snap.

"Cross-patch, draw the latch, sit at the fire and spin," sang Kat; then the door opened again, and Ernestine came in.

"Dear me, how cold it is in here, and Bea hasn't got the sitting-room fire built either. I'd just as soon be out doors."

"Go on, and let's see how long you'll stay," said Kat, shaking an egg into her coffee. "If the fires don't get along fast enough to suit you, pitch in and build one of them; there's piles of difference between that and standing around watching some one else."

Ernestine chose to ignore the remark, and stood warming her fingers, while she contemplated the frosty window-pane.

"To-day's lesson-day, so of course I hate it," she said, with an air of settled resignation. "I never thought I'd teach music, that's sure. I never was cut out for it, so neither the children, nor I, get along well. Is there anything I can do to help out here?"

"No, breakfast is ready; just trot the bread in to the table. I'll bring the butter, and the coffee will be done in a few minutes; that's all we've got for breakfast this morning," said Kat, vanishing down the cellar stairs.

"I could eat two hundred and fifty griddle cakes, I know!" exclaimed Kittie, as they collected about the table, and Bea began rattling the cups, and the bread started around.

"Come down a hundred and seventy-five," laughed Ernestine who had taken time, despite all depressing circumstances, to twist a rose-colored ribbon in her sunny hair. "I believe it's going to snow real hard; don't I wish those children wouldn't come to-day. You all can't imagine how horrible it is to teach music."

"Well, you have the easiest time of any of us," said Kittie.

"You ought to cook and wash dishes awhile," cried Kat.

"Or keep the house," added Bea.

"Or have to stay all day long in the dreariest store in town and keep books," echoed Olive.

"I thought you loved to work so?" said Ernestine, in answer to this last comparison. "You're always preaching independence."

"So I do," answered Olive, setting her cup down with crackable force. "I never would be idle, but I could choose more pleasant kind of work than sitting in Mr. Dane's office all day; it's the dreariest place I ever got into."

"Well, anyhow, Christmas is coming," said Bea, nodding cheerfully over the coffee-urn.

"More's the pity," said Kittie disconsolately. "We're not going to get anything; it'll be awful poky."

"But mama'll be home for ten days; oh, bliss!" cried Kat, waving her teaspoon, and every cloudy face brightened. "Can't we give her something, girls?"

"I don't see how," said Ernestine. "It takes every cent we all earn to keep things going. Who ever thought we'd be so poor? Just think of last Christmas, how glorious!"

Everybody remembered, and faces saddened again. How gay the house had been in evergreens! how mysterious the locked parlors, where all knew, a tree stood, branching up to the ceiling; how blissfully happy everybody had been during the two weeks when the world becomes one in spirit and truth, and the god of good-will wields the sceptre and wears the crown! Father had been with them, dear, unselfish, great-hearted papa, whose every exertion had been to make them all happy and whose dearest hope and prayer had been that his girls might be noble, splendid women, with pure, true hearts and the spirit of God therein.

"Olive, will you bring some butter when you come home? This is the last drop," said Kittie, scraping the dish, and collecting the silver, after the meal was finished, as it was very soon, for breakfasts were hurried now-a-days.

"Yes; two pounds? That's the third time this month; our bill will be pretty big. If I'm very busy I will not be home to dinner."

"Sha'n't I fix some lunch for you?"

"I haven't time to wait. Where's my rubbers?"

"I don't know. Kat, did you have Olive's rubbers last night?"

"Yes, and I don't know any more than Adam where I put them. Look in the closet, Olive, and I'll run up stairs and see," answered Kat, departing in haste.

"Well, I wish you would let my things alone," said Olive testily, throwing down her mittens and veil, and diving into the closet; the general closet, as it was called, where everything, from the kitchen stove-hook to the girls best Sunday-go-to-meeting bonnets, were apt to find a lodging at odd times. "I never can be on time," she muttered, slamming things around and comparing various odd rubbers. "This closet looks like a demented bedlam. I'd be ashamed, that's what I would."

"I can't do everything," answered Bea in a hurry, feeling that the thrust was meant for her. "Because I'm housekeeper, it doesn't rest on me to keep everything in perfect order, when you all help to muss up."

"It's like distraction without mama, anyhow," declared Kittie, departing for the kitchen, with her hands full of dishes, and scowling defiantly at the stove, where the fire was sizzling with a lazy sputter, while the dish-water taking advantage of the lull in heat, cooled at leisure.

"Pretty near as bad without Huldah," was Ernestine's comment. "I'm nearly starved for a splendid good meal like we used to have, when we could eat all we wanted, and didn't have to think how much it cost, or worry with cooking it."

"You do less than anybody towards getting it," said Olive, coming flushed and impatient from her vain search. "If Kat doesn't leave my things alone, I'll—"

"Let not your angry passions rise," cried Kat, coming in with a rubber whirling on each hand, and quoting her copy-book with cheerful disregard for any one's anger. "Here's your rubbers, my dear, and I found them right where I put them, on the end of our mantel-piece, where I put them in plain sight so as not to forget to bring them down this morning, as my prophetic soul felt a row in the air if they were not in sight at six and a half, sharp."

"You talk like a lunatic," was Olive's sole response as she drew them on.

"It's my only talent, dear," answered Kat cheerfully, beginning to work on the table, where she made the dishes rattle.

Bea trailed slowly through the room with her broom and dust pan, and a rather discontented face. Olive tied on her veil and hurried away to her daily business; Ernestine went to practice a new piece 'till the first scholar should arrive; and Kittie and Kat were left to the bliss of dish-washing and kitchen work. So began the day.

This was several weeks after events last recorded, and all things in the Dering household had changed much.

Jean had not gone to Virginia at once. Her wardrobe had needed complete repairing, and during the time so occupied, Mr. Congreve spent much of it in the city, sending therefrom various and beautiful things for Jean, and a dress for each of the girls, doing so without permission, knowing, that if asked, it would be refused him.

Kittie and Kat had been withdrawn from school, and studied at home with the older girls. Their part of the work fell in the kitchen. With Mrs. Dering and Huldah for teachers, they had studied the easier branches of cooking, and the crooks and by-ways of that department of general work. They proved apt and merry pupils, and learned their tasks quite readily, so, that while the girls missed the wonderful dishes that Huldah had been able to "knock up," they were daily fed on very palatable food, considering the age and newness of the young cooks.

Bea was chief housekeeper, kept an eye over general affairs, sat at the head of the table, and had commenced doing her hair in a most dignified way; filling with much girlish satisfaction, the position of "Miss Dering," and "lady of the house."

Olive was book-keeper in Mr. Dane's store, and really more head of the family than Bea, as she kept all accounts, settled the bills, and was frequently consulted on some questionable matters, involving the home expenses. To Ernestine fell the easy lot of four pupils in music.

Affording her no opportunities of display, or avenue for compliments or praise, she thought it very hard indeed, and found it bitterly uncongenial, to her ideas of independence, if, indeed, she had ever possessed any really tangible ones. She wanted to help, as a matter of course, especially as all the rest did; but such an ordinary, self-denying way was sadly distasteful to her, and she still had a vague, but pleasing, idea of becoming a great prima-donna and electrifying vast concourses of people, who would praise, admire, and pay her largely. Unfortunately, however, such positions do not lie around in wait, and invite

some one to honor them with an acceptance; but, in spite of such a discouraging fact, Ernestine held tenaciously to her pleasing idea, and spent much time in thinking how delightful all things would be, when that time arrived.

Mrs. Dering had secured the desired position in the seminary, three miles out of Canfield, and had a flourishing class in both music and languages. The stage came in twice a week after mail, and at these times the anxious mother made hurried trips home, and these few hours were snatches of greatest joy and comfort to all parties, and especially comforting to the girls, who found the first few weeks of the new life very trying, and oftentimes discouraging.

On the next Tuesday evening, when the stage came in, Mrs. Dering found a thick, tempting letter, with the Staunton post mark, and Jean's prim, childish hand writing. There had come several short letters from the little girl, who said she would wait until she saw everything about her new home before writing a very long letter to describe it; so it was evident now that the long letter had come, and with this extra joy for herself and the girls, Mrs. Dering hurried home, where everything was radiantly bright for her reception, and where the girls looked and felt as though care had rolled from them for the time, or was at least so lightened, that it seemed quite gone.

They did not read the letter until after supper, and on the evenings when mother was with them, this meal was always a long one, for there was so much to talk about, and somehow it seemed so natural and old-time like, to linger about the table, that they invariably did so.

After awhile they went into the sitting-room, leaving the dishes until later, when mama said they would all help; and seating themselves, with many smiles and nods of satisfaction, about the fire, prepared to hear all that Jean had to say about her new home.

*Congreve Hall, Staunton, Virginia,*
*November, 29th, 18—.*

"DEAR PRECIOUS MAMA AND SISTERS:

"I promised to write you a long letter, and tell you all about Congreve Hall, as soon as I had seen everything about it, and felt well enough acquainted to tell it well. It is so beautiful and big that I hardly know how to begin; I do wish the girls could see it, especially Ernestine; she likes splendid, grand things so much.

"We came out of Staunton, which is a lovely city, in a beautiful carriage, which was waiting for us at the train. It was a lovely day, and the sunshine was so warm that Uncle Ridley had the top all put back, so that I could see everything. The road was so wide and very smooth that the carriage just rolled along like we were on a floor, and the horses were such splendid big black ones, with harness all covered with shiny things, and they acted as if they were as proud as could be. The driver was dressed beautifully, nicer than the gentlemen dress at home for every day, and when I got into the carriage he lifted his tall hat, and called me 'Miss Dering.' It sounded so funny I pretty nearly laughed; but Uncle Ridley looked as if it was all right, so I thought perhaps I had better not.

"Pretty soon we began to go up hill, and I thought we must have come very far because the horses went so fast; but we had only come half-way. The leaves had not fallen then, and the mountains reaching up so high, way ahead of us, did look like some beautiful pictures that we used to see when papa took us to the city with him. After awhile we came to a big gate, oh, so tall, and such high posts, with figures on top of them, holding big lamps with ever so many globes, and Uncle Ridley says some night, he will light them, so I can see how bright it makes it all around, and way down the road. We went through, and then the road began to wind around, and it was perfectly lovely; we went up and up, under the grandest trees, and after a little ways, there began to be statuary sitting around under them, and beautiful seats made like the limbs of trees, all twisted together. I saw a flight of stone steps, and they came up the hill from another gate, for people that walk, and they look as white as snow in the green grass. All of a sudden we turned around a big curve, and I just screamed right out; I was so surprised, and Uncle Ridley said that was Congreve Hall. Why, mama, it is big enough to be a hotel in the city, and ever so many people could go in the front door all at once, it is so wide, and such lovely marble steps go up to it. There are

two big towers, and two funny little squatty ones, with a big stone railing around the top, and there are porches, terraces Uncle Ridley says they call them, all of stone. They go pretty near around the house, and then end in steps, broad ones, that make a big curve and come down to the ground. I think that's a mighty funny way to build them. The house is such a pretty grey color, and some places there is moss growing all over the sides, and there are ever so many vines too, that Uncle Ridley says would hold me up, they are so old and strong. Inside everything is so big and grand and dark, that I was afraid at first, and never went around anywhere unless uncle went with me; but I'm getting more used to it now, and like to hunt around, in the big rooms, and walk around in the splendid halls. My rooms, I have four you know, are all furnished so sweet in blue and white, with the dearest little easy chairs and sofas, and the cunningest little bed, with an angel on top holding the pretty curtains that come down all around. I just thought at first that I would want to stay in bed all the time. My maid has a little room just off my bath room, and she is such a funny girl. She combs my hair and dresses me, and all that, and talks all the time just like a monkey. Her name is Bettine, and she always calls me Miss Jean. My governess, Miss Serle, is such a dear, kind lady, and I'm going to study awful hard, so as to know lots and make you happy, dear mama, when I come home. Uncle Ridley is just the dearest, nicest, kindest uncle that ever lived, I'm sure. He is so good to me, and I love him like everything. Sometimes he tells me about Mabel, and then he takes out his big red handkerchief and cries; and I'm almost glad I'm lame so I can look like her, and make him happier. Mabel Congreve must have been a very sweet little girl, and very pretty; there are pictures of her all over the house, but the one in the library is the prettiest. She is all dressed in white, with such lovely yellow curls, and sitting in the very little blue velvet chair that I ride around in now. Uncle Ridley always sits in there, and I do believe he talks to her. I have all of her things, except her pony; he died, and mine is a new white one; such a darling, and I go to ride every pleasant day in her little buggy, with beautiful soft cushions and silk curtains. Her chair is on wheels, and I can ride all over the house by myself, or have Bettine draw me, whichever I want. All of her things are just as nice as new, because Uncle Ridley has been so careful of them. Yesterday he brought me her crutch, and said he wanted me to use it. It is such a shiny, beautiful black wood, with a silver rim and pad on the bottom, so it don't make any noise, and a soft top covered with blue velvet.

"I always take my breakfast in my room, because Uncle Ridley does not get up until so late, and it would be very dreary in the big dining-room for me. After breakfast I take a ride either in the house or out, then play awhile, or do as I

please until ten; then Miss Serle comes to my room, and my lessons last until twelve. Dinner is gloomy. There is a servant stands behind Uncle Ridley, and he is so tall and solemn looking in his white vest and necktie, that I don't feel comfortable at all. After dinner I play or ride until two o'clock, then I have my lessons and my music 'till four, and after that Miss Serle almost always reads to me awhile. I practice from five o'clock for a half an hour, then play 'till eight o'clock, and that is time for me to go to bed. Some days Uncle Ridley takes me into Staunton with him.

"I believe I have told you everything now that you asked me about, and I've tried hard to write a nice letter, because you were always so particular about it, I've looked in the dictionary for all the words I wasn't sure of, and I hope you will not find many mistakes. Do please, dear mama and girls, write me long, long letters, because I get so lonesome and homesick for you all. Every night when I say my prayers and ask God to take care of you all, I can hardly keep from crying, and sometimes I do, and then Bettine looks so sorry and most like she wanted to cry too.

"The doctor that Uncle Ridley wants to have me see first, is very sick, you know I told you, but he is getting better, and perhaps I will not have to wait so long. Oh, my dear mama, I know you ask God to let me grow straight, but please ask Him a very great many times, so that He will be quite sure to hear. I do.

"I am going into Staunton with Uncle Ridley to put this in the office myself, so you will know it came right from me with a kiss on it.

"Good-bye, my dear, darling mama and sisters,

"Your own

"JEANIE."

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# CHAPTER IX.

# WHAT OLIVE HEARD.

MR. DANE had closed his office at four o'clock. Nobody cared why he did so, and when he informed his book-keeper that she could go home, she never stopped to wonder why, but wiped her pens, straightened her desk, got into her wrappings and went, with her mind fixed on a certain picture that needed much that these two vacation hours could give.

It was snowing very hard, great blinding flakes that came whirling defiantly into your eyes, nose, and mouth; almost preventing a necessary amount of sight and breath: and they had collected to such depth, that walking was a matter of much labor, and only a few plucky pedestrians were out to enliven the quiet shrouded streets. Olive plunged rapidly along with her head down and seemed more engrossed with her own thoughts, than with any contemplation of the weather, for she whisked the impudent flakes aside and seemed to be looking down at something that was neither of earth, earthy, or of snow, snowy, but quite beyond the realm of either. She was scowling much the same as usual only in something of a puzzled way, that had less of the impatient dissatisfied tinge to it than was customary. In fact she was thinking of that last talk she had had with her mother, before Mr. Congreve went back to Virginia, when she had resolved in a vague hasty way, that she was going to do differently; and really, how little good, or change, had come from the resolution. She didn't think, to begin with, that she was any worse than the rest, or that she needed changing any more, but rather any thing, than be like Mr. Congreve! So she summed up all she knew of him, resolved on what was disagreeable, and began to model herself accordingly. So to begin with she was no longer so hasty or bitter, in speech I mean, for her inner-self was not touched, she only kept it all to herself now, instead of speaking it out as formerly, but if she thought herself changed there, she was the only one deceived, for our inner minds do not always require the aid of language to photograph themselves before the world. Next, instead of staying with the girls out of store hours, and running the risk of losing her temper, she held herself sternly aloof, always in the security of her own room, and at the end of a week was apt to say to herself with some satisfaction:

"There, I surely have done well; haven't been mad with any one this week, which is more than the other girls can say;" and there never came any thought that the sisters were hurt over her manner, for, indeed, she had worked herself up to the bitter belief, that they did not want her, she was so ugly, and so unlike them in all ways.

Now what puzzled her was the girls. Here she had worked (yes, she thought she had worked), she certainly ought to be improved, and yet they seemed to think no more of her than before. Way down in Olive's heart, was a longing,—choked and starved, that was beginning to assert itself. When home held mother and father and everything that could make a girl contented, she had not felt, or rather, listened to it; she compelled herself to be without it; but now, when they were left alone, when their daily life and happiness was so utterly dependent upon each other, she began to realize how she was out of the loving circle that bound her sisters together, and what a gulf of her own make, seemed to lie between them. She stood beside it in frequent contemplation, but never recognized her own handiwork, so she eyed it bitterly, and thought them cruelly unkind.

This was what she was thinking about as she plunged through the storm, looking like an animated snow-figure, so powdered was she; and regarding herself for a moment, Olive went round to the back door, so as to dispose of her ladened garments and brush off her shoes This done, she went into the kitchen, where a warm atmosphere still lingered, and, preferring to be alone, sat down there, with her feet in the oven and her chin in her hands, and once more fell into a brown study. Only a few minutes later, Kittie came into the dining-room for something, and on going back, failed to close the door, so that the murmur of voices came quite distinctly out to the quiet kitchen. A discussion was warmly in progress, and in a minute Olive started out of her reverie at hearing her name spoken.

"What's the use? Olive knows, or ought to know better." It was Ernestine's voice.

"But, mama says," interposed Bea, mildly persuasive, "that we don't try hard enough; we give up too soon."

"Bother," cried Kat, "would she have us always playing the 'gentle sister, meek and mild,' and go whining about Olive as though her company was a great honor. I'm sure we had a season of always begging her to go with us, and didn't

she snap us up like a rat-trap?"

"She—well—she's very odd you know," said Bea, wondering if her quiver of defense would outlast the arrows of complaint.

"Yes, odd, as an odd shoe," laughed Kat with a yawn.

"What did mama say to you, Bea?" asked Ernestine.

"She said that Olive's greatest fault was being so nasty and sensitive, and that because she was rather plain and—"

"She isn't," interrupted Kittie, with much energy. "I think she has beautiful eyes, if she just wouldn't scowl so much, and when she laughs her mouth and teeth are just as pretty, only she never laughs more'n once a month, so people don't know it. Not one of us has such lovely thick hair as she has, and if she just would wave or crimp it a little bit in front, I think—well, I think she would be real pretty." And overcome with this valuable earnest defence, Kittie sat down and looked complacent.

"When I see Olive Dering crimping her hair, and laughing instead of scowling, I will look for the end of the world," said Ernestine, with some asperity, as she walked over to the glass and surveyed her own hair, which Kittie had intimated was inferior to Olive's. "She can't do it, she was made to frown and stay by herself and she better do it."

"You don't mean it, Ernestine, you know you don't," said Bea, in a tone of calm conviction, and beginning to feel that the duties of elder sister imposed a warmer defense of this abused one, upon her. "I want to tell you how I feel, though it may be nothing as you all do. I really believe Olive thinks we do not want her, because, for so long time lately, we have just let her alone, and she always goes——"

"None of us ever receive a special invitation to join this circle," interrupted Kat, briskly. "Why should she?"

"I don't know, but she is so strange," answered Bea, rather helplessly, but not giving up. "And because she is so, we have sort a' stayed together and let her alone. When we used to try to get her to go with us, I think she always refused, because she thought she was ugly, and we did not try long enough to overcome this feeling, and now she imagines we don't want her."

"Stuff," persisted Kat, "I wouldn't act that way if I was as ugly as a wilted pumpkin and cross-eyed. What's the use?"

"None," promptly responded Beatrice. "But if you were like her, very likely you'd feel as she does."

"Catch me," laughed Kat, jumping up and making a scornful spin on her heel. "What do you say, Kittie?"

"I had my say a minute ago," answered Kittie, who was evidently thinking out something over the flames.

"I wonder what makes her hate Uncle Ridley so?" was Ernestine's query, as she turned from the glass, having satisfied herself that Kittie was certainly wrong about Olive's hair.

"I never could imagine," answered Bea, with evident curiosity.

"She won't call him, uncle, and the dress he sent her is in mama's room, and Olive says, she'll never wear it."

"May be she would give it me," suggested Kat. "I think hers was prettier than any of the rest."

"Well, I don't," said Ernestine, taking exceptions to this remark also. "Why hers is black?"

"I'm perfectly aware of that, also, that yours is purple, Bea's brown, mine and Kittie's grey; tell me something I don't know," said Kat flippantly. "I wish ours were black, it's so stylish."

That black was more stylish than purple, was an idea quite beneath Ernestine's notice, so she went back to her former query.

"I would like to know, anyhow, what makes Olive dislike him so." For Mrs. Dering had not thought it necessary that the girls should know of their father's final appeal, and Mr. Congreve's reception thereof; so they were all equally curious, and so, nobody being able to give an answer, Kat ventured an assertion.

"She hates him just because it's a part of her religion to hate everybody, and, to go around with her fist doubled up ready to fight. I believe she'd hate us with a little trying."

"Kat," cried Beatrice, with some severity. "You must not speak so, it is wrong, and you don't mean it Why, if any one else was to say such things about Olive, you'd pretty near fight."

"To be sure I would," said Kat with ready inconsistency. "I truly think Olive is a trump, and I'd cheerfully knock anybody down who said she wasn't. I don't know what we would have done without her in the trouble, and I do wish she wasn't so odd, and stayed away from us so."

"She makes me think of a chestnut burr," said Kittie resorting to figurative comparisons. "There's lots of good in her, but she won't let any one get at it. If we try, she shuts up and gets prickly. I never thought much about it, until here lately, and then she was so splendid, and knew how to do everything; and, I begin to think that there is ever so much more to her than we think, even if she is queer, and don't seem to like us much."

"Well, I wouldn't worry so about her," interposed Ernestine, as though the subject wearied her. "She evidently don't like us excessively, or care about being with us, so leave her alone. Bea, come let's try our duet."

Olive had sat perfectly still, and heard all this, quite unconscious that her feet were getting chilly in the cold oven, or that, perhaps, she should have notified them of her presence. She had a vague feeling, as of one trying hard to solve a problem, and pausing suddenly in her vain efforts, to listen to some one solving it for her. But surely they could not be right! Olive left her seat noiselessly, and went up the back stairs to her room. It was bitterly cold there, but she wrapped her shawl about her, and sat down by the window, where the fast falling snow was almost hidden in a heavy wrap of early twilight. Olive did not often pray. To be sure she said her prayers every night, as properly and methodical as clockwork, and was very particular about always kneeling down, as though position could atone for any lacking earnestness; for she was just as apt to be thinking of her account-book, or Mr. Dane's last order, as of anything, in the hurried words that slid over her lips. Yes, she prayed in this way once in every twenty-four hours, but there never came to her any of those sudden, passionate appeals for help or strength, when the whole heart leaps to the lips, or pleads dumbly, in its great need. Notwithstanding all teachings to the point, it never really occurred to her that God had as quick and sympathetic an ear for a little prayer of few words over some trivial worry, given silently in the busy kitchen, or on the crowded street, as He had for those when she knelt down at night, and absently asked for her daily bread, and to forgive as she was forgiven, and then

get properly into bed and refrained from speaking again, lest she spoilt the effect. At any rate, the first prayer that had ever sprung to her lips, with the suddenness of utter helplessness, came from them now, as she sat there, trying to think and battle with hasty conclusions that would spring up:

"Oh God, please don't let me try to think it out alone, because I will get it all wrong if I do. If it is my fault, make me feel it and know how to act, and don't let me be so odd, or whatever it is that makes me feel as I do."

With the earnestness of the request, came a quiet feeling that she felt to be her answer, and all the time she sat there, which was until the supper-bell rang, she felt more contented than ever before with her thoughts. Not that God immediately took away her faults, and left her placid and quiet, with nothing to battle against, because He does not do that way; it can never be said to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant," if we've done nothing; and the battling with our faults and worries is just as much our work, as the successful doing of some great deed that may bring both God's pleasure and an earthly halo.

When Mrs. Dering came home on Friday evening, she was quick to note a change of some kind, not but what every one seemed the same at a quick observation, but, there was a something. Now don't think that any thing so unnatural and improbable had happened, as Olive being bereft of all faults, and suddenly clothed in the guise of a household angel, because there hadn't, there never does; but she had thought much, and Olive had a mind capable of more deep reasoning thought than most girls of fifteen; she stopped fighting herself with weapons solely of her own make, but sent many a little wordless prayer for a different feeling, and then she found that it came more easily, and more completely triumphed over its enemy. To-night she had a little ribbon tied in her hair, only a small thing, but something unusual for Olive, and Mrs. Dering noticed that the bow at her throat was just of the same shade, also something unusual. Now over just this little thing, Olive had stood in silence, while two feelings within her held an argument:

"What's the use," said one; "you're as ugly as fate, and the girls will laugh; besides if you go in the sitting-room after supper, they will say you just did it to make them say something."

"No such thing," retorted the other, "You've no right to think such things, when they've given you no reason. Go on right down stairs, you know they want you, they said they did." And so she had gone down immediately,—perhaps she

took a little pleasure in defying herself,—and though the girls saw the ribbons the moment she came in, no one said anything, for there came a feeling to each, that she would not want them spoken of.

Mrs. Dering noticed also that when they were gathered in the sitting-room after supper, that instead of sitting off in the far corner of the lounge as usual, she had joined the circle about the table, and was busy on some worsted work.

Ernestine was rocking idly with her pretty feet displayed on the fender, and her prettier hands clasped above her head, in an attitude both graceful and becoming. She was surveying the group about the table, where all hands were busy, and all tongues going merrily, and more than once her eyes went from Olive's ribbon's to Olive's face, so changed under the effect of a smile. They were talking of father now, with their voices lowered a little, and looking up frequently to the large portrait, as if expecting him to answer, and she wondered a little, what could be the matter with Olive, that she talked so much more than usual.

"A penny for your thoughts Ernestine," said Bea, in a pause that came presently.

"I was just thinking how hard it was to be disappointed," answered Ernestine, as pathetically as though the whole world had grieved her in some way.

"What's your disappointment! tell us," cried Kittie with interest; and everybody looked up expectant at the young lady who "had a disappointment."

"Why, I want to study with great masters and be a splendid wonderful singer, with the whole world at my feet, and sending me elegant presents," said Ernestine, who always liked to tell her little grievances or wants, and receive condolence or help.

"What a modest desire," laughed Kat. "Hasn't some one else got a disappointment, because they can't sit on a gold throne and eat sauce made of pearls with a gold spoon?"

"I've got one," said Bea, with her head over her sewing. "I'd like to have mama stay home and be easy, and I'd like to have lots of pretty clothes and some real lace."

"Well, I've got one," announced Kat briskly. "I don't like being poor. I hate pots and kettles worse than mad dogs. I would like a wheel-barrow full of butter-

scotch every day and a pair of slippers with blue tops and French heels. I haven't got any talent, so I needn't worry about never being able to bring it out; it would scare me to death if I had one, because talented people are always expected to do something big. That's all, and I don't know really where the disappointment is, but I guess it's the butter-scotch and slippers. What's yours Kittie?"

"I don't know," answered Kittie, with a sigh and a glance at her hands. "I guess mine's having to wash dishes, and not having black eyes, and not being able to travel all over the world."

"Well, I've got one too," said Olive, to every one's intense surprise, as they did not suppose that she was paying any attention to what they were saying, much less to join them. "I'd like to be as beautiful as the loveliest portrait ever seen, and be able to paint the grandest pictures in the world."

Everyone was silent with astonishment. For Olive to express two wishes, and such exaggerated ones, before them all, was something no one could fully appreciate who had not heard her repeatedly ridicule the same when uttered by the others.

Mrs. Dering had been sewing and listening with a smile, but now she glanced up, met Olive's eyes, and the smile brightened warmly, and there was something in it that made Olive's heart feel happy and glad that she had made her little speech, though she had hesitated before doing so.

"I don't suppose anybody cares to hear about my disappointments," said Mrs. Dering, not looking as if she had any.

"Yes, we do; I was just going to ask," exclaimed Kittie, moving closer. "I know you've got heaps, and they're not about clothes and butter-scotch, and eyes, and doing great things either. Now tell us all."

"I don't see why I should have heaps," began Mrs. Dering, with a laugh. "Is it because I am so old, or do I look as though I had been weighted down with them?"

"Why, no indeed; but didn't you ever have any, really?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear girls, many; that at the time, perhaps seemed very hard and bitter; but I came through them, and have seen some happy, happy days where their shadow never fell. I tell you what would be a very bitter disappointment to me now, and that would be to have my girls grow to

womanhood, and each be discontented with her lot. I would feel as though all my love and labor had been in vain. It is my constant regret that I cannot give you each a complete and finished education, and supply home with all the comforts we love; but when I look at you now, all working so bravely, and receiving with so little complaint your rigid discipline, it makes me happy indeed, because I see in you, a womanly strength and character, that a life of ease, comfort, and few self-denials, could never have brought out clearly, and I know that God has chosen this way to make our girls the dear noble women we want them. I would that He had seen best to leave father with us, but He did not, so we must just feel that He still loves, and is interested in us, and have just as much thought for His approval as when *he* was with us. Now, about your disappointments;" and there she paused to glance around, but each young face was warm with interest, so she went on with her cheery smile:

"Here Ernestine, to begin with, wants to conquer the world with song, and receive elegant presents. Dearie, to conquer the world, the great, many-faced world, one's head and heart must be capable and willing to assume any and every guise; to stoop to every form of policy that secures the fickle smile; to bend to all its freaks, until it is subject to yours; and after you had done this, after you had spent your life's sweetest and purest years in studying the art of deceit and triumph, and had brought the beautiful wicked world to your feet, would you be quite happy? Could you ever be again the fresh, untouched, pure hearted creature that you are now? I'm afraid not, dear; and your warmest, greatest longing, would come back to home and girlhood, when you only knew the world's wickedness by hearsay, when you owed it nothing, and never heard its grasping cry for pay for its homage.

"Bea wants pretty clothes, and regrets that mother must work. Quite natural, dear, we all love pretty clothes, and I hope some time we can have all we want, providing it does not become a chief and selfish desire. Mother loves to work for her girls, and only regrets that it must take her from them so much of the time, for the dearest light to a mother's life, the brightest cloud that receives that life's setting sun, is found in the circle of her children's faces. To go back to Bea, she wants some real lace; I hope she may have it some time; it is a beautiful and valuable addition to a lady's wardrobe. But I am quite sure that the face of my Beatrice could never look lovelier over a garb of rarest and most exquisite workmanship than it does to-night, over a pretty linen band, with its womanly thoughtfulness and care."

Bea flushed joyfully, and bent lower over her sewing, while mother went on,

with a glance at Kat's expectant face:

"Next comes one of papa's 'boys' with such a hodgepodge of a disappointment, that I can hardly make out which part of it grieves her, or if any does. She don't like pots and kettles, but they often teach us unromantic but necessary lessons that fans and perfumery never could. A wheel-barrow per day of butter-scotch would soon leave her more than she could manage or desire, and slippers with satin tops and high heels, would only prove themselves useless and injurious. She also says she has no talent, but she has a rare and valuable one, that of making the best of all her little trials and grievances, of keeping her daily sunshine free from clouds, and making home happy with her cheerful, happy heart."

Kittie gave her mother's hand a grateful squeeze, for praise given to either of the twins was dear to the other; and Kat sank out of her sight in her chair, quite overcome, and resolved heartily to cultivate her talent to the uttermost.

"Now, our other 'boy,'" continued Mrs. Dering, smiling down into Kittie's upturned face, "wants black eyes, don't like dish-washing, and would like to travel. I wonder if she thinks I would give up these brave, true, trusty blue eyes, for all the black ones in the universe. They show what a warm, faithful heart lies within, a heart that shares its twin's talent for making sunshine out of shadows, and home happy with its laughter. A life without a dish-pan misses a good disciplinarian, and, sometimes, a teacher of patience; it's like pots and kettles—unpleasant but necessary, so the sooner we take hold, when we have it to handle, and the better the grace with which we handle it, just so much have we brought our rebellious likes and dislikes under control, and made the best of our duty. While you are getting ready to travel, dear, read the works of those who have travelled, have your mind fresh and ready to more heartily enjoy what others have seen and made immortal through the power of their pen, and if it is best that that pleasure should be given you, it will come at the right time.

"Our Olive next. I wonder if she thinks that though her face was as exquisitely beautiful as the rarest picture ever painted, that it could be any more precious to our sight, than it is now; or if beauty of the loveliest type would be taken in exchange for the strong, earnest character and brave, true heart that is stamped in it. The most beautiful face may sometimes, by nature's indelible portrayer, reveal itself soulless in heart and mind; and the plainest face possess an irresistible charm, if it is allowed to interpret the emotions of a truly noble heart. I have no ambition that my little girl should paint the grandest pictures in the world, but I

hope before long to give her instructions in the art that she loves, and then I want her to use to the uttermost, the beautiful talent God has given her, and though it should fall far short of being the grandest picture, I should be very happy, and quite content."

Mrs. Dering began folding up her sewing as she finished, and the girls did likewise, looking as though they had taken the little talk to heart and were thinking over it. Olive went out for her account-books and her face wore a happier look, than any one could remember seeing there lately. Before they got through examining and comparing accounts, the other girls said good-night and went up stairs, and when the last book was pushed aside, Mrs. Dering put her arm around Olive, who sat on the stool at her feet, and looked down at her with a smile.

"I like this, dear," she said, touching the ribbons. "And you have made me so much happier to-night, by looking more happy, what is it dear?"

"Nothing, mama," answered Olive. "Only I came home early one day, when the girls didn't know it, and I heard them talking about me. They said how queer and odd I was, and how they felt hurt, because I always stayed away from them, and some more things, and mama, I was so amazed. I always thought they didn't want me, and I didn't know which way to believe and I,—I just asked God to help me; and I guess He did. It's terrible hard work, though I've only tried it a few days. I'm so ugly, and I've got such a dreadful temper, and always want to think the wrong way, but I notice that I really have been happier these few days; and mama, to-night, you—" Olive paused and looked up shyly, she did not often say such things and it cost something of a little effort to begin—"you looked so happy and I couldn't help but feel that it was because you were glad, and I really am going to try all the harder now."

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# CHAPTER X.

# THE LITTLE BLACK TRUNK.

WHEN Spring came, spirits and strength began to flag. Everything without was so alluring, that indoors and duties grew dreadfully monotonous and tiresome. Bea found that her sweeping and dusting fell terribly behind, because she spent so much time sitting in the window-sills, and standing in the doors, where the sunshine was so temptingly clear and warm, and from where the yard and trees, so rapidly budding out, could be enjoyed. Olive dreaded her close dark counting-room, but said little about it, in the belief that complaining wouldn't help. Ernestine's four scholars lessened to two, and as the days grew warmer she spent much of the time on the lounge, looking listless, and betraying little interest in anything.

Kittie and Kat, found that snatching moments from work, to take a race down the yard, or gather some particular cluster of fresh young blossoms, gave dish-water a chance to cool; or dust, left ready for taking up, to blow back to all corners of the room. Meals began to fall behind, but everybody was too warm and listless to eat much, or mind the tardiness. In short, everybody had the spring fever, but such ordinary complaint was not noticed, until, as the heat grew more debilitating, Bea said to her mother one evening, as they stood in the door, looking out into the soft still moonlight that lay so purely over the fresh early grass and blossoms:—"Mama, seems to me Ernestine is not well."

Bea could not understand why her mother should start so, at such a slight intimation, or why her face should look so anxious as she turned it.

"Why, dear?"

"She lies down so much; it may be because the weather has turned warm so suddenly, but seems to me, she is so pale and quiet, and it is something so unusual, that I couldn't help but notice it; but then, may be, it's nothing after all."

"Only the weather, I fancy," answered Mrs. Dering; but Bea saw that she looked uneasy, and that all that evening she watched Ernestine, who lay on the lounge, more lively than she had been for several days, with a sparkling light in

her eyes, and a rich color in her face, that made her more beautiful than mother or sisters had ever seen her before. Bea watched her mother with some anxiety and no little curiosity. How sad and troubled her eyes looked, as they rested on Ernestine's radiant face, while every now and then a tremble seized her lips, even while she smiled at the continual merry nonsense that seemed to possess the girls that night.

"Ernestine's going to run away," announced Kittie, presently, with some abruptness; but no one but Bea, who was on the alert, saw how her mother started, with a force that ran her needle clear under her thumb nail, or how excessively pale she was as she wiped off the little drops of blood.

"That I am," laughed Ernestine gayly. "Some of these fine mornings I'll be gone, and you'll find a touching little note on my pin-cushion; and after I've earned piles of glory and money, I'll come back in an elegant carriage, and set you all up in luxury."

Everybody laughed, and professed much impatience for the delightful time to arrive; but Mrs. Dering pushed her sewing aside with an impatient hand that trembled, and proposed that Ernestine sing for them, which she immediately did, with a bewildering bird-like witchery, that held them all entranced, and made the girls sigh more than once, that some of the flute-like tones had not been given to them, as their talent.

Mrs. Dering's last look and words, when she left next morning, were for Ernestine, who looked languid and pale in the sunshine, with all her radiant sparkle and color gone, and no sound or look of song about her lips; and after the hack had gone, and the girls returned to the house, Kat said to Kittie, with much resentment in her voice:

"Ernestine always was the petted one in this family. Just see how anxious mama is about her having a little spring fever, and what an easy time she has, anyhow. Only two music scholars! I guess we've got the spring fever just as bad as she has, but we have to work just as hard as ever, and I don't think it is fair."

And Kittie, notwithstanding she had some such thoughts herself, answered promptly:

"Well, I suppose there's a reason of some kind, because you know Kat, mama never would do anything unfair. Perhaps she thinks Ernestine is more delicate than we are."

"Delicate—fiddlesticks! I've three minds to believe it's because she's got such big brown eyes and yellow hair, and is so—well—so—"

"Ain't you ashamed," interrupted Kittie, slamming down her dishes. "To hint at such a thing, Kat Dering!"

The very next evening that brought Mrs. Dering home, brought her with a proposition for Ernestine to go into the country for a week or two, giving her two pupils a vacation for that length of time. Perhaps it occurred to each of the girls that they needed the rest just as much, if not a little more than Ernestine, and perhaps Mrs. Dering detected the look in their faces, for she sighed, and Bea discovered that the same sad look, only deepened and more anxious, lingered in her eyes; and to show her repentance for a moment's complaining thought, she entered heartily into Ernestine's selfish joy.

"Just think how I will ride horseback," cried Ernestine, gayly. "I must fix out a habit some way, mama, and girls, you must let me have all your pretty things, because Mrs. Raymond's girls dress beautifully, and entertain a great deal."

"But my dear," spoke her mother, "I am sending you out there to rest, to enjoy their lovely home, and to grow stronger on country air, not to frolic and waste all your strength."

"Oh, mama, what an idea!" laughed Ernestine. "Why, I'm not sick, I don't need rest, all I want is a little fun and something gay. Look at Bea; she's as pale as a little ghost; you might talk about sending her out to the country to be quiet, and drink milk, but not me. I don't need it." And Ernestine nodded gayly to her own radiant reflection in the glass opposite; then without waiting for any answer, jumped up and waltzed around the room.

"What a blessing it is that Uncle Ridley gave us the dresses. My purple is just as stylish as can be, only I do wish, mama, you'd have let me had a train to it; I'm so tall, and plenty old enough. Bea, will you let me have that pretty gilt butterfly that you fixed for your hair, and your gold cuff pins? I've lost one of mine, and they are always such an addition to one's dress. Olive, you never wore your new black kids much; let me take them, will you? mine look worn, and I do love nice gloves; they always mark a lady. And your new dress. I do need a black one dreadfully, and you say you never will wear yours, so you might just as well give it to me,—loan it, anyhow."

"You may have it, for all I care," answered Olive. "But my gloves are one of

the things that I cannot loan."

"Nor the dress," said Mrs. Dering, quickly. "You have quite enough dresses, Ernestine, and besides, Olive's is from her Uncle Ridley, and she cannot give it away."

Ernestine couldn't see any sense of having it lay upstairs in the drawer, though she did not say so; and privately thought that perhaps she could coax her mother around, since Olive was so willing. It proved quite a vain idea, however, though she made it her last request in the morning, before her mother left.

"No, Ernestine, I spoke quite as decidedly the first time you asked me. Be all ready to go by this day week, you have not much sewing to do. Good-bye, once more, my girls; be careful of the lights, take good care of yourselves and do not get sick. Write to Jean to-morrow, a nice long letter and tell her everything. Good-bye."

So she went away again, and nothing discouraged at her inability to secure Olive's dress, Ernestine danced gayly into the house and off to her room, to overlook, for the dozenth time, her little collection of trinkets, and to sing blithely over her dresses; for she did possess the spirit of coming down cheerfully to any thing inevitable excepting work, and then, perhaps, mama would relent at the final moment, when she saw how much a black dress was really needed.

"It's as lonesome as a desert, and Ernestine is selfish as a pig," declared Kittie, subsiding gloomily on to the stairs as the hack rattled out of sight.

"Two solemn facts, but they won't wash the dishes," rejoined Kat, balancing over the bannisters, in a way that threatened immediate perpendicularity, with a change of base from what was customary.

"I hate dishes and dish-pans and everything," exclaimed Kittie with much vehemence. "Any how, this is your week to wash, and mine to wipe; go along and get the old things ready, and I'll be out in a minute."

"I'll change with you next week," said Beatrice turning from the door, where she had stood contemplatively. "You and Kat may tend to all the sweeping, and dusting, and keeping the house in order, and I'll do the kitchen work."

"Hurrah, will you?" cried Kittie, flying up from her despondent attitude. "You're a jewel, Bea, shake hands."

Bea surrendered her hand with some misgiving, rightfully conjecturing that it would receive a shake and twist of over-powering heartiness in the high tide of Kittie's spirits; and that young lady, having done her best to dislocate that useful member, rushed off to impart the news to Kat, and swing her dish rag jubilantly.

The change of instruments, as the girls said, took place Monday morning. Bea awoke, to find her bed-posts ornamented variously, with a dish-pan, a flaunting rag and two scrupulously neat towels, while there was a sound of revelry in the lower hall, which would indicate that the twins were up, and at their new branch of work, with a vigor which novelty always imparts to labor. Not that there was anything so novel to a broom or dust-pan, but they were so tired of their work, that Bea's really seemed delightful and easy and much to be envied.

"You must have been anxious to get to work," said that sister, coming down the stairs with her post ornaments, and interrupting a lively skirmish, where brooms flew around through the air, with a cheerful disregard for the swinging lamp, or any one's head.

"Anxious to get through, you mean," laughed Kat, throwing down her weapon, and tumbling her dishevelled hair into a net. "Hollo, Kittie, your corners are swept cleaner'n mine."

"Of course," answered Kittie complacently, and turning her broom right end up, in a spasm of housewifely care. "You better go to work and do yours over; that's in the bargain, isn't it, Bea?"

"Work to be done well," said Bea, surveying Kat's corners with a critical eye. "And those are not clean; you've slipped right by them."

"Just as well," asserted Kat, whisking her broom about and scattering the dust that disgraced a small corner over such extent of surface that it could not be noticed. "That's the way. What's the use of being so particular?"

Bea shook her head and declared it wouldn't do, then gave to Kittie the overwhelming responsibility of keeping Kat straight, and departed for the kitchen.

"Set the blind to lead the blind," laughed Kat, spinning about on her heels, and finishing up with a hearty hug for Kittie, and the penitent remark: "You are getting lots better than I, that's a fact; and I must begin to brush up and sober down, or I'll be the black sheep of the flock,—as if I wasn't always that. But you

really are getting terrible good, Kittie; I've seen it for a long time and it makes me uncomfortable; spin around and be gay like you used to."

"Nonsense," laughed Kittie, then looked sober, and sat down upon the stairs suddenly. "I'm not good, Kat, it isn't that; I don't know how to be; but some way, I can't be as terribly wild and gay as I used to be, there seems to be so much more to think about now, and seems to me we ought to help think as much as the others, and besides, I don't think we ought to be so wild any more; why, Kat, we're in our teens!"

"Suppose we are, dear me!" cried Kat, standing off and surveying her sister with a sort of vague alarm, "what ever is the matter with this family? Olive is getting so pleasant, and wears ribbons, and you're not going to be wild any more, and have gone to thinking; you'll both die next thing, good people always die; and anyhow, my fun's all up. I never can be gay if you sit around so solemn and goody-goody;" and Kat rumpled up her hair and looked desperate.

"The idea, what a speech!" exclaimed Kittie, looking as if her new resolutions had received a shock. "As if I couldn't be sensible without being goody-goody, whatever that is. Pick up your broom and don't worry, my dear. I'll never die of being too good."

Nevertheless, Kat looked forlorn all the rest of the day, and had spells of solemnly surveying Kittie, as though some wonderful change had taken place, and a pair of wings, or some equally astonishing thing might be the result. Next morning was as beautiful as a spring morning ever could be, and Kat took much comfort in the fact, that, in her haste to get out to the pond, Kittie flew about the sitting-room in a hurry, whisked the dirt under the stove, didn't stop to dust, except a rapid skim over the top, left the piano shut, neglected to put fresh flowers under father's portrait, and shut the blinds so as to hide all defects under a comfortable shielding gloom. Kat looked on and felt relieved. Kittie wasn't going to be so dreadfully good and proper after all, and much consoled, Kat put on her hat, and dashed out to the pond, where Kittie was already sailing about, with her head still ornamented in a dust-cap.

Bea had watched their early departure from the field of work, with some misgiving, and decided to go and take a view of the house as soon as she got the dishes put away, but just at that moment, the door bell rang; and dear me, what should she do? The twins were at the farthest end of the pond, yelling like bedlamites, Bea declared. Ernestine had finished her small share of work, then

put on her cocked-up hat with a blue bow, and gone down town; so there was no one left to see to the door, and smoothing down her hair, Bea hurried through the hall with flushed cheeks and some anxiety.

True to a prophetic feeling which possessed her, the opening of the door disclosed to view the last person to be desired, on that or any other morning: Miss Strong, a regular Dickensonian old maid.

"Good morning, sweet child!" she exclaimed, the moment Bea's dismayed face presented itself.

"Good morning, Miss Strong; will you come in?"

"Come in? Surely, dear. I want to see you all; and then I hear that you and your sisters are such model little housekeepers, and I think it is so lovely that you all, in your heart-rending afflictions, should bow so meekly beneath God's chastening rod, and put your shoulders to the wheel."

Bea opened the sitting-room door in fear and trembling, and blinded by the spring sunshine, Miss Strong walked into the dark room, in her girlish, hasty way, and immediately stumbled over a footstool, and landed at full length on the lounge, with such force that she dropped her beaded reticule, and knocked her bonnet off.

"Oh, I am so sorry," cried Bea, running to pick up the things, and return them to the startled and scarlet-faced spinster. "I don't know why Kittie shut the blinds, she oughtn't to."

"No, I should say she hadn't, I should, indeed," returned Miss Strong, putting on her bonnet with a jerk, and snapping her reticule. "It's a sinful shame, the way some people keep their houses dark as dungeons, to hide dirt and dust. I have heard that you were neat housekeepers, but I can't help having my opinion of people who shut out every speck of light, and trip up respectable people in this way."

Poor Bea's face burned and burned, and her heart throbbed faster as she went to the window, to open the blinds, feeling that her reputation was at stake, and that the first ray of light would kindle the faggots. Not a speck of dust, from the ceiling down, would escape Miss Strong's eagle eyes, and oh, how she would talk about it! Well, it was done; she threw them open, and turned around in the calmness of despair. The glaring sunshine came boldly in, and danced over the

dusty table, over the top of the piano, where you might have written your name, right under the stove where the dirt lay thick, all around the corners, into Miss Strong's scornful, roving eyes, and into Bea's burning face. Miss Strong was angry. She never liked to be seen or heard under a disadvantage, and she surely had received an unreconcilable insult just now. Besides, she always went about seeking whom she might devour; she wore little spit-curls all over her sallow, wrinkled forehead, had a hooked nose, a long, sharp chin, a dried-apple mouth, and two fiercely bright eyes, that looked clear through you, and plainly indicated that she thought you all wrong, and at fault. Whenever she heard any one praised, she immediately set about finding a flaw somewhere, and heralded it to the world, as soon as found. She knew the Dering family were not as nice and worthy of praise and sympathy, as people seemed to think, and she had come this morning on purpose to find out, and then correct the deluded public mind. She was quite satisfied, and the "I-told-you-so" spirit was so jubilant within her, that she could hardly keep from flaunting it before Bea's distressed face. She satisfied herself, however, with looking at each dusty article with great care, brushing some imaginary specks from her dress, settling her bonnet, and asking abruptly:

"How's your mother? I haven't long to stay."

"She was quite well, thank you, the last time she was home," answered Bea, watching those eagle eyes in terror.

"Umph! Pity she can't stay home," said Miss Strong, once more taking in the room with an unmistakable glance.

"It's very lonely without her," assented Bea, catching sight of the wilted flowers under her father's portrait, and fervently hoping that her visitor's eye would not see them. But vain hope! Miss Strong's eyes went straight from the dirt under the stove up to the neglected vase, and she smiled in a way, that made Bea long to jump up and scream.

"I have often wanted to see your father's portrait, and I have heard what beautiful flowers you always kept under it. So lovely!"

"We do," answered Bea, with much dignity, and flashing a resentful glance at Miss Strong. "Papa loved flowers dearly, and we always love to have them under his picture; but Kittie must have been in a hurry, and forgotten it this morning."

"In-deed," said Miss Strong slowly. "But excuse me, pray do, I wouldn't have spoken of it, but I supposed, of course, that this room had not been arranged for

the day yet."

"Well, it is very early," retorted Bea, stung quite out of her patient politeness; and Miss Strong got up immediately, shutting her mouth with a vicious snap.

"I'm sure I wouldn't have called so early," she said shortly. "But I am soliciting for the Church Fund, and having heard how exceedingly generous and willing you all were to give to all such causes, I made my first call here, confident that it would yield me encouragement."

Poor Bea colored violently again, remembering that she only had enough money to pay the grocery bill, due to-morrow, and yet Miss Strong had made her feel as though she must give something; every one would expect it.

"I'm very sorry," she said, slowly. "But I really cannot this morning."

"In-deed," said Miss Strong again. "But then, people will be mistaken once in a while; I must bid you good morning, Miss Dering;" and out she stalked, before Bea could gain her breath.

When Kittie and Kat came in from the pond a little while later, they found Bea, lying on the lounge and sobbing, with a despairing energy, that excited their liveliest alarm, and made all horrible things seem possible, from mother's death down to the breaking of the cherished family tea-pot. Bea told her story, but hadn't room to remonstrate, for the sobs that caught her breath; and the girls listened in grave alarm.

"Who cares for old Polly Strong?" cried Kat, with defiant irreverence, and throwing her hat to the ceiling.

"Well, I'm sorry," cried Kittie, running to comfort the prostrate chief. "It's all my fault; Kat swept the parlor this morning and I cleaned in here. Oh, I am ashamed, and so sorry, Bea dear."

"Well—well, I think it's too—too bad," sobbed Bea, uncomforted. "She talked so mean, and—and—she'll tell everybody that—that—I'm no housekeeper, and then—then, mama—"

"If she does," interrupted Kat fiercely, "I'll tell every mortal man, woman and child, in turn, that she's a meddling old thing, if they don't know it already; and I'll tell them just the truth about this room, too."

"It was horrible in me," sighed Kittie in great self-reproach. "And when you were so kind as to change, too. We'll go right back to the dishes, Bea, and not disgrace your work any more, and I'll go right to work and clean this room decent, so that everything will shine until you can see your face in it."

By this time Ernestine's wardrobe was pretty near ready to go upon her visit. She had exercised her ingenuity in making few things look their best and go a long way; and her selfishness in getting every available thing from the girls, without ever expressing a wish that they were going to share the pleasure; because, she reasoned in her mind, if they were going, she couldn't have all their pretty things, so better be still, than express an untruthful desire. On the day after the Strong visit, she came from down-town, and walked up to the house, very much as if she were a little ashamed to go in, but which she did, with an assumption of indifference, and came into the room where the girls were sitting.

"I've got the last things," she said with a laugh, tinged with an uneasiness that no one noticed, and unwrapping a small parcel.

"What?" asked Bea, glancing up with interest; then looked at the open paper, and did not say another word.

Kittie and Kat did likewise, and in a moment Ernestine broke the silence with an impatient laugh.

"Well, what do you all look so horrified at? It was my own money, I guess, and precious little at that."

"What did you pay for them?" asked Bea gravely.

"These—" Ernestine held up a pair of snowy kids, with three buttons—"I got for a dollar and a half, cheap, because one finger is a little soiled. This—" lifting a creamy tip, with pale blue shading—"was two dollars. Won't it look lovely in my black hat?"

"Yes, it will look lovely," said Bea slowly; she was really too astonished and hurt to say any more; but Kat cried out explosively:

"Oh Ernestine Dering! you selfish, selfish, old—pig, you—" "Know mama wants shoes," interrupted Kittie, with her voice full of indignant tears. "And you heard her say the last time she was home, that she did not want to spend the money for them, and here you spend three dollars and a half for—"

"Things that I want," finished Ernestine, getting up and pushing her chair away. "I've worked hard, and I think I might spend a very little bit of my own money. You all don't seem to think so, and you're not very pleasant, so I'll just leave you until you are in a better humor."

With that she went out, feeling really as though she were more aggrieved than aggressor, and stillness followed her departure.

"She's worked hard?" cried Kittie at length, with indignant scorn. "Very hard; but mama hasn't, nor we haven't—"

"Oh don't, please," exclaimed Bea, bursting into tears. "Don't say anything, girls; I don't know what I hadn't rather have, than for mama to know that Ernestine would do such a thing. Oh, I wish she need never to know it."

It did not take much thought to decide Ernestine, that she was much abused, and though her usually laggard conscience insisted on being touched, she solaced it by putting the tip in her hat, and seeing how becoming it was, and by trying on the gloves, which were a perfect fit. Then putting them away, she stole off to the garret, to carry out a plan, made in secrecy—that of rummaging the packed trunks there, and perhaps finding something that could be turned into a party dress, which she was quite sure she would need. The garret was roomy and sunny, and all the rest of the afternoon, Ernestine comforted herself, and her abused feelings by hunting among the old trunks, and spinning many gay dreams, wherein she dwelt in luxury, and all that heart could wish. She had selected a pale green silk, and a fine soft lawn from her mother's put aside wardrobe, and her mind's eye saw herself most becomingly, and beautifully dressed in them—if mama would only consent.

Over in the corner, something caught her eye presently, that she had never seen before. Only a small dark trunk with an air of secrecy about it; and something irresistibly took her right over to it, with her arm load of gay things.

"I wonder what it is," she mused, fingering the lock curiously, and feeling so strange as she did so.

"Go away!" something seemed to say imperatively; but she lingered, and fingered more curiously than ever the small key attached to a faded ribbon.

"Go away! Go away!" seemed to come again that voice, and she felt it to her inmost soul; but the very realization of an inward warning against it, urged her

on. She put the key in the lock,—and hesitated; turned it slowly,—and hesitated again; then broke into a nervous little laugh, and tossed the cover open.

"Now let's see what's in this Wonderful Trunk."
**"NOW LET'S SEE WHAT'S IN THIS WONDERFUL TRUNK."**

"Why I'm as cold as ice, what a goose! Now let's see what's in this wonderful trunk to make me feel so funny; something splendid I guess, but I couldn't help opening it, I really couldn't,—oh dear!"

It was of disappointment, for there was nothing there but a queer old basket, a pillow, with a plain little slip, and a worn faded letter on top.

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# CHAPTER XI.

# WHERE IS ERNESTINE?

THE odor of hot cakes brought everybody in a hurry, when Kat opened the dining-room door, and shouted, "supper!" as though she was a pop-gun and the single word a deadly fire, and everybody had fallen to work at demolishing the pile of aforesaid cakes, before Bea looked up suddenly and asked:

"Where is Ernestine?"

Nobody knew, but Kat ventured, that perhaps she was going to supper it, on gloves and feathers.

"You better call again, Kat, perhaps she didn't hear."

So Kat rushed to the door, and shouted:

"Er-nes-tin-e-e, cakes are getting cold," with an amount of energy and noise that might have reached that young lady, had she been sitting on the top-most round of the farthest chimney; but there was no response of any kind, neither was there any indications of a light up stairs, so Kat went back, remarking, as she again fell to work:

"She's put on her new toggery, most likely, and gone somewhere."

"But where should she go?" asked Bea with a strange uneasiness.

"Anywhere, just so people see her new things, and say how pretty she looks," answered Kat, who was not uneasy.

So they eat supper and waited; but no appearance of the delinquent. The twins began to clear up, putting a good supply in the oven to keep warm; but the dishes were through with, and all put away, and no Ernestine. Kittie began to feel anxious and worried, but Kat made fun of her, though she herself began to grow more quiet, as the evening went on. Eight. Nine. No Ernestine. What should they do?

Bea sprang up from her seat at the window, all in a pale tremor.

"I cannot stand it. Oh, Olive, what shall we do?"

"Why, I don't know," said Olive, putting down the book in which she had read nothing. "Have you looked for her hat and cloak?"

No. No one had. So they all rushed up stairs, as though it required five pairs of eyes to discover a hat and cloak, which was found lying on the bed, just as she had thrown them on coming up stairs. Bea went to her boxes, with a vague idea that the gloves and feather were in some way connected with the mystery; but they were put away with greatest possible care, and Kat, who always did the absurd things in hasty moments, reported that all her clothes and dresses were in their places, so she couldn't have gone away.

"Of course not; there's no place for her to go to," answered Olive.

"Mrs. Dane's, perhaps," suggested Kittie.

This was plausible.

"But what would she go for?" asked Bea in a moment. "And without any hat or shawl, and stay so late?"

Nobody knew, and all looked irresolute and anxious.

"Her blue shawl is gone," exclaimed Kat, in the midst of her second rummage in the closet; for what, no one knew, since it was impossible for Ernestine to be hanging over a hook; or settled in one of her pockets. "And her straw hat!"

At that, all five dived into the closet, with no clearly defined purpose, but it seemed the only thing to do just then; and in the scramble that followed, the missing straw hat was found on the floor, but no blue shawl kept its company. They all took hold of it in turn, looking at it solemnly, and turning it over and over, as though it possessed the secret of its missing mistress. But if it knew, it kept its knowledge, and only flapped its ribbons in feeble protest at being twisted about so. No one said any thing, until Bea discovered two long golden hairs clinging to the straw, then she threw it down, and burst into tears. Everybody looked aghast, and Bea cried out between her sobs:

"I can't help it—indeed—I feel as if something dreadful had happened—and I'm so frightened."

Just then the clock struck ten, such slow solemn strokes, echoing through the

still house, and everybody shivered drearily, and looked fearfully out into the dark hall; wishing, oh, how fervently, that mother was home. Bea stopped crying with a great effort, and seemed to feel that she must do something—but what? She looked at the girls in anxious inquiry. Kittie and Kat were sitting on the bed, trembling and frightened. Olive was so dreadfully pale and still; and Beatrice was nearly at her wits end.

"Perhaps—perhaps—" ventured Kittie, looking around as though her voice frightened her: "she may be trying to frighten us; you know we were a little fussy when she came up stairs this afternoon."

Nobody seemed to think so, it might be a rather good joke, but Ernestine wouldn't keep it up until ten o'clock.

"Let's look in the rooms and then go down stairs, said Olive taking up the light. Perhaps she has gone to Mrs. Dane's after all, and is staying late to frighten us, as Kittie says. Come on, and when she comes, don't pretend to be surprised or a bit scared."

This being Olive's first suggestion, it was received as bearing some weight, as indeed suggestions and advice always are when they come from people who do not always have them at tongue's end, ready for all, or any occasions. A little brighter feeling dawned upon the forlorn group, as they went to the twin's and Olive's rooms, without finding any trace, and then returned to the sitting-room. Bea half hoped and expected that they would find Ernestine sitting by the fire, full of laugh, and ready to tease them on their fright and search; but she was disappointed, for the room was dreary and lonely, the light wood fire having died of neglect; and everything looked unutterably forlorn to their anxious eyes. In an ominous silence all four sat down on the lounge, closely huddled together, and tried to talk; but it was a vain attempt. It seemed impossible to bring any voice low enough so as that it did not sound like a trumpet in the painful stillness of the house; every one jumped when any one spoke, so by and by, they were perfectly still, while the clock ticked so loudly and every moment brought a deeper fear and trembling anxiety.

Eleven! Twelve!

"Let us go to bed," whispered Olive. Somehow it seemed that whispering was the only admissible thing then. "See, the lamp was not filled fresh to-day, and it's burning down; we'll be in the dark in a few minutes."

"Oh, I'm so afraid," quavered Kat. "Let's all sleep together."

No one seemed to object, for really it was something to chill even a brave heart. Those four girls alone in the great still house at midnight, with the terrible fear at their hearts, and their wildest imagination in full play. They went up stairs as softly as though Ernestine lay dead in the house; and all went with their eyes shut except Olive, who carried the lamp, and even she kept her eyes away from everything save right where she walked. No one had cried yet but Bea; so when they knelt about the bed for prayer, each one broke down, and they finally dropped asleep, sobbing softly, with their arms about each other.

Morning came, with the brightest of sunshine, and put a more cheerful face upon things, as daylight always does. The girls jumped up merrily, quite convinced that it was all a joke, and that they were foolish to have been so frightened. Ernestine had gone to Mrs. Dane's and stayed all night; she would be home pretty soon and they would all have a good laugh over it. So they thought, and flew about lively with their work; but breakfast was over and cleaned up, the house was all in order, and the day fairly begun; still no Ernestine had arrived, and Olive had not gone.

"Seems to me, I can't go until we know something," she said, standing in the door and looking down the street. "I will be home to dinner, and surely she will be here by that time."

"I suppose so, of course," said Bea, feeling last night's fear beginning to tug at her heart again.

"Seems to me nothing could happen with a morning so lovely as this," said Kittie, looking anxious and sleepy.

"Well, I suppose I must go," said Olive at last. "I'm an hour late now, and I don't know what to tell Mr. Dane; but then, it's the first time I've ever been tardy, so he may not speak of it."

"If she comes pretty soon, I'll trot down and tell you," volunteered Kat, who was stretching on the stairs, and pretty near strangling with a succession of gasps.

"All right," said Olive, going out reluctantly.

Morning went slowly and heavily; the girls tried to study as usual, but found it impossible. There was only one thought in their minds; Ernestine! Ernestine!

where was she?

"Kittie," said Bea, when it was nearly noon, "Olive is so tired, I expect, being worried and up so late, and then bothering over her business this morning, suppose you take her dinner down to her, and then go round by Mrs. Dane's?"

"All right," answered Kittie, glad of something to work off her feverish impatience. "You fix the basket, while I run up stairs and get ready; it will only take me a minute."

Olive was sitting at her desk, very pale and tired, when Kittie came in. She looked up eagerly, but in a glance, each saw that the other knew nothing.

"I brought your dinner," said Kittie, putting down the basket, "because—she hasn't come, and we thought you'd be so tired."

"I am, and so much obliged," answered Olive, with a grateful smile, thinking, as she put the lunch aside, how kind it was, for Kittie was tired too; and thinking also, that a few weeks ago they wouldn't have done so; but that had been much her own fault, she was quite convinced of it now.

"Mr. Dane went to the city on this morning's train," she said in a moment, "so I have not seen him."

"I'm going there," answered Kittie. "Mrs. Dane's, I mean. If Ernestine is there, I'll come back by here and tell you, and if I don't come you'll know that I haven't heard anything."

They both felt that nothing would be heard, but each said good-bye cheerfully, and Kittie hurried away.

Mrs. Dane was a dear, motherly-hearted lady who had no children of her own, and consequently felt a warm interest in any one's else. She had kept a watchful, loving eye on the Dering girls, especially, since their troubles, going to see them frequently, and dropping much comfort and encouragement in all that she said and did. When she saw Kittie coming, she met her at the door, with a warm, cheery smile and inquired gayly:

"Good morning, my dear; what is going to happen that you are without your mate? and which one are you?"

Kittie laughed as she went up the neat little walk, with early violets blooming

either side, but Mrs. Dane noticed that she looked anxiously beyond her, into the house, and that her face was pale and worried, something unheard of, for either of the twins.

"I'm Kittie, and Kat was too busy to come," answered Kittie, as they went in, and she wondered what she should say next.

"It looks strange to ever see you without each other," said Mrs. Dane, detecting an uneasiness. "All well at home, dear?"

"Yes'm, pretty well, except spring fever."

"I saw Ernestine down town yesterday afternoon, and I thought she looked quite pale, but very pretty," continued Mrs. Dane.

"Yes'm," said Kittie again, with her heart jumping into her throat. "Mama is going to have her go out to Mrs. Raymond's for two weeks. Has she been by here this morning?"

"Not that I have seen. I should think it a very good plan for her to be in the country a while, if she will only be quiet; the Raymond home is a very lovely one. I notice here lately that she coughs a good deal."

"Yes'm," answered Kittie, guiltily conscious that she hadn't noticed it. "I hope it isn't much though."

"Nothing more than a spring cold, I fancy; you must all be very careful. Now, my dear, take off your hat, and stay to dinner with me. I'm all alone, to-day."

"I should like to; thank you, Mrs. Dane, but Bea will be expecting me home, and I guess I had better go," said Kittie, so intensely disappointed with her call that she could hardly keep the tears back. So she went, and Mrs. Dane soliloquized, as she recalled the troubled face. "Something the matter, I am quite positive; and those poor, dear, brave little girls all alone. I shall go over this evening and see if I am needed."

Kat was at the gate, and started out the moment she saw Kittie coming, to meet her. She was quite as ashy colored as ever brown-faced, rosy-cheeked Kat could be, and she was trembling as with a fit of ague, and as Kittie saw her, the question died on her lips, and she could only look her fear, as Kat burst forth:—

"She hasn't come—don't know anything about her; but Bea went up in the

garret this morning to open the windows, and ever since she came down, she's been crying and pretty near fainted; won't tell me anything, and I thought you never would come. What *shall* we do?"

"Oh, I don't know; why didn't I tell Mrs. Dane? I felt as if I ought to," cried Kittie, standing still in despair for a moment; then pulling off her hat and shawl, she put them on her sister in a hurry.

"There, Kat, run; I'm so tired, you can go the fastest; go to Mr. Phillips, ask him to take Prince and go for mama, quick;" and, without a second thought, Kat dashed down the street at her most breathless flying speed, not caring who saw, or what they thought, and feeling as though she had done the right thing. Kittie hurried into the house; she was alarmed, indeed, at the violence of Bea's crying, and after trying in vain to find some cause, or give some comfort, gave up in despair.

"Don't ask me," Bea would cry, when questioned. "I can't tell! Oh, if mama was only here! What shall I do?"

"I've sent for her!" exclaimed Kittie, with a great sigh of relief. "Kat has gone now to ask Mr. Phillips, and she'll be here this afternoon, I know."

Bea looked up for an instant, with a flash of relief in her face, then burst out again, crying more bitterly than ever, and with a vehemence that shook her from head to foot.

"What ever can it be?" thought Kittie, flying up stairs, and off to the garret in desperation; but, pausing as she reached the door, and shaking with a sudden terror. What if Ernestine should be in there dead, or something? She shook and hesitated, but finally opened the door, for Kittie was brave, and looked in!

Nothing seemed to be the matter. The sunshine came warmly in at the windows and illumined every corner. The little black trunk stood there, but it was closed, and she did not notice it, though she went all around, and amazed to find nothing out of place. Over in an unused corner, for the garret was very large, stood a big dry-goods box that Mr. Dering had long kept some things packed in, but on the very day before his sudden death, he had been up in the garret, unnailed the heavy cover, and gone to the bottom for some things that he wanted, and then hurried away, intending to repack, and nail up, on his return; but in the little act, was a mighty working of Providence, or fate; the box had remained just so, with its dislodged contents at its side, the little black trunk among them, and

the garret having been rarely entered during the winter, it had not been noticed or remedied.

Kittie, happening to glance that way, saw it; and with a vague idea that Ernestine might be in the box, went over to it, pushed the little black trunk nearer, and stood on it to look in; but saw only a confused lot of things, tumbled up in her father's haste, and so she got down, and left the garret slowly, more perplexed and bewildered than ever.

As she went down the stairs, she heard, she surely heard an unmistakable moan, that stopped her in an instant, and made her heart beat fast and loud with terror; and as she stood and listened, it came again, and it did not come from the garret either.

As I said, Kittie was brave. Kat would have torn wildly down stairs, and declared that the house was haunted; but she stood there, quite still, until that feeble moan came again; then with a thought as quick as lightning, she cleared the remaining steps with one jump, flew across the hall, and into the spare room!

There, at last, after all these hours of painful anxiety and fright, there, so near, that by simply opening an unused door, they would have found her—lay Ernestine.

As Kittie burst into the room, Ernestine tossed her arms above her head, and uttered that feeble moan again; and too astonished to utter a word of any kind, Kittie saw that she was unconscious, that her face was scarlet with fever, and that the dazed, wide open eyes recognized nothing.

She never exactly remembered how she got down stairs, and told Bea; or how it happened that Kat was with them when they went back; she only knew that Bea threw down her handkerchief, and worked swift and silent, that she helped, and that Kat flew off again to bring Mrs. Dane, and was back in just a moment, for that lady, being so forcibly impressed with an idea that something was wrong, had started over, and met Kat just a few minutes after she came tearing out of the gate.

It did not take long to get Ernestine into her own bed, to bathe her burning hands and face, and smooth her tangled hair, that lay all over the pillow like stray sun-beams. She submitted passively to all of it, and appeared to notice no one, except now and then to turn her eyes to Mrs. Dane, with a puzzled, pleading look, and mutter with a wistful longing: "It isn't so, is it? I know it isn't;" then

would drift into some unintelligible murmurings, or lay quiet with no expression of any kind in her face.

"She was perfectly well yesterday," said Bea, in answer to Mrs. Dane's questions. "She came up stairs singing, about four o'clock, and that was the last we saw of her until just now, when Kittie found her."

"Poor child! What did you do all night?"

"We sat up until twelve o'clock, and it seemed like a week nearly, Olive said, and we all hoped that she had gone to spend the night with you, and that is what kept us from giving up entirely. We were having a little argument when she left us," added Bea, dropping her eyes, but feeling that a little explanation was necessary. "So we thought perhaps she went off without saying anything, so as to frighten us."

Kittie looked at Bea in curious amazement. She was so rejoiced that Ernestine was found, that she wondered why Bea should still be so white and tremble, and sit down every once in a while, as though too faint to stand. Finally concluding that it was fatigue and worrying, Kittie hurried down to the kitchen, built a fire, and had water boiling for tea in a hurry, and in just a little while, brought a cup of that invigorating beverage, and insisted on Bea's drinking it, and another, too, if she could.

"How kind you are," said Bea, looking grateful, and trying to smile, but failing utterly. "You better go and drink some yourself. Where is Kat?"

"She rushed right off again to tell Olive," answered Kittie, sitting down on the floor. "Poor dear, she will be tired to death. Oh, Bea, aren't you glad we found her before mama came?"

Bea nodded yes, and hid her face in the tea-cup, while Kittie hearing Kat down stairs, hurried down to have a social and rejoicing cup of tea with her.

Mrs. Dering arrived late in the afternoon; the twins threw open the big gate, shouting the good news as they did so, and Prince came gayly up the old familiar drive with a joyous whisk of his tail, and a loud neigh of recognition, and as Kittie and Kat fell to hugging him wildly, Mrs. Dering hurried into the house, and was met by Bea at the door.

"Were is she? What does it all mean?" cried the terrified mother.

"She was in the spare room—sick—we found her this afternoon," answered Bea, speaking as though the words choked her. "Come—come into the sitting-room, mama, and—let me tell you."

Mrs. Dering followed, with a terrible fear at her heart, and was obliged to sit down, so trembling and faint was she; and Beatrice meeting that anguished, imploring look, could not utter a word, but simply put her hand in her pocket, and drew out a worn, faded letter.

Mrs. Dering looked at it for an instant, then uttered a broken cry, and threw out her hands beseechingly.

"Oh, Beatrice! my daughter! Not that, not that, surely!"

"Yes, mama."

Mrs. Dering dropped her face in her hands with a moan that came from the depths of her heart, and overcome with the confirmation of her fears, Bea sank into a chair and burst into tears; and nothing but her sobs were heard for several moments.

Under all circumstances, Mrs. Dering was a woman of wonderful self control; so in a moment she looked up and asked:

"Do you know anything about it?"

"No, mama," answered Bea, then repeated the circumstances in the case, adding, with a look of loving sympathy into the grief-stricken face opposite, "When I went up into the garret this morning, I saw one of your trunks open, and your green silk and white lawn lying on the floor by the little black trunk, which was open also, and the letter was dropped on the floor, and I knew she had been there, and thought perhaps it was something she had left, so I read—only a part of it, and—oh, mama!"

Mrs. Dering vouchsafed no explanation, as Bea paused with a sob; but looked out of the window with a world of puzzled inquiry in her face, and murmured to herself:

"How did it ever come out of the box?"

"Papa," answered Bea, catching the words, "He was up there the day before he —died, and I remember when he came down with what he wanted, he said that

he had gone clear to the bottom of the big box for it, and that he would put things back, and nail it up when he came back home, and they were all left just that way, mama; and oh—please tell me—is it true?"

"Yes, Beatrice, it is true, too true," answered Mrs. Dering, sadly, then went up stairs, and left Bea sobbing on the lounge.

In just a few minutes Kittie came running in, and paused astonished at the sitting-room door, but as she surveyed her sister, and heard how bitterly she was sobbing, she went in and knelt by the lounge.

"Bea, can't you tell me yet, what the matter is?"

"No-o," sobbed Bea.

"Well, please tell me just one thing: I'm so frightened about something, I don't know what. But, is Ernestine very very sick, and is that what you are crying about? or—or, *has* something happened that we don't know anything about? Please tell me just this, Bea, and I won't ask any more."

"Yes, something has," was Bea's answer; and Kittie went sorrowfully away to tell Kat and Olive not to rejoice so much, yet.

It was quite late that night, and every one had gone to bed, except Mrs. Dering, who sat sleeplessly beside the bed, holding Ernestine's hot hand, and Bea, who nestled quietly in a large rocking chair, equally sleepless, and looking alternately from the loving, watchful face of mother, to the flushed, restless one on the pillow, while the big tears dropped unheeded down her cheeks.

The doctor had said, on leaving in the evening, that when Ernestine awoke, she would be herself, and for some time Mrs. Dering had been watching the feverish flush give way to pallor, and the restless, uneasy tossing to quiet slumber, and she knew, that before long, Ernestine would be herself, and ask a dreaded question. The house was painfully still. Bea shivered as the clock's ticking sounded loudly through the halls, and thought of last night when they all stood there, in that same room, and wondered where Ernestine was; and Mrs. Dering shivered, though, for quite another reason, for her mind held far different memories.

Just then, Ernestine turned, as though awakening, and the clock began to strike twelve. Through the dozen slow strokes she did not move again, but the moment they ceased, she moaned just a little bit, in a feeble, tired way, and

opened her eyes.

At the same instant, Mrs. Dering held a tiny glass to her lips, raised the pillow and said quietly:

"Drink, dear."

Ernestine did so, unresistingly, and lay for several minutes perfectly quiet, with her eyes wide open; and then they began to grow startled, and went suddenly to Bea's face, and stopped there. Bea smiled, notwithstanding she was trembling violently, and leaving her seat, came to the bed. But Ernestine was not noticing her now; she was looking all about the room in a terrified way, and suddenly sat up straight in bed, pushed her hair back, and saw her mother. For an instant she did not seem to know what it was she wanted; but it came to her suddenly, and with a beseeching cry, she threw out her arms.

"Oh, mama, mama! is it true? Am I somebody else's child?"

Bea turned away, and fell into her chair again, unable to see that pitiful, anguished face; and Mrs. Dering, sitting down on the bed, drew the trembling figure closely to her heart.

"My darling, you are my own dear little girl—" but Ernestine interrupted, with a pitiful cry:

"Oh! tell me if that letter is so, or if it means some other Ernestine? just tell me that, quick, mama, oh please do!"

What could Mrs. Dering say, with those clinging arms about her neck, and that pleading face, and the despairing eyes never moving from hers?

"You are dreaming, darling," she began soothingly; but Ernestine threw her head back, and her voice rose to a terrified shriek:

"You won't tell me; you won't tell me," she cried wildly. "Oh, I must know if it is true; I must. Oh, mama, say it isn't; tell me that you are my own mama, that the letter don't mean me; oh mama! mama!"

"Ernestine, darling, listen;" said Mrs. Dering, with the tears running down her pale face. "You shall know the truth. You have been my little girl ever since you were two months old, but your own mother gave you to me just before she went to heaven, and she was my—;" but it was needless to say more; Ernestine gave a

little moan, and dropped her head, and Mrs. Dering was sobbing, as she laid her back on the pillow; while Bea ran for some water.

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# CHAPTER XII.

# THE STORY.

MRS. DERING and Ernestine were alone; Ernestine had asked for the story of her own, or rather her mother's life, and now lay with her face turned away, while Mrs. Dering held her hand in that loving clasp, and began telling it quietly:

"We were all living in Virginia at the time, dear. Papa Dering lived with his uncle Ridley. Uncle Walter Dering lived in Staunton, and your mama's home and mine, also in the city, were only a little way apart, and we saw a great deal of each other. Florence Granger was her name, and she was the most beautiful girl that I have ever seen, except the little daughter here, who is going to be her mother's very image. She was lovable in every way, but possessed a restless, impatient, dissatisfied spirit, that brought her much unhappiness. She constantly yearned for some kind of life that would give her eager, uncontrollable spirits free play; she hated the restraints of home, and frequently threw out dark hints to me of what she would do sometimes, when the right moment presented itself. I often begged her to give up such restless longings, and be happy at home; for she certainly had a lovely one, and might have been the happiest of girls; but she would kiss me and laugh, and call me 'dear little proper Bess,' and really be so happy and gay for a time that I would lose my fears, and think her threats all lively fun. About this time, papa and I became engaged, and I, confiding to him a secret that I had discovered, that his brother Walter loved Florence, he said that Walter had confessed it to him but that he despaired of ever gaining her heart, and that he dreaded the depressing effect of discouragement on his health, for Walter was very delicate. So I promised to do all I could towards helping him, and finding out the true state of Florence's heart towards him, and I did so quite successfully, though it has always been a source of bitterest regret to me. I found, with very little trouble that she had no thought or feeling of love for him, and one day, when she was thoughtlessly laughing at him for something, I told her, in a hasty moment, how he loved her, and how the disappointment might kill him. I never can forget how surprised and grieved she looked, nor how bitterly I regretted my hastiness, for a more tender-hearted girl never lived, and it was impossible to guess, how, in a generous, impulsive moment, she might sacrifice

herself. That night she stayed with me, and both Walter and papa called; and I saw in an instant, that in her generous pity, she was going to do a work that could never be undone. Poor Walter was nearly beside himself with joy and encouragement. She sang for him, and oh, how many times have I gone back to that night, when you have been singing to me, with your mother's voice, dear. She promised to ride with him next day, and as papa watched them, he said to me in great relief: 'She loves him, and they will be happy;' and I could only say 'I hope so, truly,' and pray that I might be forgiven for what I had done; for I knew she did not love him.

"In a few days, she came rushing to me in a perfect passion of stormy, bitter tears, and frightened me greatly with her fierce vehemence. She declared that she hated him, that she could not endure the sight of him, and yet, not half an hour before, she had promised to marry him, and now, if I did not say something to comfort her, she would do something dreadful, sure. I was perfectly at a loss what to say or do, and trembled for the end of it all, but I knew the only way to quiet her would be to appeal to her pity and tenderness, so I talked and talked for a great while about him, how he loved her, how the disappointment now would surely kill him, how happy we would be as sisters when married, and how we would all go to Europe if papa inherited uncle Congreve's estate; and so finally won her over to a more pleasing view of the case. In the weeks that followed, I had the same thing to do many, many times, and found it more difficult to accomplish each time. She was wildly rebellious, and in an unguarded moment, let fall her passion for stage life, and then confided to me all her former plans, hopes, and aspirations. She had been in correspondence with members of the profession and had many secret plans laid for carrying out her ideas. She showed me several letters from Clarence Clare, then a famous actor, and I did not dream, could not even realize then, how far matters had gone. She was to have joined his troupe when he reached Staunton, left her home and gone out into the world under an assumed name, to taste and know its bitterness, when it was all too late. I was in an agony of fear, and besought her to give it up and think, before she lost herself to home and friends, but she told me I need not worry, she had written to him that morning that she was to be married, and could not fulfill her plans with him, and that I could rest in peace, for she was going to be a really good girl now, and settle down as properly as I could wish. I believed her, and was entirely deceived by the quiet, contented aspect that marked her from that day, and was overjoyed at the happiness that seemed to come to her as the day of our double marriage drew near. She spent much of her time with Walter, and the rest almost entirely with me, and we had hours of delightful chatter of when we

would be sisters indeed, and always live together, for papa and Walter were devoted brothers.

"It all comes back to me now, so terribly clear, how the day before our wedding came, and Florence was in such a state of ecstatic happiness; she left me in the evening with the warmest, tenderest kisses and embraces, and said she would be on hand early in the morning, for we were to be married at ten o'clock. While we were at breakfast next morning, her maid came over in great haste, to know if she was with me, that she wasn't at home, and evidently had not been, as her room was untouched. It seemed for a moment that I could not move, so great was the terror that possessed me; then I jumped up, snatched a hat and ran all the way to her home, without once thinking of amazed observers. She was gone. There was a little note left for me, and no word for any one else; she had gone with Clarence Clare, who had arrived the day before, and, perhaps, even as I stood there reading her hurried words, she was being married, or was already his wife. I can never tell you of the tempest of grief that fell upon two homes, or how we ever got through that wretched day. Papa came to me for just a few minutes, then hurried off to stay with Walter who had not spoken, or betrayed any signs of consciousness since the word of Florence's desertion reached him. We knew from that day that he could not live, and though he was never ill, he died slowly, lingering with us only about six months, and his last words were to papa and me, spoken just before he died: 'If she ever comes back, tell her I forgave her, that I loved her to the last, and prayed God every hour that she might be happy.'

"A little while after, papa and I were married, and moved to Richmond. He received nothing from Uncle Congreve, you know, so we both had to go to work, and we were very happy, for papa was brave, strong and honorable, and he prospered; so that in a little while we had a cosy home of our own, and envied no one their riches.

"Mr. and Mrs. Granger, your grandparents, were very proud, and left Staunton, rather than stay where their daughter had disgraced them, and we never knew where they went to, or whether they are still living or not. Two years went by, and in that time I sent many a loving, anxious thought to Florence, where ever she was, and wondered if we were ever to meet again; and one night my answer came to me. It was a bitter night, snowing hard and blowing fiercely. Papa and I, were sitting in our cosy, warm room, and Bea was sleeping, rosy and sweet, in her little crib, when there came the feeblest kind of a ring at the door-bell, and papa went to the door. In just a second he called me, and I hurried there, to find

him holding a basket, with a queer bundle in it, and looking amazed out into the night; then he set it down suddenly, and hurried out. I had not collected my thoughts, when he came in again with a fainting figure in his arms; a woman with a face uncovered, and we both recognized her in an instant. She was nearly dead with exposure, and it was a long time before she was able to speak a word, but we doctored her strongly, got her into a hot bed, and after a while she opened her eyes, and knew us. When she could talk, she told us how unhappy she had been; how, after submitting to her husband's neglect and the trials of stage life, for over a year, she had left him, and as soon as her baby was born, began looking for us. She was very feeble, and after leaving her burden on the steps, fainted in the snow before reaching the gate."

Here Ernestine, who had lain motionless all the while, gave a quick sob, and shivered from head to foot, and bending down to kiss her tenderly, Mrs. Dering went on:

"She died with us, dear, in just a few days after, and with her last breath, gave you to me; and ever since I took you, a tiny, little babe from her arms, you have been just as dear to me as though God had sent you to me, my very own."

Ernestine was shivering violently, and as Mrs. Dering finished, hid her face deeper in the pillow with a pitiful heart-broken moan, that was hard to hear, and Mrs. Dering said softly:

"Here, darling, in this box are some things that were to belong to you, in case you ever knew the truth, though with her last breath, your mother besought us to keep it from you, if we could, and we have tried, that being one reason why we afterwards left Virginia for New York State. But God knows best; it is right for you to know, or it would not have been so. The ring in the box is the one given by Walter to your mother, and she wished you, if you ever knew the story, to wear it."

Some time after Mrs. Dering left the room, Ernestine slowly turned her head, looked at the box, and with trembling fingers lifted the cover. The first thing that met her eyes, was a picture, an exquisite face painted on porcelain, and she uttered a smothered cry as she looked at the face of her mother, of whom she was the living image. There was the same brown eyes, with their slender arches; the same fine straight nose, and wilful, determined mouth, and the same halo of sunny hair, covering the proud little head. But Ernestine, looking at it then, thought of the sweet, true, dear woman, she had always called mother, and threw

it down with a bitter cry of pain. There was also a tiny note, written in a beautiful dashing hand, and after a while she read it slowly.

"BESS DARLING:

"You have always been my good angel, and I could cry if I wasn't so happy, to think how I am going to disappoint you after all. But you mustn't mind, only think how happy I am going to be, for Clarence loves me! I will be his wife when you read this, and oh Bess I cannot help but be happy then. Tell Walter he must not care, he never would have been happy with me, because I could not love him. I hope you will not feel badly when you get this; have a gay wedding, and think how happy I am. I expect it is wrong to run off this way, but I've always done things wrong, I always will, but it might have been different, if my mother had loved home more, society less, and been as true and good to me as a mother, as you have been as a friend.

"FLORENCE."

There were many little trinkets, beside the diamond ring, which Ernestine declared she could never wear; and in a tiny little box, with "My Baby," written on the top, were four round bits of gold, each a five dollar piece.

It really seemed as though the girls could never recover from the shock. Their faces were pale and tear-stained for many days; and only Olive, whose self-control was greatest, could venture into Ernestine's presence, without bursting into tears, and having to beat a hasty retreat. Every fault that she had ever possessed, they lost sight of now; they only thought how they all loved her, how happy and sweet she had always been about home, how lovely she was, and how dreadful it would be if they were to lose her. For Mrs. Dering had told them some things that she had not told Ernestine, among them these:

"You have many times noticed how much more careful and anxious I have been of Ernestine's health than of yours. That was because I knew that God had given me my girls well and strong, and poor little Ernestine came, burdened with the fatal seeds of her mother's disease, consumption. I have known always, for the doctor told me, that she would become its victim sooner or later; and that if she lived to womanhood, he would be surprised. I also saw in early childhood, that she had inherited her mother's restless, eager, dissatisfied disposition, though the difference in her home life has modified it greatly; and knowing the

weakness that would assail her if she lived, I have battled against it, and prayed that she might ever be spared a trial, or that a greater strength would be hers, than had been her mother's. As she has grown older, I have been grieved and troubled, beyond expression, to watch the growth of that spirit, and of a selfishness, that must have been her father's, as not an atom of it belonged to her mother, and many times I would have been discouraged utterly, if I had not had the faith that God would do all things for the best, and that all He wanted was for me to do all in my power, and trust the rest to Him."

As the days went by, Ernestine did not seem to grow any better, and friends hearing she was ill, began making kindly visits of sympathy, and were greatly surprised to find her so terribly altered by the brief illness. At first she refused to see any one; but Mrs. Dering asked if she could not, as they would think it strange, and she immediately assented.

It was indeed sad to look at her face, changed so suddenly from its laughing, exquisite beauty to such a pallid, hollow-eyed, heart-broken look, and every one pitied, and wondered, and privately talked it over. Miss Strong, who had industriously circulated the report of her visit, with many additions and wonderfully sly, meaning looks, now felt called upon to supply the public with a reason, so she told her dearest friend that Ernestine Dering had had a foolish little love affair, and broken her heart over it; and before twenty-four hours, the whole of Canfield had heard from, or told their dearest friend, the same thing; while Mrs. Dane, and a few other sensible ladies, were indignantly denying it, with what success, persons who deny rash stories, can guess.

"I declare," cried Kat one day in desperation, "I can't bear to go up stairs. I just dream about how sad she looks, and I can't keep from crying just to think that she really isn't our sister any more than—than Susie Darrow or any of the other girls. Oh, Kittie, just suppose we were ever to find out that we were not sisters, or belonged to somebody else, or something dreadful!"

Kittie gave a long, expressive shiver, and hugged her "fac-simile" by way of satisfaction, for such a dreadful thought.

"How often we have wondered where she got her lovely hair and eyes," she said slowly. "And how many times we fretted because mama watched her so, and seemed to humor her, where she never did us. I expect we have made mama unhappy lots of times by acting jealous that way."

"Like as not," answered Kat remorsefully. "It's all dreadful, every bit of it. I'd

give worlds if it had never happened."

They all tried, by every way in their power, to win Ernestine back to something of her old self; but it seemed impossible. She spent hours and hours by herself, just sitting with her hands folded, looking out of the window with no sign of life or interest in her colorless face, and rarely speaking. Just brooding, brooding, and nursing her grief, until the doctor said she must go away, take a complete change, and then she would come back herself again. He accepted the lover-story, as indeed, most every one did, for surely the general behavior and symptoms were much the same, and then, besides, what *could* the reason be if it wasn't that?

Ernestine was perfectly indifferent about a visit anywhere. She was selfish in her grief, as in everything else, and took no interest in all their plans for her, expressing no satisfaction at the decision that Bea should go with her, and saying that she did not care when or where they went.

One afternoon, Kittie went up stairs and found her writing something and crying bitterly over it. She so seldom cried, that Kittie was alarmed, but Ernestine said it was only because she was nervous; then put her writing away, and took her old, listless attitude in the chair by the window.

That night Olive heard something; she was sure that she did, and started up in bed for a moment to listen, but everything was perfectly still, so in a moment she lay down again, but could not get to sleep until long after the whistle had blown for the midnight train that went through to the city.

Next morning Ernestine did not come to breakfast, but it was nothing unusual, so Kittie fixed a tempting waiter and took it up stairs.

In a few minutes she called "mama," in a frightened way, and Mrs. Dering instantly sprang up, followed by the girls, and ran up stairs.

Since her sickness, Ernestine had slept alone, and Bea had gone over with Olive; so now, as they hurried in, they saw her untumbled bed, with just the slight pressure made where she had lain down, as though gone to bed for the night; everything else was unchanged. Mrs. Dering sank trembling into a chair, and pointed to a paper lying on the table. Olive reached it, and read aloud in a frightened, awe-struck voice:

"DARLING MAMA:

"I'm going away; I can't stay, and oh please don't look for me; for I could not come back. It seems as though my heart was broken, and it nearly made me crazy to think that I was all alone in the world, except a wicked, cruel father. Oh, I never knew how much I loved you all, until I found that I was nothing—neither daughter nor sister. I have taken the twenty dollars in gold, and fifteen dollars that I saved from my teaching, and I will go some where and work for my living. I know it will grieve you, and that is all that has kept me from going before; but I could not stand it any longer; something made me go. Oh, please forgive me, and do not look for me. I love you all so much, and it nearly broke my heart to look at the girls, and think they were all sisters, and you their own mama, while I was nothing. Don't grieve for me, please, but do love me.

"ERNESTINE."

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# CHAPTER XIII.

# A YEAR LATER.

KATHLEEN was sitting in the swing, and idly pushing a hole in the saw dust, with the toe of her shoe; while Katherine sat on a log hemming a handkerchief, a red rose stuck in her hair, and much thoughtfulness in her face.

"I think it's too horrible to think about," said the former, suddenly, and with a vinegary aspect of countenance.

"He may be nice," returned the latter, consolingly, though with much evident distaste to the fact.

"Who cares, and then besides, I bet he isn't."

"You mustn't bet."

"I will. You may be nice, and proper, and so awfully prim, if you want to, but I sha'n't."

"You're nearly fifteen."

"Suppose I am. Besides I'm not; it's three months yet."

"Well," said Kittie, after a pause, and turning a corner in her handkerchief with great nicety, "I suppose since it's settled, that he will be here in a few days. Bea has fixed his room so pretty."

"Pooh! I bet he'll never notice it, and he'll be an everlasting bother, and we'll never have any more fun; and I'm going to tell him the minute he gets here, that I hate him; and I hope that'll make him happy and want to stay," exclaimed Kat vehemently.

"Besides," continued Kittie, as placidly as though nothing was disturbing the serenity of her sister, "you see, my dear, how it will help mama."

Any remark of a like character, would, at any time, reduce the girls from the most active rebellion to passive acquiescence; and Kat immediately lost her

ferocious determination and looked reflective, as she recalled the dear face they loved, with its pale patient sweetness, and the gray hair that had all come into the brown locks within the last year, since Ernestine went away.

"Well," she said in a moment, and beginning to swing, "I suppose it's all right, but I wish he wasn't so old. Twenty! my goodness! He'll be forever lecturing us and reading solemn books, because I know he's solemn; sick people always are, and everything will have to be poky and still to suit him, and I think it's abominable!"

"Exactly," answered Kittie, with a nod of agreement. "But Kat, there's one splendid big thing to offset all those little horrid ones; why don't you think of that?"

"Well, I do, and I'm most tickled to death, that mama won't have to teach any more; poor, dear, blessed mama, she's most tired and worried to death;" and Kat's face grew very tender as she swung and thought over it all.

"Oh Kat!" cried Kittie, with a sudden vehemence, though the question that hung on her lips had been asked countless times in the past year, "Where do you suppose Ernestine is?"

Kat stopped the swing, and faced her sister with a sudden decision.

"I think," she said slowly, "Kittie, I think she's—dead!"

"Oh no! you don't surely! She can't be!" cried Kittie in terror; for no one had ever hazarded that cruel belief before. "Our Ernestine dead! I couldn't believe it, and I think it would kill mama, if she thought we would never find her again."

"But I can't help but feel so," said Kat sadly. "Just think of her getting into New York in the night, and not knowing anything where to go. I just know something dreadful happened, because we never can find one thing about her after she got there."

"But I don't believe she's dead!" exclaimed Kittie firmly. "I wouldn't believe it if I wanted to; and I think some time, or somehow, we will find her, or she will come back to us."

"Well I hope so I'm sure, for it will never seem right without her," said Kat. "Seems to me, we all lived so happy, with no troubles of any kind, until all of a sudden, then everything happens all at once. Home has never seemed the same

since papa died."

"When you look back and think how things have changed, don't it seem strange," said Kittie, dropping her sewing and looking pensively off at the wood-pile. "It seems so funny, to think that Miss Howard is married, and that people live in the little old school-house.

"Didn't we used to have fun there?"

"Yes, we did, and we're getting old dreadful fast," said Kat, ruefully.

"I can't imagine anything more dreadful than getting to be young ladies, and having to wear long dresses, and done-up hair, and always be polite and proper. I think it's horrible to be nearly fifteen!"

Kittie loved fun as much as Kat, but she was not quite so frolicsome in her tastes, nor so averse to a graceful train, or a lady-like structure of hair. In fact, she had many ideas of ideal young-ladyhood that would have amazed and dismayed her twin, had they been known. Any one who knew them well was no longer at a loss to know which was which, for while in childhood they had been too similar to ever be distinguished, the coming years brought different ideas to each, and left their print in looks and manner. Kat was wildly rebellious at the thought of growing up; she wanted to remain in the blissful days of short hair and dresses, when she could race with anybody, jump a fence, climb trees, and in every way be as boyish as she could, to pay up for being a girl. Consequently she always had a fly-away, unsettled look about her, rebelled at the lengthened dresses, insisted on wearing her hair in a flying braid, wouldn't be induced to cultivate ease and grace, and altogether was as wild and unconquerable on the threshold of fifteen as she had been in the freedom of twelve. Kittie, on the contrary, had a decided love for grace, and the ease of a cultivated young lady. She did her hair up in various and complicated fashions, occasionally practiced with a train, and had learned to bow with the latest grace and twist. She remembered Ernestine's little graceful ways, and profited by the remembrance, thereby driving Kat to the verge of desperation, by giving frequent lectures on the necessity of sitting still gracefully, and walking without a skip or jump every third step. With all their little growing differences, they were just as devoted and inseparable as ever. Kittie would sit and sew with a lady-like air, and a posy in her belt, while Kat would lounge in the window-seat, and read aloud, or amuse them with nonsense; or, if they went out on the pond, Kittie would wear her gloves and ply her oar with an eye to grace, while Kat would, perhaps, be

encased in a sun-bonnet, or be bareheaded and row as if on a contract to outdo the champion club in existence. In their work was the same little mark of distinction, and so now-a-days it was very easy to tell which was Kittie and which was Kat.

It was just a year since Ernestine had gone, and such a long, sad, hopeless year! Not a clue or trace of any kind could they find except that she had gone to New York. The Canfield ticket agent had had his suspicions when a lady had bought a ticket and gone on the midnight train; but it was none of his business, to be sure; so she had gone on her way unmolested, and farther than that, they knew nothing. Where she went on reaching the city, no one knew, though no mode of search had been left untried, and no expense spared, either by Mrs. Dering, or the relatives and friends who so heartily sympathized in her heart-broken search. There was nothing, from himself to the last dollar he possessed, that Mr. Congreve did not offer; and Jean sent a tear-stained note with a crisp ten dollars—all she had, and saying: "Mama, please spend it to find Ernestine; and I ask God every few minutes, if He won't please let us have her again."

But it had all been in vain. In the long days when Ernestine had sat and thought and grieved, she must have matured her plans well, or else she had gone blindly forth, on the wild impulse of despair, and been swallowed in the black wickedness of the great city, into which she went. It was a ceaseless question in the anxious hearts of those who loved her, but there never came any answer; and the days and weeks dragged into months until the year had rolled around, and they had heard nothing. The name of the lost became more precious than ever, and many things she had left behind, that all spoke so eloquently of her, they treasured as priceless, and wet them with many a sad tear, while heart and lips pleaded for the return of the dear one. The year of anxiety had told on Mrs. Dering, for the soft brown hair was thickly lined with grey, and there was a never-dying look of prayerful anxiety in her face, as though in some way, her life-work had been remiss and the fault of this one, gone astray, lay at her door. Still she never once gave up hope that at some time God would return this dear one to her, though it required constant prayer to strengthen the faith that trembled on the threshold of this affliction.

Under the strain of mental and physical work, her health was slowly giving way, and for many weeks there had been the anxious question, "what can be done to relieve mama?" and there had been no way discovered, for money was low, and each one already doing her utmost; so Mrs. Dering held her position at the seminary, and was obliged to content herself with one visit home a week, and

sometimes not even that, for the hack drive was so fatiguing, and besides, it cost fifty cents every time.

Well, after all, God never fails to give us something to cheer our flagging steps, never fails to know when a burdened child is falling with its load, and never fails to take the hand outstretched to Him, and help that child along!

In the midst of an anxious controversy one evening, when Mrs. Dering had just arrived home, and was lying exhausted on the lounge; Olive came in from the store and brought a letter with the Boston post mark; it proved to be from Mr. Dering's cousin, a wealthy widow, with an only son whose health was failing, and for whom the doctor prescribed a summer's rest, and relief from study. She had once visited the Dering home, and said she knew of no one, to whom she would so willingly trust her boy, in his delicate health, as to Robert's wife. The price named for his board was lavishly liberal, and filled the long felt want, for it would more than admit of mother's being free and at home to rest, and regain her own health and strength.

So this was what Kat, viewing matters from a personal standpoint, thought was "horrible," and what Kittie tried to reconcile her to by reviewing the good things that would result from it. Bea was to room with Olive, and the sunny front room was fixed for the coming invalid, and it is a pity that all the knick-knacks arranged by the girls could not have retained all the curious conjectures uttered in their hearing, as to what the coming cousin was apt to be like, and repeated them to that same person.

He came one evening, a tall pale youth, with very black eyes, quiet gentlemanly manners, and a faint suspicion of a mustache, and Kat instantly declared that she didn't like him.

"I told you he'd be solemn, and look like a preacher. I bet he's got consumption too, and I suppose he'll call me Kathleen and ask me if I'm prepared to die?" she exclaimed, after they had met him and he had gone to his room.

"I think he's very polite and nice," said Bea.

"He looks very intelligent," added Olive, with a pleasing idea in her mind, of having some one with whom she could discuss her books, and study Latin.

"Some fun in him I know," laughed Kittie. "And what nice manners he has,

and black eyes, I wonder if he appreciates them?"

"Poor fellow, just hear him cough," exclaimed Bea in sympathy. "Girls, what have you nice for supper?"

"Slap-jacks," answered Kat grimly. "I hope he'll enjoy them."

"O Kat, you surely have something else besides cakes," cried Bea in dismay. "It'll never do, he's used to everything nice."

"Suppose he is, we're not, and he mustn't expect it here."

"Dear me," explained Bea, starting for the kitchen; but Kittie interrupted her, with the consoling remark:

"It's all right, I made a nice pudding with sugar sauce, and there is cold meat and hot biscuit, that's enough, mama said so."

"I bet you he'll sit and mope in his room, and cry for his mama, dear little boy, I'll give him a sugar horn," laughed Kat, then caught her breath suddenly, and flushed scarlet, for there in the door stood the new cousin, also rather flushed, but with his eyes twinkling, and his arms full of things.

"Thank you, Cousin Kathleen," he said gravely; "I really hadn't thought of crying, but your promise is tempting, I'll begin in a few moments. In the meantime, here are some messages that mother sent with her love. She selected for each, as she remembered you, and I hope that none of you have so changed in tastes, that these little things will be out of keeping."

His genial tone, and winning smile were very taking, and made every one feel acquainted at once, so Bea pushed an easy chair forward, saying with a smile:

"We'll try hard to be grateful, Cousin Ralph. Come, take this easy chair and deliver your messages, you see we're anxious."

He did so, holding up a splendid copy of Dante.

"For Olive, whom mother remembers as a studious book-loving little girl, and hoped she would enjoy this grand work."

"I shall indeed," cried Olive joyfully. "How kind your mother is."

"She is indeed," answered Ralph. "And very dear to me, I assure you."

"This for Beatrice," he added, holding up a stout package; "I assure you, the interior is more attractive than the exterior," he said with a laugh; and so Bea found it, for there was a box of kid gloves, a dozen beautiful handkerchiefs, with her monogram worked in the corner, and a beautiful set of jet jewelry.

Bea was in ecstasies, and put on her ornaments at once, while Ralph next unfastened two boxes exactly alike and handed them, with their contents exposed, to their owners.

"For Kittie," he said, "and Kathleen."

Kittie gave a little scream of delight, but Kat simply made a bow, and said "Thanks," with the grace of a ramrod, and shut her box with a snap. They were two beautiful chains and lockets, of ebony and gold, with the letters "K. D." in raised letters on the lockets, and a picture of the giver within. Ralph took no notice of Kat's reception of the gift, but complimented Kittie as she put hers on, and then asked for Mrs. Dering.

Her gift was a dress of heavy black silk, with everything necessary to its make-up, and yards and yards of beautiful lace and fringe for its trimming. Oh, how happy the girls were over that, and how splendid it would seem to see mama once more in an elegant dress, such as she used to wear.

For Ernestine, were elegantly bound copies of the old composers, and for Jeanie an exquisite little pearl ring. The one of these, Mrs. Dering laid away with tears, and a silent prayer, such as came from her heart every hour of the day for the absent one; the other, she sent with a long, loving letter to the little girl in Virginia, and thought, with a grateful heart, that the bitterest sorrows have a drop of joy somewhere, for the doctors had said that Jeanie could be cured.

In just a little while, it seemed as though Ralph had been with them always, such a comfort as he was to all, and such a genial, jovial companion as he became on all occasions. Mrs. Dering, or Aunt Elizabeth, he very soon lifted to the niche of affection next to his mother's; and she, in turn, loved him as an own son, and in his ambitious moments, gave him long earnest talks, wherein she drew his unremembered Uncle Robert, as an example of truth, manhood and honor, such as she hoped to see him follow.

For Bea, who now revelled in all the bliss of being a young lady nearly eighteen, he exerted all his most courtly politeness and gallant manners, and she wondered how she had ever gotten on without him before.

To Olive, he was confidential, and finally won her to the same state. They studied, read and discussed, disagreed and argued, but he was always so polite, and ready to gracefully yield when a contested point could not be settled, that Olive grew ashamed of her more abrupt manners and hasty speech, and so the intimacy helped her in more ways than one. He confided to her all his ambitious plans of being a great lawyer, and his impatience at having to drop his studies for so many months. She, in turn, confided to him her longing for artistic study, and made him ashamed by the patience with which she had laid aside her cherished plans, and given all her time to the work which necessity demanded. So their friendship prospered.

To Kittie, he was invaluable, and a more devoted brother and sister surely never lived. They boated, walked, sang, played and, in short, were almost constantly together. He was quick to discover the girlish longing to be graceful, refined and accomplished, and he helped her much, both as an example of polished, polite manners, and by rehearsing for her many of the accomplishments and graces of ladies of his acquaintance. And many times had he said to her in their little chats: "You have a constant example before you, Kittie, in your mother. She is so refined, and such a true, noble woman, I would love to see you like her."

To Kat, he was nothing, unless it was a stumbling block in the way of her happiness. She didn't like him, and was furiously jealous of the flourishing friendship between him and Kittie. He had not been solemn and poky, as she had prophesied, and the fact nettled her. She never could make him angry, though she left no way untried, and that was exasperating. He was always catching her at a disadvantage, and what she thought was anger at the fact, was, in truth, wounded pride. She was as rude as she dared be, and never lost an opportunity to sharp-shoot; and while he realized the impoliteness of a return shot, the temptation was too great to resist; so they had some lively skirmishes, in all good humor on his side, but in lively anger on hers.

He came out on the porch one day, and found her sitting on the steps, with her hat tilted over her eyes, and a generally woe-begone look in her whole attitude; and they had just had a wordy battle out at the pond.

"Why, Kathleen," he exclaimed, in mock penitence, "is it possible? Why, I never meant to hurt your feelings. I didn't suppose they could be hurt."

"No; they can't, by you," retorted Kat, knocking off her hat, and showing her

eyes scornfully bright and dry. "Whenever you speak, I consider the source, and it never amounts to much."

"Is it possible?" he exclaimed, laughing. "When I speak to you, you are the source of every inspiring word."

"Then I am heartily ashamed of myself."

"I don't wonder; I'm often ashamed of you."

"You're hideous," cried Kat, fiercely. "I wonder if you have the ghost of an idea how horrible you are, Ralph Tremayne?"

"No, indeed, I never found any one impolite enough to tell me; but you will, I'm sure."

"Don't judge my politeness by your own!"

"I can't for you have none," he rejoined coolly.

Kat could have slapped him with a relish, and like as not, if he had been nearer her own age she would have tried it. As it was, she looked into his laughing eyes and knew that she was angry, and he was not, therefore he would win, for a cool head can think a great deal faster than a hot one; so she turned on her heel with a contemptuous spin, and left him.

That afternoon she heard Ralph and Kittie planning a walk to the woods next day, and her jealous heart ached and burned fiercely. How despicable he was to take all of Kittie's time, and make himself such a paragon in her eyes, that she could talk of no one else. Kat shook her head in dire vengeance, and might have cried if she hadn't been too proud. But just then Kittie said:

"I don't know, Ralph, whether I can go or not; I have some sewing that I ought to do; you remember how I tore my dress the last time we went boating? well, I ought to darn it, you see."

"No, I don't happen to see, unless you take it out in the woods and mend it, while I make you a crown and put it on your head as queen of industrious girls. Violets would be very becoming to your brown hair and winsome face."

"What nonsense!" muttered Kat, in disgust, while all the time her heart ached. "Wouldn't it be a joke if he was saying all those things to me instead of Kittie, and didn't know the difference. He wouldn't think I had a winsome face if I was

the last girl alive, and yet I'm the moral image of Kittie."

"Perhaps I can find time to darn my dress this afternoon, and if I do, then I'll go to-morrow," Kittie was saying, and then in a few moments Ralph went away. The moment he was gone Kat came around into the arbor, and threw herself on the grass.

"Now then, Kittie."

"Well, my dear."

"I would just like to know a thing or two?"

"What, for instance?"

"Who are you going with to-morrow? That abomination wants you to go with him, and I've set my heart on having you go with me down town. You haven't been with me, since the dear knows when, and upon my word, I feel real bad."

"I'll mend my dress now, go with Ralph in the morning, and you in the afternoon," smiled Kittie sweetly.

"No you don't," cried Kat, sitting up. "I'd like to have you to myself for one day, at least. If he can get you from me so much in six weeks, by the end of summer you'll be beyond speaking to me."

"Oh, Kat," cried Kittie reproachfully. "How can you?"

"Well, will you go with me to-morrow?"

"My dress—"

"I'll darn your old dress right now. Will you?"

"I don't believe you care half as much for me to go, as you do to spite Ralph," said Kittie thoughtfully, and to Kat's amazement she suddenly realized that this was so, not but what she really wanted Kittie, but the predominant desire was to spite Ralph, and she was bound to do it now, so she ran off for the dress, brought it back, and darned it immaculately, whereupon Kittie felt that the thing was settled.

Kat was jubilant all the evening, and seized the first opportunity of announcing the change in the programme. Shortly after they came into the sitting-room, Ralph asked:

"Is the dress darned, Kittie?"

"Yes, it is, and I darned it, and Kittie's going down town with me to-morrow," answered Kat glibly.

Ralph lifted his eye-brows with a smile, instantly detecting the little spite-work.

"Why, did I speak to you?"

"Believe not; I spoke to you."

"Suppose you try the novelty of speaking when you're spoken to."

"I generally do; also at any other time that I take a notion. I've done it all my life, and it'll take more than you to stop me."

"Some people talk to hear themselves."

"So I've heard, and I'm quite convinced that no one has a better right to come under that head than yourself."

"Quite true; I'm amazed at your powers of penetration. Perhaps you also observed that I rank only a little ways below my illustrious cousin, Kathleen."

"I'm not your cousin, thank goodness."

"Don't thank anything with which you have so little acquaintance; it's apt to never be appreciated."

"No acquaintance that I have with anything, or any body troubles me as much as the acquaintance that I have with you."

"You have my sympathy, for I'm troubled with the same feeling."

"Do hush," exclaimed Kittie. "It's perfectly awful the way you two do talk. Ralph, come play chess. Kat, I'm astonished."

"I don't wonder; so am I; but I never had such an object to deal with before, so no wonder I do some unusual things," cried Kat, and bounced out of the room to hide the tears that would come; for Kittie's voice was reproof, and she took Ralph's part, and that was altogether too much!

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# CHAPTER XIV.

# STUDY OR PLAY?

OLIVE was standing at the window, with a thoughtful face. Any one who remembered seeing her on the porch one evening, a little over two years ago, and recalled her face then, compared to what it was now, would have said in incredulous amaze:

"What a change!"

She was now nearly seventeen, though she looked every day of twenty, both in face and figure. There was such a settled, purposeful look in the face, and so much strength and soul looking out from the eyes, that had been used to scowling fiercely, so much determination expressed in the mouth, that had caught the trick of smiling much more readily than it once had. Nor was this all of the change either; she had come to realize that care in personal attire, and a study of pleasing others, could frame the most unattractive in attractive guise, and indeed, they had done their work for her. Instead of wearing the very things that she knew did not harmonize with her peculiar dark complexion, she studied what was becoming. Her hair, which was luxuriously long and heavy, she wore in such a manner as to soften the severe outline to head and face, and waved it deeply in front, so that curly tendrils of hair lessened the height of her too-high brow, and gave a more girlish look to the thoughtful face. In short, the Olive of two years ago was not much like the Olive of to-day, and in what her character had changed, I leave you to find out for yourself.

She stood there, looking out, and something pleasing, evidently, caught her eye, for it brightened suddenly, then in a moment a look of regret chased the smile from her face.

"What is it, dear?" inquired Mrs. Dering.

"What, mama?"

"The faces of my girls are so dear to me, that I can read them quickly. Something pleased you, then brought an after-thought that was sad. What was

it?"

"Nothing. I only saw Bea coming with Dr. Barnett."

"Ah!" The same smile, followed by a look of regret and a little sigh crossed Mrs. Dering's face, and she sewed a little faster than before, as if her thoughts were suddenly quickened by something. Dr. Walter Barnett had come to Canfield within the past year, rented a modest little office, hung out a neat, pretty sign to indicate that all persons afflicted with any of the ills to which flesh is heir, would always find him ready and anxious to do his best; and after a patient, hopeful struggle, he had now settled in a flourishing practise; for he was courteous and gentle, ready and willing, and always inspired the children with a liking, which old Dr. Potts, with his blue glasses and loud voice, could never do. Dr. Walter also taught the bible-class, and won the flinty hearts of the congregation, and the susceptible ones of the young ladies. He also frequently walked home with Beatrice Dering, and had fallen into the way of occasionally stopping in the evenings, if he happened to be passing and saw them in the yard. The old house, with its shady porches, clambering vines, and sheltering trees, made him think of his own home he said, and then Mrs. Dering, with her sweet, motherly ways, and surrounded by such lovely attractions, seemed to charm him; and Ralph Tremayne possessed a wonderful influence over him some way, which served to bring him there more frequently than he could have found an excuse for coming, if that young gentleman had not formed a part of the household.

Bea came up stairs in a little while, with a lovely color in her cheeks, and looking very bewitching indeed, with her soft bright eyes, a posy in her belt, and a merry smile on her lips.

"I met Dr. Barnett" she said, taking off her hat, and smoothing out the ribbons with a little thoughtful air; "he was just going to see that poor widow's little girl, who broke her back last week, and he stopped while I gathered some flowers for him to take to her. He is going to cure her if he can, and not charge anything. Isn't it good and kind in him, mama?"

"Yes, dear, very. He did not tell you so, did he?"

"Oh no; he's too modest. Mrs. Dane told me. She went to see the little girl, and took some things, for they are very poor, you know; and the mother told her, and just cried when she told how good and kind he was, and how he talked, and told Katie stories, when she was afraid to have her back fixed."

"He is a very estimable young man, and a true Christian, I think," said Mrs. Dering, watching Bea's animated face as she talked, and noticing that there was no touch of embarrassment or any trace of color, as she rehearsed her friend's praise.

"When I gave him the flowers," added Bea, taking the posy from her belt, and sniffing at the fragrant leaves, "he gave me these, and said we would exchange. He has a little window-garden in his office. I think that is so nice,—and these grew in it; they need some water now, poor little things. Hand me that vase, Olive! There!"

Mrs. Dering went on with her sewing, and her heart, ever young, went back to the blissful days of her own life, like these in which Bea now lived, and she thought, with a smile:

"Bless the dear innocent little heart. She doesn't suspect yet how happy she is, nor what precious meaning the little exchange of posies will soon take unto themselves."

Olive was thinking of Bea's happy face and blithe laugh, and after her sister had gone singing from the room, she came over to her mother's side, and sat down on a stool there.

"Mama, are you glad?"

"Yes, dear, both glad and sad. A mother always dreads the time when she must begin to prepare herself to have her children leave her; but it must come, so if she can know that their new choice will bring them happiness, it, of course, lessens the pain which comes with losing them. Dr. Barnett is a good Christian, a perfect gentleman, and I think he loves Beatrice. I also think she is quite unconscious of it as yet, and I am very glad. I hope it will continue so. She is young yet, my dear little girl, and when she becomes aware of the new love, then I must be content with second place, and I do not want it to come yet."

"And, mama—"

"Well, dear."

"I want to speak of something that may be all imagination on my part, and will take your word to settle it. But don't you think Ralph thinks a great deal of Kittie?"

"Yes, he does; but it is all a brotherly feeling, anything else would be nonsense! Why, they're nothing but children!" said Mrs. Dering a little sharply.

"I know Kittie is, and she never thinks of such a thing any more than a genuine kitten; but Ralph is twenty, mama," said Olive.

"I know; and very old for his age in many things, but at heart he is nothing but a boy. He has always been at home with his mother, and has an almost girlish love and preference for ladies' society. He and Kittie are genial in amusements, just as you and he are in books and ambitions. They love each other as brother and sister, but as nothing more. I should be sorely displeased if any other idea should ever reach either."

"It never will through me," said Olive. She then sat silent for a long time, and finally breaking the pause, by saying:

"Mama, do you remember, one night a long time ago, when we were all telling disappointments?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Of course, it was all nonsense; but I have often thought since, that some time, I would tell you what I wanted to do."

"And am I to hear now?"

Olive smiled, and looked a little wistful.

"Yes, I guess I will tell you, though it will be no surprise to you. I want to study, but I can never do it in Canfield. When I was fourteen, I first thought of going to the city and studying in Cooper's Institute and coming home for over Sunday, and I began to save up my money for it. The money that I gave to papa was that, and I was at work on a head to take with me, because I thought perhaps I would have to have a trial picture. I knew I couldn't go then, because I was too young and inexperienced; but I'm older now, and if you would only say that you are willing, so that I could begin to put just a little money away every month—"

Mrs. Dering laid down her sewing, and looked in amaze at Olive's face, which had become so enthusiastic as she put her plea in a voice that trembled in its eagerness.

"My dear child, I had thought of that same thing for you."

"Why, mama!"

"I had, indeed; and is it possible that it has been your own thought and desire for so long? You have so cheerfully given up your own work and done that less tasteful, and so patiently waited for the time to come when you could use your own money, that I had decided on just this thing, and will draw enough money from the bank to send you. I have a dear old friend in the city who would be delighted to have you board with her during the week, and now that Ralph is here, you can and shall be spared from your work, and shall take a rest in doing the work that you love."

Olive looked speechless. Her eyes were full of sparkling tears, and her lips trembling with a smile. She evidently did not know what to say for some moments, then she exclaimed:

"Oh, mama! Is it really so? It seems too good to believe, I had almost given up hope, for it didn't seem as if I ever could go. Oh, how I will study and draw, so as to make money and make my name;" and overcome with joy and a desire to shed some happy tears, Olive jumped up and ran out.

In a day or two, however, something happened that deferred Olive's studies for a while longer. It was from Jean, a long letter, full of love and longings to see them all, and long reports of what the doctors were doing for her, and how she could stand straight now without her crutch, and would soon be able to take a step. And after all that, she began about Uncle Ridley: how kind and good he was, how she had everything she could think of; how they loved each other; and then came this piece of news:

"He wants one of the girls to come and make a visit, mama. He's often said so; but the other day he told me to write for one of them, which ever one I wanted, and he would pay her expenses. Now you know I never could choose which of the girls I'd love to see most, because I want to see them all so very much. But I think he wants to see Olive; he's often said so; and he's asked me so much about her, and said he'd like to know her because she was so impudent to him. Why was she? Do you know, mama? I think it's so strange, when he's such a dear, darling uncle. Anyhow, I think it would please him very much if she would come, and oh, how very happy I would be. Tell me what you think about it, and I do hope she'll come; and if she can't, please let one of the others, and hurry and let me know. I can hardly wait."

"Of course you'll go," said Kittie, when the letter was finished, and the

question open to discussion.

"To be sure," said Kat. "Olive, you're a lucky girl. I wish I had been impudent to him."

"I always have wanted to see Congreve Hall," said Bea, with a little sigh. "How grand it would seem to live in a magnificent place that had a name to it. I suppose you'll stay a long time, Olive?"

"I wish he wanted any of you," said Olive, "and I believe he does. It's all Jeanie's notion, his wanting me. Fix Bea up, mama, and let her go. I have something else on my mind."

But Mrs. Dering shook her head. "I think Jean is right," she said. "Uncle Ridley is a peculiar old man and he thinks Olive is much like the Congreves; he told me so himself, and I think he wants you for that reason."

So great was Olive's consternation, that she sprang right up from her seat in dismay.

"Oh, mama! I want to see Jean; you know I do, but I can't give up my plan any longer; I can't. You don't think I ought to, do you?"

"What do you think about it, Olive?"

"I don't know; I think it's too bad," cried Olive; then fled from the room, as she always did when she found her emotions getting the mastery over her.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Kat, in sympathy. "It is too bad when her heart is so set on her studies. That's the disadvantage of having a talent. Don't you suppose Uncle Ridley would be satisfied with me? I'd do my level best to be like the Congreves, if that is such an attraction to him."

"He'd go crazy with such a whirligig about as you," said Bea, a little envious of Olive's good luck. "I think I might go. I'm the oldest, and dear me, how I would enjoy it!"

"I would love to have you all go," said Mrs. Dering, thoughtfully creasing the letter in her fingers. "Congreve Hall was papa's home, and I would enjoy having you see it, would love to go myself, in fact, and when I think of my dear precious little girl, it seems as though I must go. But that cannot be, so it need not be thought of. As to Olive, Uncle Ridley is peculiar and quick, and he took a

fancy to her, and if her going to see them would give him any pleasure, I am only too glad and willing to have her go. I am sorry the invitation came just now for the child has waited so patiently to study and work on her art, that delay will be a sore disappointment to her. But she will see through it rightly I am sure and be willing to wait a little longer."

"Mama," said Kat, reflectively, "don't you think Olive has changed very, very much?"

"Yes, dear."

"And especially since Ernestine went away. Why?" asked Kittie.

Mrs. Dering sighed and looked sad; she always did when Ernestine's name was mentioned.

"Olive's was a very unhappy disposition then, a great deal more so than she is now," she said. "What attractions she possessed, she hid by her faults; she did not try to please any one, but took her time in envying Ernestine's natural beauty and power to please. She made herself bitter, morose, and unattractive, then blamed others for showing any preference for her sisters. I think the lesson poor Ernestine taught was one that she took to heart deeply, and has profited much by."

"I notice she does not dislike Uncle Ridley as much as she used to," said Bea, smiling and looking very happy all at once as she caught sight of a gentleman coming up the shady walk. "Mama, here comes Dr. Barnett. I promised him some more flowers to take to little Katie Gregg. If he is not in a hurry I shall ask him in; and, Kat, I advise you to put up your hair. It looks like an Indian's that way."

"Who cares for old Barnett?" said Kat, as Bea flitted out. "My hair suits myself, and if he don't like it, he can look at Kittie's. Hers is as proper as ten commandments, with a killing bow fastened right on an angle with her ear. Now here comes Ralph, and I'm off. Kittie come down to the pond, and let's take a row."

"I will in a little while," said Kittie, putting her sewing aside; "but Ralph is going to help me with that example I couldn't get, and I'll do that first, then I'll be down."

"Well, I'll not look for you," said Kat discontentedly. "After you get your old

example, there'll be something else, and then it'll be time to get dinner. I just abominate cousins!" and Kat slammed out of one door, just as Ralph came in at the other.

No one saw Olive again during the day, but just before supper she came down stairs and asked for mother.

"I don't know," said Kittie, flying about the kitchen with her big apron on. "She and Bea went down town this afternoon; I don't know whether they're back or not. If you're going in the sitting-room, tell Ralph to come; he said he'd beat the eggs, if I'd make a puff-cake."

So Olive went into the sitting-room, and sent Ralph out to the feminine employment of egg-beating, then she stood by the window and looked absently out at the shadowy yard. She was going to Virginia; she had decided on that, though the decision had cost some bitter tears and some stern reasoning; for her new plans, long held in check, were doubly precious in the sudden promise of fulfillment, and her whole soul, starved out on book-keeping and dusty offices, begged for a revel in the art she loved so well.

"After all," she mused, deciding grimly to look at the best side of things, "Jean says there is a gallery of grand pictures at Congreve Hall, and I suppose I can study and make copies of the ones that I like; and then"—the thought was a little distasteful to her—"I suppose I was unjust to Mr. Congreve, and ought to make amends if I can. We do owe him more than any amount of gratitude can ever repay, for all he's done for Jean, and I suppose I ought to call him Uncle Ridley, and have the dress made that he sent me; perhaps he'll recognize it;" then she laughed a little, to think what he would say at discovering her just accepting the present made two years ago.

"A laugh sounds encouraging; what brings it Olive?" asked Mrs. Dering, having entered noiselessly.

"Nothing, I was just thinking," answered Olive. "I will go, mama, because I cannot help but think that I ought to, I was just deciding in my mind to call him Uncle Ridley, and have the black dress made. How soon shall I go?"

"I cannot tell yet; there is much that you will need done. I am very glad that you have decided in this way, Olive dear, though I know it was a sacrifice; but your art will become none the less precious through delay, and your decision shows a desire to retract some hasty judgments, and do justice to a peculiar old

man, who, with all his faults and vagaries, has a heart as true as gold."

"I guess that's it," said Olive, with a little sigh; and then the supper-bell rang.

At the end of three weeks Olive was ready to go, and it was hard to tell whether she was any more enthusiastic with the idea or not. After the fashion of all young girls, she could not help but be pleased to see the accumulating pile of pretty things; to feel all the time that something, which might prove very pleasant, was going to happen; and that she was the cause of all the little bustle of preparation that filled the house, and engrossed the mind and hands of mother and sisters. There is always something, more or less exciting in the appearance of a trunk, and when packing time actually came, Olive found that she was beginning to indulge in some very pleasing anticipations.

"I expect Jean has grown very tall," said Bea one afternoon, as the girls were all gathered in Olive's room, and the big trunk stood open in the middle of the floor.

"Probably wears long dresses, and does her hair in a chignogger," said Kat, from a perch on the foot-board of the bed, where she rested in idle moments.

"'Tisn't to be supposed that she can be treated so like a young lady, and not get stuck up. Just to think of having a maid, and being called Miss Dering, when you are only twelve. Hollo, Kittie! hand me that pile of skirts, and I'll fold them."

"Dear me," said Kittie, handing over the snowy starched heap. "You have six white skirts, Olive, and three of them trimmed. I'd feel terribly fixed up, and lady-like with so many."

"Pooh! some girls have six dozen, with tucks, and ruffles and puffles on every blessed one of them," said Kat, making the starched cloth rattle with her vigorous folding.

"All nonsense," assented Kittie, down on her knees before the trunk. "Now hand me the things and I'll pack. Kat, you're knocking everything off the table, the way you whisk those skirts around. Hand me the black dress; that's the heaviest and must go in first."

"Where's the other black tip?" asked Bea, who was trimming the travelling hat. "There it is, you blew it behind the table with your whirlwind of skirts; hand it to me, Kat."

"What fun it is to pack and go away," said Kat, fishing out the desired feather with Olive's parasol. "You pack like a captain, Kittie. I'd most likely have put her best hat in the first thing, shoe polish next, and then tumbled in anything that I happened to lay my hands on. Dear me, I wish I was going."

"I really think it's too bad that you haven't a party dress, Olive," said Kittie, with some disapproval.

"Whatever would she do with a party dress," cried Kat, once more enthroned on the foot-board. "Who'd give a party, I'd like to know? One old man, a little girl, and a pile of servants!"

"Young Mr. Congreve is there," corrected Bea.

"S'pose he is; and anyhow, I hope you'll snub him, Olive; he's going to own Congreve Hall, and it ought to have been papa's. If he was a decent man he wouldn't take it. How are you going to treat him?"

"I don't know;—yes, I like the feather that way; you ought to see how nicely my dress hangs," said Olive, in a little flutter of pleasing excitement. "Really, it's quite nice getting ready to go away. I only wish the visit was over and done with, and all this preparation was for sending me off to study."

"Don't worry about your studying, you're twice as smart now as any of us," said Bea, surveying her work, from its perch on her finger. "Now try this on, Olive, I've tipped the feather a little more to one side, and it looks more jaunty—just the thing too; isn't that becoming girls?"

"Perfectly mag!" exclaimed Kat, making an eye-glass of her hands, and falling into a rapture of admiration that pretty near upset her from the foot-board.

"I declare, you're going to be very distinguished looking, Olive," said Kittie, resting from her packing to survey, and pass an opinion. "And a cocked hat is very becoming. The next thing we hear, you will be creating a sensation in Staunton that will shake the whole of Virginia."

"Very likely," laughed Olive; but she looked pleased, for there was honest admiration in each sister's voice; and, after all, it is no small thing to be going off alone, with a trunk filled by loving hands, a new cocked hat that is becoming, and the pleasing thought of looking well in all respects, and perhaps "distinguished."

The day for departure came at last; and in the afternoon sunshine, Olive, trunk and satchel stood on the porch, waiting for the express wagon; and the front door stood open, and there was a great deal of laughing and talking going on within, that sounded very gay and happy. Dr. Barnett had taken advantage of the little excitement to drop in, though he had been around only the evening before, and bid Olive good-bye, with much ceremony and many good wishes; but no one seemed to object to his being on hand again, for Bea looked her unconscious happiness, and Mrs. Dering was cordial and kind, and the young doctor was in a dream of bliss.

"Where's Ralph?" exclaimed Olive, suddenly, when the real good-bye moment had fairly come; if such it could be called, when the whole family were going to the depôt with the young traveller.

"He's gone, sure enough!" said Kittie, after some hasty and lusty calling had taken place. "I suppose he's gone on down to the train; but it's funny the wagon don't come."

"I'll trot down to the gate and see if it is in sight," volunteered Kat, who was obliged to keep moving as a vent to excitement; but just as she started, there rattled up to the gate, in great style, the handsomest of Canfield's two hacks, and out of it sprang Ralph.

"I wanted you to go off in style," he said, well pleased with himself when he saw Olive's delighted look. "Here cabby, is the trunk! Now, ladies—hollo, doctor! you going to the train?"

"Well, really," said Dr. Barnett, hesitating, "I hadn't thought, but, if Miss Olive will allow me, I'll be happy."

He said Miss Olive, but, bless you! he looked right straight at Miss Beatrice, and she smiled; and after that, neither ever knew whether Olive was willing or not.

"This is putting on style with a vengeance," said Kat, as the ladies seated themselves in the back, after the trunk had been tossed aloft. "People will think the whole family is departing for Europe."

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# CHAPTER XV.

# CONGREVE HALL.

"THAT'S Olive! that's Olive! Oh I'm so glad; hurry James, there she is!"

It was an eager, childish voice, ringing joyfully through the Staunton depôt, and making every one turn and smile at the speaker, who stood in a large carriage, running her eyes over the crowd that gathered as the train came in and stopped; and suddenly breaking into that joyful cry, as she watched for a face, which appeared among so many strange ones.

"Yes, Miss Jean; the young lady in grey?"

"Yes, and hurry; she doesn't see us yet," cried Jean, almost leaping from the carriage in her eager excitement, but James made his way through the crowd, and Olive suddenly found herself confronted by a tall man who lifted his hat.

"Miss Dering? Miss Jean is in the carriage; may I take your satchel? This way, please."

Olive followed, with her heart fluttering wildly; but almost before her quick eye discovered her little sister, James had paused at the carriage, and Jean was laughing and crying on her neck.

"Oh, Olive, I'm so glad and happy, I don't know what to do! I was so afraid you wouldn't come—and Uncle Ridley told me I mustn't get out of the carriage—and cousin Roger couldn't come with me—and I'm so glad you came—and how is mama and the girls—why don't you say something?"

More than one person in hearing of this incoherent outburst, smiled broadly, and James was obliged to lower his head as he assisted Olive into the carriage, lest the twinkle of amusement in his face, should mar his profound dignity and professed stolidity for anything outside his coachmanship.

"Do tell me everything—quick," cried Jean, as the carriage started onward, and she took her seat on Olive's lap. "Didn't mama send her picture, or something? I'd give twenty million dollars, if I had it, if I could just see her for a

few little minutes. I guess I've cried about fifty gallons of tears to see you all since I came here."

"Cried, when you are getting well?" laughed Olive, just beginning to realize how much she had wanted to see the little sister, who was now clinging to her with such joyous love.

"Yes, indeed I have; and then Bettine gets so sorry for me, and says it isn't right, but then, I think God ought not to make me love mama and you all so much, if He does not want me to cry to see you."

"And are you ever so much better?" asked Olive.

"Oh yes, I never use my crutch now, only a little cane to help me, and the first time I really walk without any thing, I'm going to have my picture taken for mama."

"I will draw it," exclaimed Olive. "If I am here, and have you standing among the flowers."

"How nice," cried Jean; then drew back a little, and looked at her sister, as though just aware that she was really present.

"Why, Olive, you—seems to me—I don't know; but then, aren't you changed a good deal, someway?"

"I don't know; do you think I am?" asked Olive feeling the color creep into her cheeks, at the honest childish question.

"Yes, it seems to me you are;" and Jean looked undecided whether to go on. "You look so nice and pretty, and then you don't seem a bit cross; is it because you are glad to see me?"

"That's just exactly it," cried Olive, moved to hide her face.

"You don't know how glad I am to see you Jeanie, and if I'm cross a single once while I'm here, you may scold me."

"Oh, Olive," and Jean laughed merrily. "The idea of my scolding you, that's too funny. Don't you ever get cross any more?"

"I try not, but then I do a great many times, I expect; I don't think I will now though, for I'm so glad to be with you, and find that you are just the same little

Jeanie, that mama and the girls love and want to see so much. Why Kat said she expected you would have on long dresses, and be a young lady."

"What a funny old girl she is," cried Jean. "I'd give anything to hear her laugh once, it always sounds so pretty."

The rest of the drive was taken up in hasty chattering, as though they were going to be separated in just a few moments, and would leave something untold; and Olive never noticed that they had entered some tall gates, and were going up a white gravel road that wound in and out of the velvet-like lawn; and had quite forgotten her trepidation at meeting Mr. Congreve, until they came to a stand still, and James, throwing open the carriage door, revealed the great entrance portico, the open doors and the cool dark interior to Congreve Hall.

"Where is Uncle Ridley?" was Jean's first question, as James lifted her out and handed her cane, while Olive followed.

"I do not know, Miss Jean," James answered; but at that moment, Mr. Congreve became visible, advancing through the wide hall, and with her heart in a little jump, Olive passed Jean, entered the door, and met him, with outstretched hand.

"How do you do, Uncle Ridley?"

"Uncle Ridley! God bless my soul, just listen," cried the old man, the quizzical look on his face changing to one of blank delighted amazement, "Why, how do you do, my dear child; I didn't know but what you'd take my head off the first thing; you've changed a great deal; yes, bless my soul you have, but it's very becoming, it is indeed. Now come right in and sit down, and let me look at you, for I'd like to do so, yes I would. There—hum! ha, I never expected to get this close to you and be safe. And you called me Uncle Ridley too. Do it of your own accord?"

"Yes, sir."

"Going to do it again?"

"If you want me to?"

"Want you to! God bless my soul! Just listen. I never was a downright, unvarnished heathen, but twice in my life; and I guess you know about both of those times, and my first request is that you let them slide from your memory.

The Lord knows I'd like to! Yes, child, I want you to call me uncle, I hoped you would, but I wasn't going to ask you to. Before I die, I would like to be a better uncle to Robert's children than I ever was to him."

"Why, how do you do, my Dear Child?"
**"WHY, HOW DO YOU DO, MY DEAR CHILD?"**

Olive found that what little of the old dislike that lingered in her memory was fast vanishing, but before she could speak, he had whisked back into his odd, abrupt way.

"What stupids we are, to be sure; never ask you to take off your things, or wash your face; and it's dirty sure as I'm alive! but then, there's enough smoke and dust and stuff, between here and New York, to dirty the faces of all the angel hosts, so you needn't mind; though I don't suppose you do; bless me! no; but then, you had better go and wash it. Jeanie, Olive is ready to go up stairs."

Jean had been fluttering about Olive's chair in impatient eagerness, and now signified her readiness to act as guide by seizing her hand and hurrying out.

"I was so afraid he would keep you there to talk," she said, as they went up the wide stairway, and through the hall, that made Olive open her eyes in spite of herself, for she never had seen such lavish display of elegance; and she was immediately seized with an old feeling of awkward strangeness, that brought a defiant color to her face, as she thought of any one discovering that she was unused to any elegance or custom that might reign in Congreve Hall.

"Uncle Ridley had these rooms fixed for you," said Jean, throwing open a large door, and ushering her in. "See, aren't they just beautiful?"

"Yes, indeed," exclaimed Olive in quick delight; for they were certainly gems to make a girl rejoice. Three, with a bath-room, all complete, and looking like Titania's bower in their delicate green coloring and bamboo furniture. The carpets were like untouched moss clinging fresh and sweet, to mother-rocks, and to Olive, it seemed almost like sacrilege to tread upon it. From the wide, deep windows was a view, such as would hold the most careless gazer in a moment of ecstasy, and after one quick cry of artistic appreciation, Olive stood mutely entranced. Looking down, there were occasional glimpses of the magnificent lawn, with here and there, a rustic seat, and white statue, thrown in bold relief as seen through the tossing foliage; and looking out, there showed the road winding down through the mountains, every now and then disappearing, until finally lost to view; and farther off, and down in the valley lay Staunton, the busy, beautiful

city, with its church spires rising into the hazy atmosphere, as though in defiance to the lofty peaks towering so much higher, and printing themselves against the sky in the far distance, in jagged, immovable lines, that looked like relentless guards to something beyond.

"Do you want a maid?" asked Jean, breaking in upon her reverie. "Uncle Ridley sent to ask you."

"A maid!" exclaimed Olive, feeling blank for a moment. Did she want a maid? No; of course she didn't. Ernestine would have taken a maid; oh, yes; and no one would ever thought but what she had had a maid and untold luxuries all her life. But she—"No, I don't want any maid," she said, almost sharply; then laughed as Jean looked grieved at the quick tone. "What would I do with a maid, Jeanie? She would know a great deal more what to do than I, and that would never do, you know. Besides, I'm too used to dressing myself. Do all young ladies in Virginia have maids?"

"All the rich ones, I guess. Miss Franc Murray,—she is going to marry Cousin Roger, Bettine says; she has one, and scolds her like everything when her hair isn't just right."

"Why, how do you know?" laughed Olive.

"I've been there lots of times. She comes here for me, and tells Uncle Ridley she loves me dearly; but Olive—"

"Yes."

"When she comes, she stays just as long as she can; and if Cousin Roger isn't around, she asks me where he is, and all about him; then I have to promise never to tell."

"But you are telling me."

"Oh, do you think that counts?" cried Jean in alarm. "She didn't ever mean you; but then, perhaps, I better not tell any more until I ask her, for I might break my word."

Olive could not resist kissing the childish, innocent face that looked more like a little angel's than a child of nearly twelve. Surely, no matter how Jean was surrounded, she would always retain that childish sweetness and purity, that had always made her seem more of heaven than earth. Before she left Congreve Hall,

Olive many times wondered that the child was not spoiled, for her slightest wish was law, from the owner down to the last servant therein.

When the bell rang for tea, it broke in upon an earnest cosy chat between the sisters, and made them reluctant to leave their seat in the twilight; but Mr. Congreve was punctual to the letter, and required the same of others, so Jean led the way in a moment, and together they descended the stairs and entered the room.

"Here you are, with your face clean, and a posy in your hair," cried Mr. Congreve, from his stand on the rug. "Fine looking girl, you are, my dear, and a Congreve every inch of you. Come here, and shake a paw with your Uncle Ridley."

Olive did so, and conscious that another gentleman was standing outside the circle of light, and doubtless regarding her as she crossed the room to "shake a paw," she advanced, and tried not to think whether she was doing so gracefully or not.

"That's the way," exclaimed Mr. Congreve, drawing her into the brightest light. "Roger, here is your Cousin Olive, and Olive, this is Roger Ridley Congreve at your service, and we will suppose that you are cousins, for the want of a better name. Now shake hands and be friends, children."

The gentleman came forward, and conscious that her face was growing scarlet, Olive bowed slightly, and murmured something wherein no words were audible, but his name, and grew furiously angry with herself, because she had become confused at the sight of a gentleman, where she had expected to see only a youth.

"Hoity-toity!" cried Mr. Congreve. "That will never do; call the boy Roger, Olive, and then we will go to supper."

"The boy" smiled in a friendly fashion, and supposing that her confusion arose from the old gentleman's abrupt manner, he held out his hand.

"Let us shake and be friendly, Cousin Olive, and it is a great wonder that he doesn't command a kiss of greeting, on the strength of our being cousins, more or less distantly removed."

As he spoke, Olive looked up with a startled air, and unconscious that he was holding her hand, she looked straight at him for several moments. Where had she

ever seen that face and heard that voice?

"What's the matter?" cried Jean, for the memory was in some way painful to her, and reflected itself so in her face.

"Nothing," exclaimed Olive, withdrawing her hand in mortified haste, and flushing scarlet again.

"I thought perhaps you was getting ready to blow his head off," exclaimed Mr. Congreve, as if in relief. "That's something the way you looked at me, only not so ferocious, no! God bless my soul, no! I should have run if it had been; I should indeed. Now let's go to supper. Jeanie, come and help your old uncle along, and Roger, you take your Cousin Olive, and lead the way."

Olive was angry, mortified and confused, so her reception of Roger's arm was none too gracious, nor the few words she uttered in answer to what he said, anything but barely audible and civil. Sensitively aware that she had allowed her feelings to get possession of her in the commencement, she tried to rectify matters now, and grew so frigid that there was no thawing her out. Roger Congreve's eyes wore a constant twinkle, and he looked at her so frequently that Olive defiantly felt that he was laughing at her awkward confusion, and the thought made his prospects towards gaining her friendship, none too bright. So on the whole, supper was not a successful meal, for Mr. Congreve never, when at the table, allowed any duty or pleasure to interfere with his eating; in consequence of which, he now devoted himself solely to chicken and chocolate, with only an occasional word, shot in edgeways, between bites. Jean was worried, because Olive looked so displeased, and as for Mr. Congreve the younger, he soon found that their guest preferred to say little or nothing, so allowed her to have her way. Immediately at the close of the meal, Jean and Olive went up stairs. Mr. Congreve went to sleep, with a big pocket handkerchief over his head, and his hands folded solemnly over his waistcoat; and the young gentleman took himself away,—to see "Miss Murray," said Jean, as she settled in Olive's lap for a chat. "I know he's going there, because I heard him tell Carl, that's the gardener, to gather a beautiful bouquet."

For the first week the two sisters were left entirely to themselves; and they talked early and late, until every step travelled by each; during their separation, had been gone over, and made familiar with, by the other. Almost every day, Jean wanted to hear Ernestine's story repeated, and each time it seemed to grieve her more, though she never failed to say with a patient trusting faith—"She will

come back, I know she will, for I ask God every night, and then somehow I always feel as though he had said to me: 'Wait a little longer Jean, I'm not ready quite yet,' so I'm waiting, Olive."

Such perfect unquestioning faith, was something that Olive could not understand; and many times, when Jean spoke in such a simple trusting way, of how she talked to God, and told Him her little wants and worries, the elder sister would feel, with a thrill of fear, that perhaps God was going to take onto Himself, the child, who, all her short life had seemed to breath the air of Heaven more than of earth; and that up above, she would be united to the sister, who seemed lost to them below.

They wrote home nearly every day, and Olive's letters were such blessings, for were they not filled, from beginning to end, with news of Jean! How she was growing strong and well, and would, perhaps, walk before Fall; how every one, from Uncle Ridley down, were devoted to her, and what a little dream of luxury her life was now, with every want or wish gratified, and everything that heart could wish. "And she is so sweet and unselfish," writes Olive. "A very little angel she seems to me, mama, and every hour that I spend with her, helps me in some way. There is a little lesson for me in all her childish words, and I'm not ashamed to tell you that I wish I could be more like her, though I never can. She seems apart some way, and is a constant study, that becomes more precious to me every day. When I pray, it seems to me like an important extra thing, that I must make some preparation for and be precise about; and then I cannot help feeling, that perhaps I'm not heard after all, which I know is wrong; but it is so different with Jean. She goes to God, as she would to you or papa, and never seems to doubt that every word is heard, and interested in. She is perfectly confident that Ernestine is coming back, and it gives me hope just to be near such perfect faith."

After having given them several days of uninterrupted talk, Mr. Congreve began to lay claims to more of their time. He said he was lonesome for Jean, and that he was not getting any better acquainted with Olive, than as if she had staid at home; and that he thought they might talk to him, five minutes a day, at least; so after that, Jean spent her usual time with him, and Olive brought bits of sewing, or a little sketch she might be working on, down to the library, and they spent hours together. It was a pleasing study, to see how this companionship with the girls, affected the crusty old gentleman. He would sit by the hour with Jean on his knee, listening to her quaint childish talk, and looking alternately at her and at Olive, sketching or sewing, in the window seat; and the dear knows, what

all he might be thinking about; but it must have been much; for it sometimes got the better of him, in a way that made easy breathing difficult, and brought the red handkerchief into vigorous use; and then he would jump up, flurry about, as though he were scaring a whole brood of chickens from the room.

"There! clear out, clear out; God bless my soul! I want to read and be quiet awhile. Jeanie, hunt up my glasses, and get down my book, and then trot out, and be quick about it."

The first time he dismissed them in this abrupt fashion, Olive left with dignity, and told Jean that they would not trouble him again; then she thought it over, and changed her mind, and went back the next day as usual, to his evident surprise, for he had noticed her heightened color the day before, and little expected to see her back; so that when she came in, he gave vent to an astonished "humph!" and after a moment's pause, took one or two thoughtful turns around the room.

"So you are determined to put up with the crusty old uncle, are you?" he said, pausing beside her, and looking down at the little sketch that was growing under her busy fingers. "Well, my dear, I'll turn in and help you; but if I ever get too much like a bear to be called human, you must remember that I'm getting old, and rather on the cross-grain; and not mind me any more than you can help. Now I just enjoy seeing you sit here and sketch," he went on more briskly. "Robert used to sit here in this very window, and draw mountains and valleys, and all sorts of things, and he did 'em well, though not as quick and true as you. I suppose he would have been an artist, and a splendid good one, too; but then I didn't want him to, so he gave it up,—a good boy was Robert, a splendid good boy, and I hope the dear Lord will forgive me for ever forgetting what my duty was to him, and letting my thundering temper get the better of me;—there now, draw away; I'm going off for a little tramp in the garden, and I'll be back a great deal sooner than you'll want me, I expect;" and off he went, with a great racket, which he never failed to make, when at all excited.

One day, when he startled them with the usual abrupt dismissal, Olive did not go; instead, she laid down her work, and took his book, which was a ponderous volume of essays.

"Now, Uncle Ridley, don't you want me to read to you?"

"Read to me! God bless my soul! you read to me! Well, I never, I never did, to be sure; where's my snuff-box?—you read to me? No, I think not; you—you'll read too fast, and clatter your words up, and I'll have to work like a steam engine

to keep up with you; no, on the whole, I guess not, I guess not."

Olive's first thought was to put the book down, and leave, but her second was the one she acted upon.

"I'll read slow," she said, "and as distinctly as I can; shall I try?"

"Well, humph! I guess you may; sit down there, and go slow," with which remark, he sat back in his chair, spread the red handkerchief over his face, and Olive began to read. She read well, slowly and distinctly, and in a little while, the clear voice attracted another listener, who came in quietly, and studied the young reader's thoughtful face, from his seat in a distant corner.

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# CHAPTER XVI.

# UNDER THE SHADY GREEN-WOOD TREE.

"WHY, Kat, what is the matter?"

"Nothing; not a blessed thing; I'm just trying to see how big a goose I can be. Where did you come from?"

"Down town. Why, child, you look as if you had been crying for hours. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, I tell you; take my word, and get out of the way, for I'm going to jump;" and down she came from above, with a swinging leap that brought a shower of half-ripe apples with her, and filled the air with leaves. "I had the dumps a little, and I've been sitting here in the tree crying over this book, until my nose is so big that I cannot see over it, and my eyes ache terribly."

"I should think they would, and you look dreadfully frowzled," said Bea, smoothing down her own dress, with an air of self-approval. "Really, Kat—"

"Oh, come now, don't. I never was, and never will be a pink of propriety; and I would like to have a little peace and rest from lectures. You and Kittie are getting so orderly and band-boxy-fied, that there's no pleasure living. I'll be glad when Olive comes back, for she isn't quite so distressingly particular!" exclaimed Kat, who was evidently in anything but the best of humors.

"Well, don't get fussy about it, and I won't say any more," promised Bea, with a conciliatory smile. "Besides, I've got some good news. We are invited to Mrs. Raymond's picnic, next Wednesday!"

"You don't say so; hurrah!" cried Kat, in a sudden gale of delight, her eyes beginning to sparkle behind their still wet lashes.

"What oceans of bliss! Who did you see?"

"Clara and Lou; they were just coming out here to invite us, when I met them. It will be splendid; they are going ten miles out, and they supply carriages for

all, and there will be boating and dancing, and games, and just everything delightful."

Kat spun around on her heel enthusiastically, and threw a handful of small apples into the air. "Of course there will," she cried. "Raymonds' never do anything except in the most stylish way. That's the fun of being rich."

"I've just been down to call on Miss Barnett," said Bea, stooping to pick some imaginary burr from her dress. "They are invited, too."

"Ah, indeed," said Kat, with a mischievous chuckle, "I suppose of course, you are glad, for you want Miss Barnett to have a good time, don't you?"

"Of course," answered Bea, with much composure, and a little color. "She is a very pleasant young lady, and I would like to invite them here one evening before she goes home."

"Nothing to prevent that I can see," said Kat, "unless the doctor should object; but then, I don't think he will."

"I shall ask mama," continued Bea, without noticing the little sly remark. "I need not have many, about fifteen is enough; and we might have cake, you know."

"Yes, cake and water; cheap and original; she won't expect much, for I suppose the doctor has told her that we are poor as Job's turkey."

"I suppose he has not," corrected Bea, with some mild resentment. "He would have no occasion to mention us in connection with such a subject. Besides, we're not as poor as that."

"Just go by it then," laughed Kat. "But you shall have a party, dear, if I have to paint the hole in the carpet and do all the work. We'll have a party or die."

Very much the same conclusion, only a little more mildly put, Mrs. Dering came to, when Bea made her modest request, with a pretty color in her face.

"I know the parlor furniture is shabby, but it won't show so much at night," Bea explained. "And we might just have cake and coffee, you know, mama."

"Yes, dear, quite a nice little idea; and I think we can do it without any trouble," answered Mrs. Dering, with that degree of motherly interest that is always so encouraging, "How many would you like to have, and on what

evening?"

"How good you are!" cried Bea, with a grateful hug, before she answered any questions. "Twelve is enough, don't you think so! Perhaps we'd like to dance, or if the moon should be very bright, we could play croquet and row on the pond."

"Quite delightful ideas. And what evening, dear?"

"Next—the picnic is on Wednesday. I guess on Friday evening would be the best; Miss Barnett goes home on the next Tuesday."

"On Friday evening next. Well, I will spend the meantime studying up my receipt-book, for its been a long time since I made a fancy cake," laughed Mrs. Dering. "As to the parlor, I think you had better go right in and see what is needed there."

"So we had. Come on girls;" and off fluttered Bea, with a blithe song on her lips, and followed by Kittie and Kat, who were consumed with excitement at the prospect of a picnic and party in one week.

The parlors were quite large double rooms that had never been fully furnished, but had received chairs and a table or two, by degrees; a lounge at one time, a couple of stools at another, and, lastly, a what-not, at which point contributions towards furnishing them ceased. The carpet was rather shabby, from long use, and in one or two places was worn perfectly white, which must be remedied in some way, as they looked alarmingly big. The girls opened the door, and Kat immediately said:

"Curtains must be washed."

"Sweeping the carpet with salt and tea-leaves brightens it up," added Kittie, throwing open the blinds, and letting the sunlight in.

"Goodness, how that makes everything look!" cried Bea, in sudden dismay.

"But it doesn't shine at night," said Kat, consolingly. "Bless me! how the back of the big chair is worn! what shall we do?"

"Make a big tidy out of darning-cotton," answered Kittie. "That's pretty and cheap, and I know a lovely stitch, and can put long fringe on."

"Capital idea!" assented Kat, with an approving nod.

"We'll have to bring something in out of the sitting-room," said Bea, pushing the chairs around, with a view to making one fill the space required by two. "There's so much room, and it makes things look so skimpy."

"Don't have everything pushed back so," advised Kittie, giving a twitch here and a pull there, that brought things to more social angles, and left less space. "See that fills out some, and in that corner we can put the wire rack and fill it with flowers and vines."

"But the rack is so rusty," said Bea, only half relieved.

"There's some green paint in the woodshed, and I'll touch it up," said Kittie, becoming thoroughly interested. "We can make a lovely corner-piece out of it; there's all those limestones down in the yard, and some of them are such pretty shapes, that will look lovely set in moss, with vines going over them. We can hang the baskets in the windows, and when the curtains are fresh and clean, it will look so pretty."

"Hurrah for my better half," cried Kat, with a flourish of her hat. "It's bliss to hear you talk. Your words are like wisdom and—butter-scotch."

"What's in the wind?" asked an interested voice from the window. "And what's all this I hear about limestones and butter-scotch and wisdom?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" said Kat, with an unfriendly grimace.

"I do, indeed; and what's more I'm going to find out, because you will tell me, won't you, Posy?" said the new-comer, appealing to Bea, by the nickname which her prettily-colored cheeks had won from him.

"Oh, yes, of course; and you must make yourself useful. I'm going to give a little company for Miss Barnett," said Bea, with a friendly nod, to make up for Kat's ungraciousness.

"So-ho, a party, and we are all going to make our *début*, are we?" asked Ralph, swinging himself into the open window, and taking a seat on the sill, with an air of interest. "Good! Tell me what you want done, and I'm ready, Posy."

"We'd like to have you take yourself off, somewhere, and stay till the day after the party," was Kat's uncomplimentary remark.

"And I would like to oblige you, my dear, but I couldn't stay away from you

that long," retorted Ralph.

"I'm not your dear, shut up;" cried Kat, flapping her hat, and scowling at the handsome, laughing face.

"There," cried Bea, with a suddenly exhausted air. "I don't see any way of filling that big space between the windows in the back parlor. Dear me, I wish there was more furniture."

"Bring the piano in," advised Ralph. "That's just exactly the place for it, and it ought to be in here on such an occasion."

"Goodness! To be sure, but there's the expense of moving," exclaimed Bea with a longing sigh. "And it would have to go back, of course."

"Why? Leave it here, a parlor's the place for a piano."

"Yes, but that would never do," said Bea with decision. "We always sit in the other room, because it is so much more sunshiny and cozy than these big parlors; and it would seem deserted without the piano there, especially in the evenings."

"Reasons very good and accepted," assented Ralph. "The only thing left to be done, is to decide whether or no, the piano shall come in and go back; ready, those who want it so;—and remember, I'm going to attend to it. Now then: yea or nay?"

"Yea," cried the girls, in one delighted breath; after which, Bea ornamented him with a rose-bud, in token of her thanks, Kittie beamed untold gratitude upon him, and Kat remarked with condescension: "You can be a first-rate trump, when you take a notion."

"I'm overcome," said Ralph, with both hands over his heart, and leaving his seat to make an extravagant bow—"To receive a bud from Posy, a smile from Kittie, and the assurance from my unconquerable Kathleen, that I can be a trump; is too much; I therefore hope you will excuse me for leaving you somewhat abruptly, ladies;" and out of the window he went with a flying leap, and Kat, watching him stroll down the yard, made another astonishing admission:

"He's very handsome, if he is such a bother," she said, putting on her hat with a reflective air. "I don't know, but what he might become quite civilized, if he staid here long enough."

Between the picnic and the party, the girls were kept pretty busy for the next few days, and the house was very merry, for busy hands with happy hearts, bring chattering tongues and joyous laughter; and these summer days were gleeful ones.

To be sure, some accidents happened, both comical and disastrous, and in fact, it never was otherwise, if anything was going on in which Kat had a hand.

On the impulse of an unlucky moment she offered to paint the flower-rack, as Kittie was busy; so rigged in a big torn flat, and a pair of fingerless gloves, she went to work, and painted the bottom first, with flourishing success; but left it out over night, when it rained and splashed her work with mud; then she began over, and did the top first, and then hung the pot on a little hook, and went over the bottom again; but in the midst of her zeal, the pot slipped, turned over, and deluged her head and body with slopping green paint, and would have ruined her eyes, if she hadn't shut them tight with the first gasp of amaze; and when she tried to walk to the house with them closed, the wheel-barrow stood in the way, and over she went, with a shriek of dismay that brought the whole household flying to the spot; after which the afflicted damsel was picked up, and carried tenderly to the kitchen to be worked with.

Ralph finished the rack, and Kat heard him remark, that she had daubed enough paint on one knob, to do for half the rack. It didn't make her feel any better.

In her zeal to get the parlors clean, Bea had climbed the step-ladder to wash some ancient dust from the top of the folding doors, but the ladder tilted, and over she went soap suds and all; and in answer to a wailing cry, the rescuing family once more put in an appearance, to find that the cleanly heroine, had wrenched her ankle, and could not step on it, but must be carried to the sitting-room, to have the afflicted member rubbed with arnica.

"I tried to jump," she explained with pathetic rivers of tears. "Oh dear, what shall I do? I can't go to the picnic—nor have the company—nor anything—and I think it's too b-b-ad."

"Perhaps it is not so serious," said Mrs. Dering, with comfort in her voice, and in her swift careful fingers that were binding the swollen ankle in cool bands. "You will have to be perfectly still, and by Wednesday, I think it will be well; it is only a little twist, so don't feel so cast down dear." But Bea refused to be comforted, and sobbed herself to sleep that night. Not to go to the picnic, when

Dr. Barnett had asked her to go in the phaeton with them, oh, it was too bad, surely!

Beyond hammering one of her fingers, till the nail swelled up with insulted feeling, and threatened to come off, nothing happened to Kittie, who considered herself specially blessed, and did her whole head up in papers on Monday night, so as to be sure and have it curl for Wednesday.

When Tuesday arrived, Bea had sunk to the lowest ebb. She knew she couldn't go, and there was no use talking. She was the most unfortunate girl that ever lived, and no one could deny it; and after making this assertion numberless times during the day, she gave up and cried despondingly, giving herself full freedom as she was alone; and so it happened that a young man came up the walk, and finding the front door open, came in, and a moment later, stood transfixed at the sitting-room threshold, to behold that utterly crushed looking figure on the lounge, with dishevelled hair, and hidden face; while the most heart-broken sobs crept out from behind a drenched handkerchief. No wonder he was alarmed, or that his voice trembled when he asked:

"What is the matter—what has happened?"

Bea nearly fell off the lounge in dismay, and only gave him one brief, startled glimpse of her wet face, then she stopped crying, and said after a reflective pause:

"Nothing—I guess."

"Nothing," he repeated, with a breath of relief, and then began to laugh.

"Won't you come in, Dr. Barnett?" said the discomfited weeper from behind her handkerchief, and with an attempt at dignity, "Excuse me for not rising; I'm —I'm lame."

The little hitch in her voice betrayed her grief; but, dear me! he was all interest now. He drew a chair close to the lounge, professional habit, no doubt, and ventured to touch one of the hands that supported the doleful looking handkerchief.

"Won't you let me see you? When did this happen?"

"Saturday. No, you can't see me; I've been crying an hour."

"Is the pain so great?"

Oh, no wonder this young M.D. was so popular if his voice was always thus tender and anxious in making inquiries.

"Pain! no, but," with a little hysterical sob, "I can't go to the picnic!"

Now you needn't smile at this frank explanation, for he did not. Bless you! no; he looked as if he had three minds to cry too, and if Mrs. Dering hadn't entered at that moment, there's no telling what he might have said by way of sympathy. As it was, he returned her cordial greeting, and began to express his regret in polite terms, but with much warmth of feeling that could not be concealed.

"Is it quite impossible, do you think? Lottie will be so disappointed;" he said, regardless of the fact that he was making Lottie do double duty, in the way of disappointment; but Bea took the remark in all good faith, and thought it was very sweet of Lottie to care whether she went or not.

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Dering, thoughtfully. "It was only a little twist, and she stood on it this morning, didn't you, Bea?"

"Yes, mama," said Bea, coming out from behind her handkerchief in eager interest. "I did for several minutes, and it didn't hurt hardly any."

"Suppose you try again," said Dr. Barnett with unprofessional haste to test an injured member. "Take my arm, and let's see if you cannot walk a step or two."

Bea did so, with a shy blush, and stood up; then after a moment, took a few steps, with the color coming and going in her cheeks, for more reasons than one; and, though it was very pleasant to feel her clinging to his arm in that helpless way, Dr. Barnett made her sit down; but passed his opinion that she could go to the picnic.

"Do you really think so?" said Bea, with delighted eagerness.

"I do, if you will be content to sit in the carriage all day," he answered, looking down at her, as though he thought a much swollen nose and highly colored eyes were the most adorable sights; and Bea looked up at him, then blushed, without any reason whatever, whereupon Mrs. Dering made some hasty remark about the desirable weather for picnics, and the doctor decided, all of a sudden, that he must go, which he accordingly did.

What a glorious hub-bub a picnic morning is, especially when there are several in one home interested in its perfect success. Neither of the girls slept much. Bea couldn't have told what kept her awake, but somehow, her eyes would remain open, and she was dimly conscious, of smiling several times in the dark, and feeling very happy. Once she came very near humming out a little air, that seemed to be singing itself over and over in her heart, but she suppressed the desire, out of consideration for others, who were less blissfully affected. Kittie declared that there was no use trying to sleep, because Kat kept getting up every few minutes, to look out and see if it was going to rain; and Kat, in turn, said that Kittie had sat up all night, because her crimping papers hurt her so she couldn't lie down. At just four o'clock everybody was fully awakened, by the twins clattering down stairs with a great racket, and getting breakfast under headway, and Mrs. Dering, awakened from her morning nap, consoled herself with a fervent—"Bless the children, I'm glad this doesn't happen often."

"It's going to rain," cried Kat, with a despairing wail. "See that cloud?"

"Stuff!" echoed Kittie. "It isn't as big as a door-knob." But nevertheless, they both let breakfast burn, while running every few moments to see if it was swelling any bigger, and were fully rewarded by seeing it dwindle and sail away over the barn before six o'clock.

No, it didn't rain, and before the sun was through his earliest infancy, they were all ready, and Dr. Barnett's phaeton stood at the gate, with Miss Lottie in a pretty picnic suit; and her brother deeply absorbed in the pleasing task of getting Bea down to the gate without hurting her ankle. Ralph officiated on one side of the interesting cripple, and took a wicked satisfaction in doing the greatest share of the supporting; but then the doctor was reasonable, and was as happy as possible with what fell to his share; and Bea,—well, Bea was perfectly content.

They drove off with an accompanying shout from those left behind, and a few moments later, Ralph and the twins departed on foot to meet the carriages that were all to assemble at a certain place.

Quite a little flutter of admiration went round as this trio came up, for Ralph was a very handsome centre piece, and the twins in their very becoming costumes and wide-awake hats, cocked up at one side after the prevailing fashion, made pictures of great attractiveness on each side. Everybody was there, and everybody was laughing and talking merrily, and everybody had a word of greeting for the new arrivals. Of all the old school-girls from Miss Howard's,

Kittie and Kat were the only two who did not make pretensions towards young ladyhood; and just now, there was something so girlish and sweet about them, in their fresh calico suits, and bright young faces under the big hats, that one or two strangers asked who they were, all the elder people smiled approval, while the young ones, with an eye on the handsome cousin, nodded sweetly, and were quite attentive.

"Look at Susie Darrow," whispered Kat, under cover of her lowered hat. "All tricked out in silk, and a little gipsy bonnet, with a white plume; and she's been smiling at me every minute, and Ralph thinks she's the biggest goose out. I'll tell her so."

"No, goodness no; let her smile if she wants to, she'll soon find out that it's no use," answered Kittie. "There's Sadie Brooks too, she's been in New York, and has got an eye-glass, dear sakes alive, just watch her use it, will you?"

"Good morning girls, you look a couple of daisies;" said Mrs. Raymond, going by with a nod and a smile. "You and your cousin, are to go in our carriage, the girls want you," and away she went, like a busy happy soul that she was.

"The Raymond girls look sensible," said Kittie, with an air of approval; "see they have on short dresses, and big hats; I think Lou is prettier than Clara, don't you?"

"Rather," answered Kat, too much taken up in watching her former play-mates, to notice others. Susie Darrow had been to boarding-school, Sadie Brooks to New York, and May Moore was going to the sea-side next month; so they were all much uplifted in mind and manner, and took unto themselves the airs of thoroughly initiated society-ladies.

"Girls?" said Miss Brooks, with her little affected drawl, and raising her eye-glass in her lavender kid-fingers. "Which ones do you mean, I do not quite understand?"

"Those two under the big tree," replied her questioner, a visitor in Canfield. "Twins they are, in the big hats."

"Oh! Yes." Miss Brooks's eye-glass went slowly to the place indicated, and took a leisure survey. "You mean the little girls in calico dresses; they are the Derings, I believe, but really, being in the city so long, I find I am quite forgetting old faces."

"Indeed," was the reply, with a respectful air, though the desire to laugh was almost irresistible. The little girls in calico dresses were fifteen, and taller than Miss Brooks, who was just sixteen; but then, dear me, she had on a train of party length, bushels of banged hair, a little wisp of a bonnet, and little fine black marks along her lower eyelid, so altogether she looked about twenty, and was perfectly satisfied with herself. She could not look ahead to the dissatisfaction that would be hers when she became twenty, and looked to be twenty-eight.

When they started, ten merry carriage-loads, everybody stood in their doors, and hung over the front gates to see them off, for Canfield was a social little place, and felt a deep interest in anything going on within its limits; so if good wishes could make a successful day, surely they would have it.

Well, they did have it; yes, indeed, they did; and a happier set of young people were never turned wild in green-woods. To be sure, there were some draw-backs; for instance, when a dozen or so went off to swing in a wild-grape vine, Sadie Brooks couldn't go, her dress was too long, and it would tear her gloves. Likewise, when they played "drop the handkerchief," "blind-man," and "down on this carpet," Susie Darrow couldn't join, because her tie-back would hardly admit of sitting down, let alone racing in the woods; besides, the wind blew her white plume all up, and took the crimp out of her hair, and then she lost her lace handkerchief, and didn't receive much attention from handsome Ralph Tremayne; and altogether, she lost her temper, declared picnics a bore, and told May Moore that no one but romps ever came to them anyhow, which, considering that both she and May were in attendance, was a remark which might have been improved on.

Sitting in a carriage all day proved to be no hardship to Bea, for didn't Dr. Barnett spend nearly all his time there? and at Miss Lottie's proposal, didn't several of them trim the phaeton in boughs and vines, and deck her out in flowers until she looked like a forest queen? and aside from being a favorite, didn't she receive so much sympathy that there was a constant court before and around her throne? and above it all, don't you suppose a certain pair of eyes, as they looked at her that day, told her a certain story more plainly than the owner's lips ever could? That she was the fairest and dearest picture to him, there, or elsewhere?

"Who is that young lady—little girl, I am almost disposed to call her, with the fresh young face and lovely eyes? The one who stands on the bank, there, with the wreath of leaves on her hat?"

Mrs. Raymond's brother asked the question, as he sat with his sister on an elevated spot under a big tree, surveying the gay crowds roaming about in all directions.

"That? It is one of the Dering twins," answered Mrs. Raymond, with a smile of interest. "But I don't know which; they are not to be distinguished; they are lovely girls, so fresh and unaffected. I suppose you have noticed them both?"

"Yes, and I disagree with you, for they are to be distinguished; I have been watching them with considerable interest. There; the other one is coming down the hill now; do you mean to tell me that you see no difference?"

"Well, surely not in face or figure," replied Mrs. Raymond, with a puzzled glance. "I see that the new-comer's hat is hanging to her neck, and has no trimming, that her gloves are gone, and she has the general appearance of having gone through a wind-mill."

"And you have struck the distinction admirably, my dear," was the smiling answer. "There was something in their faces that interested me this morning, and I have noticed them a great deal. So far as I can see, the one has had just as gay a time as the other, and done very nearly as much romping; and yet you see, she looks as fresh and sweet as when starting out, with the addition of much becoming trimming; and where she has gone heartily, yet with a girlish grace, the other has gone pell-mell, as though in defiance of any restriction on feminine gender. Do you know which is which?"

"Indeed, I do not," said Mrs. Raymond, who was not acquainted with the characteristics of the twins. "All I know is that one is Kittie and the other Kat, and that I never know which is which when I am talking to them, never having had time to study them up."

"Well, I will wager my shoe-buckle, that the one on the bank is Kittie, and the hatless one Kat," was the quiet response. "At least, that is the way it ought to be. Now I should like to meet Miss Kittie, and if you—"

"Is it possible?" cried the lady, throwing up her hands in amaze. "You, who would only consent to come, on condition that you need not be introduced, and play the agreeable to the young ladies; well, well! who would have thought it, Paul?"

"The generality of young ladies are bores," was the reply. "I did not expect to

meet such a fresh faced, lovely young girl; for society never allows them to remain so, if it gets hold of them."

"It will never be so with these girls," said Mrs. Raymond. "They have too sensible and lovely a mother, and besides, they are a family much devoted among themselves; there are five sisters, you will remember my telling you about the other one, Ernestine, she sang like an angel; and another one is an artist, the youngest a cripple, and—well they all seem to live solely for each other, so require little from society. I admire them all very much."

"So do I, from what I hear," said the gentleman, getting up from his grassy seat, and glancing down at the bank. "Shall I assist you?"

"No, indeed; I'm not old yet, if I am grey," laughed Mrs. Raymond, jumping nimbly up to prove her assertion. "I don't know what the ladies will say, Paul, to see you finally succumbing to feminine attractions; they have all eyed you in your seclusion with evident regret. You know there is something singularly attractive about a widower, young or old; though I suppose you have found that out," she added with a sister's fond belief that her brother is irresistible in every way.

"Yes, I dislike conceit; but I have found out a few things in the last four years," he answered, smiling; then uttering a little exclamation of disappointment, as they reached the foot of the hill, and found that Kittie had disappeared from the bank.

"Great oaks from little acorns grow." Sometimes they do in books, sometimes they do out; and this afternoon in the sunshiny woods, two little acorns had been planted. One of them was when Paul Murray had looked with careless eyes into Kittie Dering's face, and found in its bright girlish sweetness, what had been lacking for him, in any woman's face since he lost his wife; namely—interest. He was a grave, thoughtful faced man, with just a dash of grey on his temples, and a listless air of world-weariness, that made him look beyond his years; for he was only twenty-eight; and yet he had had a vigorous cuffing from the reed-shaken hand of Fortune, and had come to regard himself with a sort of pitying disapprobation, such as falls upon us when we know we have a duty to perform, yet think it too great, and hesitate between self-condolence and accusation.

He had seen the day of wild oats, and had sown them, but had drawn back ere they sprung into life and choked out all else. He had had riches and lost them; had married a lovely loving girl, only to have her taken from him in one short

year; then to deaden his grief he had gone to work, regained his wealth, after which he left his infant daughter in tender hands, and had gone abroad, only to again lose all he had in an unfortunate speculation, which brought him home, where he had again gone to work, but with a listless, disinterested way,—that had brought him little success.

So, to-day, he was a lawyer, struggling as though he had just entered the bar. So, I say, he felt like a man without an incentive. To be sure, there was his little daughter, but then he had really seen so little of the child, and for a time there had been almost a bitter feeling against her, because, in gaining her life, she had taken her young mother's, and left him desolate; and then if he was to die, she was amply provided for by her grandmother. He had yet to learn, that, though severely dealt with, he had still much to live for.

The other little acorn had fallen in kindred ground, in no less place, than the loving little heart of Pansy Murray.

The brother and sister were strolling rather aimlessly about, with a word here and there to chattering groups, and an occasional glance around to see if Kittie was in sight, when, who should they see, but that young lady coming slowly towards them, with her arms filled with a familiar bundle, that showed signs of life, as they came in sight of each other. It thus remarked with much excitement:

"I was losted, I was, papa, behind a big tree, an' I was a kyin' dreffully when the lady finded me, I was."

"Lost? Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Raymond, snatching the child in a hurry, and forgetting all introductions. "Why, I told the girls not to lose sight of you, Pansy."

"But they did," said Pansy, with a blissful smile, as though she had done something great. "They bothered me dreadfully, saying: 'Come, Pansy,' 'Don't go there, Pansy,' till I went right off for sure 'thout telling one body, and then I got losted mos' right away, and I wished I could hear somebody say 'Come, Pansy,' but nobody did, so I jes' began to commence to holler, 'th all my might, and the lady camed right off; I think 'twas drefful good for her to."

"Kat lost her breastpin, and I was helping look for it," said Kittie, with a modest blush, being quite overcome with the gratitude visible in both faces before her. "She wasn't very far away."

"I was far away," corrected Pansy with decision. "I was more'n 'leventeen miles, and I expected to see a big bear mos' every minute, I did, and I know one would have camed if the lady hadn't; and I jes' love her very much, I do."

"Oh, yes; excuse me," said Mrs. Raymond, hastily. "Paul, this is Miss Dering; my brother, Mr. Murray; and we're so thankful to you, Kittie."

Kittie bowed and blushed still more, as Mr. Murray repeated his gratitude, but as she turned to leave, Pansy cried vehemently:

"You stay with me, 'cause I want you, and you go home with me and my papa in the little buggy; tell her so quick, right off, papa."

Of course what could Mr. Murray do but say politely:

"I should be most pleased, Miss Dering, if you would allow me to be cruel enough to take you from the gay party."

Kittie did not know the invitation came from a society lion, who refused to be caught, and the depths of her innocent heart never dreamed how pleased he was, at thus being forced into giving it; she only knew that she had much rather go home in the carriage, with the girls, and was quite unconscious that the thought shone in her eyes, but Mr. Murray saw it and hastily added:

"It would be too unkind, after all. Do not consider it another moment; only tell me if you will allow Pansy and me to come and take you to ride some evening soon."

"Yes, thank you," answered Kittie. "I should be very much pleased."

Some one shouted her name through the woods just then, and with a little bow and smile, she went away, leaving Mr. Murray to comfort Pansy, as he said slowly:

"A delightfully natural, and charming little girl! We will go and take her to ride soon; so don't cry, Pansy."

Well the blissful day came to an end, as all days will, though they prolonged it to the last minute and did not reach home until after dark; and then everybody forgot how tired they were, and said with a sigh of pleasing memory, "How delightful it was, to be sure!"

"I had a lovely time," said Bea, smiling to herself in the dark, after they had

gone to bed.

"Well, I'm sure I did," added Kittie, hugging her pillow with a tired, contented sigh, and thankful that she had no crimps in the way.

"Well, I didn't find my pin, and I tore my dress, and knocked my head till I saw stars, on that grape vine, but I had a grand tip-top time, and I'd like to go again, yes, I would, if only to see Sadie Brooks wiggle her eye-glass and say, 'How shocking!' when I walked the log across the creek," was Kat's final remark as she dropped into worn-out slumber.

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# CHAPTER XVII.

# SEVERAL THINGS.

ON Friday morning, while the girls were flying busily around, and Mrs. Dering was deep in the task of getting a tall cake browned just to a turn, there came a note from Mrs. Dane.

"How unfortunate," she mused, reading it hurriedly, as the girls ran in to see what it was. "Mr. Dane has gone to the city and will not be back until ten to night, and Mrs. Dane wants me to come and stay with her, as she has one of her dreadful nervous attacks. I feel as though I ought to go, if you can spare me girls!"

"Things will go higgle-ty-piggle-ty, sure as the world," said Kat, balancing on the edge of the table, and fanning with the duster.

"No, they will not either," corrected Bea. "We ought to be ashamed if they do. Go, of course, mama, though I will be dreadfully sorry not to have you here this evening."

"The cake is not quite done, and has to be iced," said Mrs. Dering, glancing from the fire to the clock. "I don't know,—"

"I'll finish it," said Kittie, letting down her dress, and replacing her sweeping cap with a big kitchen apron. "Go, and get ready mama, then come and tell me how to do the icing; the cake will be done by that time."

"It must cool first, but you can get five eggs, and take the whites, get the beater and the sugar, and then I'll be back," replied Mrs. Dering, brushing some flour from her sleeves, and hurrying out.

"Now something is going to happen," said Kat with prophetic certainty. "I feel it in my bones, and I bet you a postage-stamp it will be my fault."

"Then I'd advise you to be careful," said Kittie, taking a hurried peep into the oven.

"Never!" cried Kat. "Something would be sure to go wrong then; it always does when I'm trying my very level best to be a credit to my family. The only thing for me to do, is to go at it with a slap and a bang; then things twist about like proper magic."

"What nonsense!" said Kittie, breaking eggs with deft fingers. "Have you cleaned the lamps yet?"

"No, nor done much else either; it's too hot; the thermometer is boiling, down cellar, and Ralph said that I was so good natured that I'd turn to grease if I got too heated, so I'm being careful, you see," said Kat, with a lazy laugh; and she sat in the window and fanned, with the duster in one hand and the egg-beater in the other.

"Well, I think the parlors look so pretty," said Kittie, with an air of relief, as the last egg deposited its silvery white in the big platter. "What an addition a piano is, and how nicely the curtains are done up; everything seems to be going right."

"I smell the cake; it's burning!" cried Kat, jumping from her seat in a hurry; but Kittie threw open the oven, and jerked out the precious contents which did smell burnt, and was deep black right around one edge.

"What a shame!" she cried regretfully; but Kat resumed her seat with the comforting remark:

"Slice it over, and cover it up with icing; it will never show in the world; you see, if I hadn't been in here, it would have been burnt up."

"I guess I've got a nose," retorted Kittie, beginning to beat eggs with a swiftness that brought high color to her cheeks. "Now go on, Kat, and fix the lamps and help Bea, for she mustn't be on her foot much."

"That's right, beat them just as stiff as possible before you put in the sugar," said Mrs. Dering, coming in with her things on, to note the progress, and leave orders. "Put it on with a large knife as smoothly as possible, then set it down cellar. As to the coffee, you know about that just as well as I do. The milk that is raising cream is on the back swing-shelf, down cellar. That is all, isn't it?"

"Yes'm, and I guess we'll manage all right. Tell Mrs. Dane I'm sorry she's sick. Good-bye."

"Everything looks beautiful, and I hope you'll have a pleasant time, dears," was Mrs. Dering's next remark, as she glanced into the parlors on her way out. "Don't tax your ankle too much, Bea, and Kat, try and not have anything happen to you this time. I suppose I will be here before they all go home, but if I am not, present my compliments and regrets. A merry time to you all. Good-bye."

"There, how does that look?" asked Kat, balancing herself on the step-ladder with a caution born of bitter experience, and looking cock-eyed at the blooming basket she had just hung.

"Beautiful," answered Bea, with her head, in a big sweeping-cap, turned admiringly side-ways. "Yes, that effect is lovely. I hope it will look as pretty by lamp-light. There comes Ralph with two big packages. I wonder what they are: something good, I expect?"

Kat sat down on the ladder to look out the window, as Bea hurried out on to the porch to meet the young man of packages, and receive his burdens, if they were offered to her.

"I was meditating this morning," said Ralph, sitting down on the steps with an exhausted air. "And it struck me, that to drink coffee on such a night as this—with the thermometer at blood heat in an ice chest—would be nothing less than a new order of suicide, so I have brought a substitute, which I venture to hope, will meet with your approval;—lemonade."

"Oh, you're a blessing," cried Bea, with a joyful pounce on to the bundles. "It will be so much nicer, and what splendid big lemons, and enough sugar to make a gallon."

"A gallon won't come amiss, I guess, people are ravenously thirsty such weather as this; why, I feel like I could drink a quart myself this very minute;—where's Kat?" asked Ralph, drawing another package from his pocket.

"Here I am; what's wanted?" answered Kat, putting her head out at the top of the window.

"Here's something that you are fond of—catch," said Ralph, tossing the package, which Kat grasped as it flew by. "I looked all over town for some decent candy for this evening, and couldn't find a thing except that, which I knew would suit Kat, and put her in a good humor."

"Butter-scotch!" cried Kat, with a shriek of delight. "I haven't had any in the

natural life of ten coons. What bliss! Ralph you're a top!"

"Thank you. I'm getting along, I see; for I suppose a top is a little higher than a trump, isn't it?"

But Kat had disappeared, so Ralph leaned up lazily against the post, fanning with his big straw hat, while drinking in with dreamy delight the quiet beauty before and around him. How intensely quiet nature can become in the sunshine of a summer afternoon! Even the birds in sheltering nooks among the shady leaves find greatest happiness in helping the solitude; and save a light breeze, touching the tops of the trees, and dipping down to stir the cool grass, lying in deep shade, there is no evidence that nature's pulse still answers to the quiet beating of her heart. The Dering home at a time like this, looked more like an old picture steeped in cool shadows, with glints of sunshine here and there, and one could almost imagine now, in looking at it, that the open windows, with glimpses of snowy curtains, the great front door with the cool, deep hall beyond, the shady, vine-covered porch, and the indolent figure on the steps, with dreamy, dark eyes, and hat idly dropped, were but witcheries of the artist's brush and colors.

Something entirely averse to the idea of a painting, namely, a moving figure, appeared at this moment, coming from the front door, and bearing a small waiter with a glass of cool lemonade.

"Here's something to make your eyes shine!" cried a voice that made him start up from his reverie in a hurry and look delighted.

"Kat! Is it possible? For me? Who made it?"

"I did, to be sure, all alone by myself."

"Where's the other glass?"

"Other? Patience! won't one glass do you?"

"No, but wait; I'll get it," and away he went, coming back in a moment with an empty glass, into which he poured half the cool refreshing contents.

"There! To be more social, you see. Now, mademoiselle, let's drink to health, happiness, and everlasting peace and friendship between us, from this moment henceforth. Shall we?"

"Yes," said Kat, with her brightest smile; so they clinked glasses and drank merrily in the shady porch; then shook hands to strengthen the contract, and made mutual resolves to smoke the pipe of peace forever.

Meantime Kittie, unconscious of the great reconciliation just being sealed, was having a sorry time by herself out in the hot kitchen. The icing wouldn't ice worth a cent, but persisted in being sloppy and unmanageable; and the more she spatted and smoothed, the worse it looked; and finally she called to Bea, in worn-out despair:

"I don't see what in the world is the matter with it," cried the discouraged icer, setting forth her work with a sigh of exhausted energy. "Do you see what's wrong?"

"You've iced it on the wrong side," said Bea, smothering her own disappointment, out of consideration for Kittie's tired despair. "You see the top always puffs and bakes out of shape, so the way to do is to ice the bottom, so it will look smooth and nice."

"Yes, to be sure; what a goose I was not to think! I tried to make it look even by filling the dents up, and they're all perfect little puddles;" cried Kittie in heated disgust. "What shall we do, make another one? Though I'd be afraid to try. I never made any kind but the very plainest and that wouldn't do."

"No, I had rather have this. Put it down cellar in the very coolest place, and I guess it will harden up all right," advised Bea, smothering a little sigh of regretful anxiety, as she tried to give comfort to the discouraged cook. So Kittie carried it down cellar, and throughout the rest of the day made regular trips down to see if it was hardening any; but it wasn't, and her spirits sank so low that the astonishing sight of Ralph and Kat, sworn enemies when last she saw them, coming slowly up from the pond under one umbrella and evidently on such amicable grounds, did not rouse her, except to a moment of amaze; after which, she sank back into a world of troubled dreams, where there seemed to be nothing but cakes, swimming about in puddles of icing, while a dreadful penalty hung above her defenceless head, if the puddles did not congeal into ornamental coverings before a given time.

"Oh, dear, oh! What can the matter be?" sang Ralph, stopping at the kitchen window, just in time to see her coming from the cellar-way with a face bereft of all hope. "What has happened?"

"Oh, Ralph! I don't know what I shall do," she cried, with desponding agony, and then sat down on the wood-box and burst into tears.

"Why, bless your poor little heart! Tell me about it," exclaimed Ralph, swinging himself into the window, and hurrying to turn comforter.

"The ca-ake is ruined," sobbed Kittie, entirely given over to despair and grief. "It's all slopped and soaked to pieces in the old icing—and I don't want to tell Bea—and I don't know what to do, either. I—I—fan—fanned it a whole hour to make it colder, and it didn't do a bit of good, and—oh, dear me!"

"Well, that is a calamity, to be sure," said Ralph, feeling a masculine helplessness since the trouble lay within the domain of cookery. "But then, never mind; we'll drink lemonade, and let the cake go."

"Yes, I'd just as soon, but Bea—she'll be so disappointed, and I hate to tell her," sobbed Kittie, wailing.

"But Bea is reasonable," urged Ralph. "She will know you did your best, and ought to be ashamed if she says anything cross."

"Oh, it isn't that," cried Kittie, hastily. "She knows I tried, and she won't say a word, but then she'll be so disappointed, because she wants everything nice for Miss Barnett, and—and, I hate to tell her."

"Exactly," said Ralph, much touched at this little evidence of sisterly consideration, and feeling a greater desire than ever to do something to help the cause along. "See here, Kittie," he exclaimed suddenly, and Kittie looked up quickly, for there was something promising in the voice. "Do you dry those eyes out in a hurry, and run out doors to get cool and cheerful, and don't ask me any questions."

"But Ralph—"

"Go, I say, and do just as I tell you. Don't give that cake another thought, but go and fix yourself as pretty as you can for this evening, and I promise you everything shall be all right."

"Oh, you blessed boy," cried Kittie, with a gasp of relief.

"Boy! Don't insult me; remember I will vote this Fall."

"To be sure; I beg your pardon," and Kittie began to laugh through her tears.

She hadn't the slightest idea what he could do to make matters all right, but then he had said he would, and that was enough. She never doubted but what he could do whatever he set his mind to.

Just after it came time to light the parlors, it became evident to all that something was the matter with Kat. She didn't say anything, but on coming in from a late tow on the pond, and finding everything lighted, she gave a gasp, and stood perfectly still in the parlor door.

"Well, what were you down to the pond this late for?" asked Bea, flitting about in her white dress, with the softest color in her cheeks, a knot of blush roses in her hair, and another in her belt.

"I—I was cool—I mean I wanted to get cool," answered Kat with a stammer, and her eyes going hurriedly from one room to the other.

"What did you light up so early for?"

"I don't call seven o'clock early—there goes the gate now."

Kat groaned, as if in deepest despair, then dashed up stairs, and cast herself into the first chair with a tragic air.

"I knew it! I knew it! oh, what a miserable wretch I am, and whatever will I do? I never never will be anything but a black sheep to the longest day that I live?" After which cheerful prophesy, she ran both hands over her hair by way of smoothing any stray locks, gave her skirts a twist, and herself a general shake, and started slowly down stairs again, with a grimly resigned air.

It was only the most informal of little evening company, so every one came early, and in a little while the quiet evening air grew musical with merry voices and gay laughter, then became quieter, and was replaced by notes from the piano, or some one voice trilling out a popular song or a pretty ballad. Everything went flourishingly; to be sure, there were more ladies than gentlemen, which required much watching and managing on Bea's part, that no lady should suffer a dearth of masculine attention. Once, Ralph was missing from the room for some little time, which worried her greatly, but when he came back, she noticed that he nodded and smiled to Kittie, which was unintelligible to her, but was readily understood by her sister, to mean that everything was right. Just as the young hostess had decided that it was time to serve refreshments, some one asked her to sing.

"I? Oh, I never sing," she said with a modest blush, and drawing back, while her heart began to flutter nervously.

"I'm quite sure you do," persisted the young lady; whereupon the request was strengthened by all voices; and conscious that it would be impolite to still refuse, Bea walked to the piano, with her fingers growing cold as ice, and a die-away feeling in her throat. It took a few minutes to spin up the stool and decide what to sing, then in a voice that would quaver, she began a little Scotch song, and was just through the first verse when things began to look strange. Was it because she was so nervous, or was it growing dark? She played a few rambling chords, then she stopped and looked at the lamp with a chilly foreboding, and —*it was going out*!

Somebody else had noticed it before she did, and now as she sat in blank, dazed mortification, some one crossed the room, and lifting the lamp, blew it out, saying with a careless laugh:

"Several adventurous bugs were burning themselves to death, so I have ended their, and our misery, by putting out what they were slowly killing, and now while they are being dislodged, and the lamp relighted, shall we adjourn to the porch, ladies and gentlemen? The moon is coming up gorgeously."

Bea could have gone down on her knees in gratitude to him, and Kat, the terrible, actually threw him a kiss in the dark, before she rushed out to the kitchen, where Bea had carried the lamp.

"It's all my fault, every bit," she cried remorsefully. "I thought this morning, when I cleaned the lamps, that I would wait until it got cooler to go up after the coal-oil, and then I forgot it, clean as a shingle, and I'll do anything under the sun if you'll forgive me."

"Don't talk," said Bea sharply, too excited and nervous to say much. "Go, bring every lamp in the house, quick!"

"Never mind," exclaimed Kittie, coming hurriedly in, as Kat went off on a rush. "Don't feel bad, Bea, not a soul noticed it, and you were singing beautifully; besides you just ought to look in the dining-room; there's the most magnificent cake that you ever saw, and a freezer of delicious ice-cream!"

Bea dropped the lamp-top from her trembling fingers, and turned her face with incredulous relief and delight.

"Oh, Kittie!"

"Yes, and I'm going right out now to distribute plates and napkins, and let them eat out in the moonlight; it's nearly as light as day, so don't worry another bit; the other big lamp will burn over two hours, yet, and you can empty enough from the little ones into this to make it go, and everybody but Dr. Barnett thinks it was bugs. Only hurry and come out;" and away fluttered Kittie, with the memory of Bea's brightened face, to provide the young guests with plates and expectations.

So, when Bea replaced the lamp in the parlor, with its blaze high and bright, and came out on to the porch, she found the merriest party imaginable, and there were generous saucers of cream going round amid "Oh's," and "Ah's" of satisfaction, and Kat following after them with an immense cake, its top shining white as snow in the moonlight. Bea knew only too well who was the author of all this generosity, and she seized the first opportunity of giving Ralph's hand a squeeze of inexpressible gratitude, to which he made answer by giving her a fraternal pat on the shoulder, as they stood in the shadow of the vine, and whispered slyly:

"Barnett's a trump, isn't he? I never saw anything neater."

Bea thought so and was treasuring up a little speech of thanks to make him when the good-night moment should arrive, but she didn't make it, for that moment turned out to be something so different from what she expected. It was this way. After having reduced the cake and lemonade to a state of bankruptcy, and made way with all the ice-cream, the young people strolled around the yard for a while in the moonlight, took rides in the Water-Rat across the pond, and then decided that it was time to go home, and began making their parting thanks accordingly; so that in a few moments every one was gone but Dr. Barnett and his sister; and that sister, with feminine quickness, understood that this moment might be the very one her brother wanted, so she engaged Kittie and Kat in a lively conversation, and together they all went up stairs for her wrappings.

"It was so kind in you," began Bea when she found that they were quite alone on the porch. "I don't know what I should have done, and it was so terribly mortifying, but then—" and there she came to a pause, for looking up, she met his eyes, wearing an expression, such as chased all further words from her lips, and made her forget entirely what it was that she was going to say next.

"Don't you suppose," began the young doctor rather hurriedly, "that it is very pleasant for me to know that I saved you any pain, and don't you know that I wish I might feel that you would give me the right to do so always? don't you, Beatrice?"

"Oh—I—don't know;" stammered Bea, with a foolish little quaver to her voice, and dropping her face clean out of sight, yet making no resistance when she found her hands imprisoned.

"Please look at me," was the first request, in very tender tones. "I need some

encouragement. Won't you give me a little? If you love me ever so little, dear, won't you put your hand in mine again?"

Bea dropped her head still lower, all in a tremor of happy, shy delight, and looked at the hand which he had released, and was waiting to claim from her. Should she give it? She knew she would, even while she hesitated, for didn't she love him from the top to the bottom of her devoted little heart? Yes, of course she did. And didn't she foolishly think that the loveliest music in heaven could never be more delightful to listen to than his voice asking for her love? To be sure she did. Oh, it's wonderful how such times affect us all!

"I'm waiting, Beatrice," said Dr. Walter, with a very proper degree of beseeching impatience. "Don't you love me any, darling?"

Up came her head with a little flash of courage, giving him one glance of the shy, happy eyes, then down it went again, as she held out her hand, and felt it covered with an eager firmness, while something was said close to her rosy ear that did well enough for her to hear, but cannot be told to you.

It is wonderful how much time Miss Lottie managed to consume in putting on a single wrap—a fleecy covering over her head; but she realized the importance of keeping out of the way a while, so loitered and chatted and admired the moon-lit view from the windows, and finally started slowly down stairs, fervently hoping that the important words had been spoken.

They evidently had, for both parties looked so happy, and when the doctor bade the twins good night, it really seemed as though he would shake their hands off, in the excess of some feeling that possessed him; and there is no mistake about it, he certainly kissed Bea in the shadow of the vines, as he said to her in parting:

"To-morrow, I am coming to see your mother, and then I hope to put my seal on this little hand that you have given to me."

At first, Bea did not know whether to tell the girls or not, but then, of course they knew, for after they were alone, what unheard-of capers they did go through with, such winks, and sighs, and groans, and tragic acting. So Bea sat over in the shadow where they couldn't see her face, and said with a laugh:

"Stop your nonsense, if you want me to tell you about it."

"Tell!" echoed Kat. "As if we didn't know, and hadn't seen for months. I've

been nearly dead to tease, 'cause you're such a good subject, but then mama said we shouldn't. Engaged! Oh, here's a go!"

"What did you both say?" asked Kittie, in romantic interest, and feeling as though a great hole had been made in the family, with Bea set apart from them in some way.

"Not much," answered Bea, with a little smile to think how quickly it had all been done. "I hear voices at the gate; it's mama and Mr. Dane; I guess I'll go down and meet her;" so off she went, leaving the twins to laugh and mourn over the event.

Dr. Barnett came the next day, and he and Mrs. Dering talked in the sitting-room together for a long time. Then Bea was sent for, and after a while, when she came out with a quiet, almost sad happiness in her face, she wore a rim of gold on her left hand, and for a long time she sat alone in her room, thinking much, shedding a few tears, and saying a little prayer, as though she felt that she stood on the threshold of something that would require help, and that was hard for her to realize.

After this, the summer days came and went, with little to disturb the quiet life at the Dering's. The heat was so intense that amusements of all kinds were laid aside, just as little work done as possible, and the greater portion of the long days spent out on the old roof, where it was constantly shady. So nothing further happened until the time came for Ralph to return to home and studies. The prospect of such an event drove despair into the hearts of the girls and made them extensively rebellious. Even Kat mourned and felt a great deal more than she showed, for with all pretensions to dislike, would it have been possible to have had Ralph Tremayne there for six months, and not like him?

"I'll come back," he would say over and over again, as though in some way, he gained comfort himself from the assertion. "In two years I'll be through with my studies, and my very first trip will be here and then—" but somehow, he never finished, but would look thoughtful for a little while, as though the move after *then*, was going to be a very important one.

"I believe you're glad to go," Kittie would say to him when he would often be telling of what he was going to work for and accomplish. "You'll go back to Boston, and study, and make yourself a great lawyer, and you'll see such elegant ladies in society there, that you will forget all about this little country town, and these little country girls."

"Kittie," Ralph would exclaim in return, as though this little doubt of his faithfulness hurt him, "you know you don't mean it, and if you knew what this summer has been to me, you never would say so."

"Why don't you tell us, then?" asked Kat, who happened to overhear this remark one day.

"Perhaps I will some time, if I find that you are glad to see me when I come back," answered Ralph with a mysterious smile.

"Can you ever doubt that?" asked Bea. "After the blessing and comfort that you have been to us all? I don't know what we ever will do without you, Ralph; it will be so lonesome."

"Why, you ought not to care," said Ralph with a laugh, and touching the hand that wore the gold ring, with a significant gesture. "My place was taken long ago in your fickle heart, mademoiselle."

It did not really seem as though they were going to lose him until September came, and the days crept around, till the one came when a trunk stood packed in the hall, the front room up stairs looked forsaken, and Ralph was really going next morning.

Right after dinner, Kat took her book and went off to the farthest corner of the back-yard, where a gigantic apple-tree stood, with a magnificent seat of curled branches up in its centre, into which, Kat found her way, with some speedy climbing, and then sat down and looked thoughtfully at nothing for nearly half an hour. Yes, she did look very thoughtful, and after a while, she opened her book, but did not read much, for something kept coming between her and the leaves, and two or three times she might have been seen to slide her hand across her eyes, and wink pretty fast, which plainly indicated that something must be the matter. She never could have told afterwards what made her stay there all the afternoon, but stay she did, and never came down until the sun had commenced to throw slanting shadows across the grass. On the way up to the house, she walked slowly, and appeared to be holding some internal communion or argument with herself, and was seen to shake herself rather fiercely before she went in.

"Well, where in the world have you been?" was the remark that greeted her, as she appeared in the sitting-room door; and the speaker was Bea, who turned from the window with wet eyes.

"Been? Up in the big tree out below the pond."

"Why I thought you had gone up town," exclaimed Kittie, who was crying on the piano-stool, like one bereft. "Ralph's gone."

"Gone!" echoed Kat, slowly.

"Yes, gone," repeated Bea. "He found that he could make connections right through by taking this afternoon's train, and he raced all around town an hour before train-time, to find you. Kittie said you were going after dinner."

"Yes, but I changed my mind," said Kat slowly, then turned and went out. Gone, and with no good-bye to her! She wondered a little to see how much the thought hurt her. Ralph's old straw hat, with its broad band of blue ribbon, just as he used to wear it around the yard, hung on the rack. She took it down with a queer little feeling in her throat, and slapped it on to her head, then went out into the yard again.

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# CHAPTER XVIII.

# AT THE OPERA.

THE sun came warmly in at the great west window of the picture gallery, and showed Olive sitting before a tall frame, and working busily at the sketch that lay in her lap. Very near to her lay Jean, on a luxurious little divan, with an open book in her hands, from which she read a little now and then, and watching her sister in the meantime. It was very still, for when Olive was at work she was always too absorbed to think of aught else, and objected to being talked to, so the deep silence lay unbroken, and Jean satisfied herself with being allowed to watch to her heart's content.

At last Olive raised her head with a sigh, partly of fatigue, and partly of blissful content, and after taking a professional squint at her subject and her copy, passed it over to Jean with the remark:

"There, how do you like that, Jean? Does his nose look right?"

"Just beautiful!" cried Jean with enthusiasm. "How splendidly you do it, Olive. He looks as if he was going to speak. It must be so nice to be an artist; you'll be a great one, some day, won't you?"

"I want to be," answered Olive, who had lately learned that nothing so threw Jean into raptures, as to be appealed to, and confided in. "After I learn to draw heads just as nicely as possible, I am going to sketch yours and Ernestine's for mama."

"Are you really?" exclaimed Jean in delight, "and like that one?"

"Yes, like this," said Olive, looking at her sketch, which was a copy of a magnificent head of Demosthenes, cast in bas-relief against black velvet. "Don't you think she will like it?"

"Oh, she'll just be too happy!" cried Jean, slipping from her lounge, and limping over to Olive with her cane. "I want to talk a little while now, will you, Olive?"

The young artist cast a hasty regretful look at her drawing, and was on the point of putting off the little talk, for her fingers fairly trembled to go on with her work, and catch with her pencil the peculiar life-like expression about the mouth of the great orator; but the temptation was thrust aside, and the next moment, Jean was sitting in her lap, with the contented air of one who expects no rebuffs or unreturned caresses.

"I've been watching you so long," she began, touching with loving fingers, the long, heavy braid of beautiful hair, that had fallen over Olive's shoulder, "and I just wanted to tell you how different you look from the way you used to, you know."

"Yes," answered Olive, who had grown used to these loving bursts of admiration from the observing little girl.

"I used to think," continued Jean, "that you was the most unhappy girl I ever saw, and it made me feel so sorry, 'cause I thought it must be somebody's fault, and then I wanted to kiss you, or something, but you always looked so, I didn't know whether you'd like it or not, and so I never did."

"But I would have been glad," said Olive, who could remember very well the many times she had frozen the little girl's loving advances.

"I'll tell you why I was so unhappy, Jeanie; I thought no body loved me, and that I was in the way."

"Why, Olive! Olive!" cried Jean in greatest amaze. "How could you think so; who made you?"

"I made myself," said Olive. "I was so cross, that I made you all stay away from me, and then I thought it was because no one cared for me, because I was so ugly."

"You wasn't pretty then," was Jean's honest remark. "But you are now, really, and so splendid looking some way. You haven't got rosy cheeks like Miss Foster, nor yellow hair like Ernestine, but somehow I love to look at you, and so does Cousin Roger, 'cause sometimes when you are drawing, he just looks right straight at you all the whole time."

"Does he?" laughed Olive, and then revealed the utter want of romance in her nature, by never giving the complimentary fact another thought. "I'll tell you something, Jean, if you'll not repeat it."

"Oh, no, Olive, never!"

"Well, I'm drawing Cousin Roger's head."

"You are, and he don't know it?"

"No, I take good looks when he don't see, then go and draw awhile; it's good practise, and he has such a strong, clear face, and splendidly shaped head, that I have to work hard to make my picture good, and I find it is helping me a great deal," said Olive, with never a thought of doing a thing that might be termed romantic.

"How nice, and may I see it?"

"Yes, when it is done."

"And may *I* see it?" inquired a new voice, that made them both start and turn, to see Roger Congreve coming down the gallery.

"Did you hear?" asked Olive, looking a little vexed; and Jean opened her mouth to say something, then shut it in a hurry.

"No, I didn't except the last two sentences; but from the way you both look, I think it must be something that I ought to hear," answered the gentleman, sitting down on Jean's divan with a laugh.

"Tell him," whispered Jean, and as Olive looked up, and saw his head with gleams of sunshine falling across it, she realized the advantage of having it to look at steadily, and how grand his forehead was.

"Yes, I'd just as soon tell you as not," she said frankly. "I've been taking a sketch of your head."

"Have you indeed," he exclaimed, with a sudden light in his face that Olive could not understand, if indeed, she thought anything about it.

"Yes, it makes a splendid study, but I haven't made much progress, because I've had so few chances."

"Why did you do it on the sly?" he asked, hoping to detect a little confusion in her answer, such as might indicate a little deeper interest than the mere study; but not a bit of it; she answered readily enough:

"I thought you might consider it a bore to sit still, doing nothing, just for the

sake of being copied, so I never said anything about it, but studied by piece-meal."

"On the contrary, believe me, nothing would be greater bliss than to sit still doing nothing, by the hour, for the sake of being copied—by you," said Roger with an unmistakable accent.

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," replied Olive, on whom all such things were thrown away; as indeed he had found out long ago, being a little nettled at the discovery. Not that he was given such, to any extreme, but then he was a society man, born and bred, with all of society's pleasing little airs, which might have made him a society fool, if he had not also possessed too much manhood and good common sense. Between his handsome self, and it being known that he was "old Congreve's heir," it's a never ending wonder that he wasn't spoiled; but he had kept clear headed, and also clear hearted so far, and had come to find out that there were but few women who were not susceptible to flattery, and who would not drop into a harmless flirtation with little invitation. Therefore, when Olive came, and never seemed to regard him as any extraordinary being, he decided to make her; so after trying indifference, equal to her own awhile, he was somewhat amazed to find that his was feigned, and hers was too genuine to be complimentary; after which he tried the attentive, which rarely fails to bring a girl around, and was astonished beyond measure, to find that it was in vain. To be sure, Olive accepted his flowers, sometimes wearing a bud or two in her hair, and seemed to think it very kind in him to remember her in that way. And she went riding day after day with him, with the most hearty enjoyment, for did she not see the most magnificent scenery from the mountain roads, round which they cantered in the lovely days? And they frequently spent evenings together, when at her request he would read aloud from books she might name, and then they would discuss them, when he would find that hers was no ordinary school-girlish mind, that could be bent according to another's ideas. And so, at last, he came to feel a genuine desire to win some feeling from her, since she was rousing so much in him; but the genuine desire seemed as vain as the former idle one, for while Olive undoubtedly enjoyed his society, since he assisted her in discovering the best sketching points, and was an able conversationalist in what he had read and seen; there was nothing beyond it, and she would have enjoyed the same, just as well, in any one else. Most any girl but Olive, would have come to understand and appreciate, the evident preference he at last professed for her society, above that of the Staunton belles; and most any girl would have been flattered by the attentions which now bore sincerity in their face; but to Olive

they seemed only courtesies paid to her as a guest, for which she was grateful, and gave no extra thought. She was wrapped too deeply in her art to have any thought of lovers, besides she was not at all romantic; all her cravings for affection were satisfied in the home circle, and the deeper fountains of her heart, that, once reached, would be a well-spring of deathless unchanged devotion, lay deeply buried now. So it was that Roger Congreve had met the first woman whom he could not attract in some way, who won from him the strongest feelings, and gave him nothing in return but polite friendliness; and that she should be nothing but a seventeen year old girl, was something rather humiliating. When the study on the head began, as it did the next day, it was both a pleasure and almost a pain to him to feel that he might as well have been a piece of statuary as for all the attention she gave him, aside from the long careful looks her thoughtful eyes bestowed on some particular curve to his nose, or expression about his mouth. But then it gave him plenty of time to study the quiet face, with its clear colorlessness, the lowered eyelids with curling lashes, the nose, that was purely aristocratic in its fine outline, and the wavy sweep of brown hair from the high, white brow. The study was always a pleasure to him, and made ten times stronger his resolve to win some feeling and expression thereof from her.

"Are you sleepy?" Olive asked once, when he had fallen into a reverie, and was regarding her with eyes dreamily tender. "I'm ready for your eyes now, and that expression will never do. I've put your head and face in an expression of strong defiance, and those eyes would ruin it. Look real angry for a minute, and let me catch the expression!—no, not that way, it's too fierce; but just steady and earnest, as though you were determined to do something, whether or no."

"Very well; look at me now," he said, turning his eyes on her with a flash of determination, such as set her pencil to work in a hurry. "I want to tell you that I have made up my mind to do a certain thing, which I will tell you about when accomplished."

She was too busy replacing that look on paper to heed the gracious promise; and he had the questionable pleasure of knowing that he was entirely forgotten for the next few minutes, save in the capacity of a model, and that thought accomplished what Olive wanted, for it kept that look of roused defiance in his eyes.

Occasionally old Mr. Congreve would come into the gallery and take a look at the work, on which he would pass some characteristic comment, and then depart,

taking Jean with him, and saying to her with a chuckle, that sounded like intense satisfaction:

"Come along with me, Jeanie, and let's leave the young folks alone with their drawing. I guess they can manage it better alone;" and Jean would go regretfully, and with an innocent wondering how her staying would make any difference.

One evening, towards the latter part of September, Roger came up from the city, and meeting Olive on the lawn, drew two tickets from his pocket, and threw them into her lap.

Mr. Congreve would come into the Gallery.
**MR. CONGREVE WOULD COME INTO THE GALLERY.**

"There! The first opera of the season, and pretty early for that, too! but I hear they are rather good, and they give 'Bohemian Girl' to-night, so I bought tickets. Shall we go?"

"Yes, it was kind of you. I would like to hear it very much," answered Olive with a pleased smile. "Do you know, I never heard an opera in my life."

"Is it possible?" in intense surprise. "Why, we will go every night they are here, if you say so."

"Oh, no," with an air of reproof. "That would be very nice, but too extravagant. I know money is nothing to you, but then it wouldn't seem right to spend so much for mere pleasure when there are so many poor."

He looked at her in surprise for a moment, but was too modest to tell that he gave twice as much to worthy poor as he ever gave to personal pleasure; so the subject dropped, and they were silent until Olive asked, with a sudden recollection of how she had frequently heard him describe ladies' toilets:

"Do they—I will have to ask you because there is no one else—but do the ladies dress much at opera, here?"

"Just as they please. It is not so popular as formerly. Street dress is mostly worn now."

"Well, I don't know as it makes any difference, for I've got just so much to

dress in, and would have to wear it anyhow," said Olive, with a composed laugh, which indicated how little she cared for what was popular aside from a polite desire to be becomingly attired in the eyes of her escort.

"Will you wear some flowers if I will send them up to you?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Why do you always thank me for every little thing as if we were perfect strangers?" he exclaimed, with a little impatience, and a sort of vague feeling that if she realized or cared for the devotion accompanying the acts, she would accept them more as a matter of course.

"Why should I not thank you?" with an air of surprise. "Is it any reason that I should not be polite since we are well acquainted?"

"No, to be sure not," with a slight laugh; "but, then—what flowers do you prefer?"

"Make your own selection."

"I shall choose white then. Are you going in?"

"Yes; this is Jean's day to go to the doctor's, and I promised to go with her," and with a little nod, she walked off and left him where he had thrown himself on the grass at her feet.

That night, many a glass was turned towards their box for Roger Congreve was too eligible not to be a perfect magnet of interest, and any lady that he might choose to show a slight preference for, became, at once, a target for glances and comments; so, for a while, Olive was conscious of a dazzling battery of eyes and glasses; but Roger noticed, with some wonder, that the fact did not seem to disturb her more than as though it had been the commonest occurrence in her life. She looked exceedingly well to-night, dressed entirely in black, with lillies-of-the-valley in her hair, and fastened in the lace at her throat, while the pleasing excitement brought a bright flash into her eyes, and more color than usual into the lips that clearly showed their curved outline.

The evening's amusement began, and progressed pleasurably through the first act, to which Olive listened attentively, saying with a little sigh of regret when the curtain fell:

"How lovely it all is! Ernestine always wanted to go on the stage! It must be delightful if one can?"

"Delightful, possibly; but a life of drudgery until one has worked to the top, and even then, there are hardships," Roger answered, noting how a look of sadness chased the gay smile from her lips when she spoke of the absent sister. Somehow, the place seemed replete with memories of Ernestine; the music which she had often played, the glitter of wealth and fashion that she always loved and longed for, the very atmosphere of gayety and excitement, such as she had always craved to draw breath in, seemed to recall her now, as Olive, caring so little for it, sat in its midst, and lost in memory. Roger regretted that any sadness should have obtruded itself, and was relieved to see, that when the curtain rose on the second act, that Olive soon became absorbed in the picturesque gypsy scene and lovely music. The robbery of Florestein was being committed with the usual success of brilliancy, and the gipsies were taking French leave, when the figure of a woman enters, drops her cloak, and—Roger sees no more. He hears a sudden painful gasp at his side, and turns to see Olive, whiter than her lilies, rising from her seat slowly, as if faint.

"Olive," he exclaimed, hastily drawing the curtain between them and the audience, but she put out her hand, and then sank back in her chair, too weak to stand, for the first time in her life:

"Ernestine!" she said, huskily. "It is Ernestine!"

In incredulous amaze, he looked back at the stage, just as the queen was leading Florestein off, and he sees a frail-looking figure heaped in gaudy toggery, that looks as though it would drag her down with its weight; and, above it, is a pale flower-like face, with great dark, weary-looking eyes, and a heavy coronet of yellow hair twisted with tinsel and gauze.

"How can I go to her?" Olive is saying with intense eagerness, and leaving her seat with a new strength. "Tell me quick, for I must go at once—tell me, quick."

"It will do no good," said Roger, laying a detaining hand on her arm. "Listen to me a moment, Olive,"—as she threw it off in wild impatience. "They would not admit us behind the scenes, and besides, do you not see how frail and weak she looks? The shock would unfit her for the rest of the performance and—"

"What do I care for that? She shall leave them at once. I will go to her. I'll go alone, if you will not go with me," cried Olive with glowing eyes and trembling

lips, and moving towards the door.

"But she dare not leave, and they would not allow you to see her," said Roger earnestly. "Only wait until the performance is over, and we will be at the stage entrance to meet her as she comes out. It will be best so; believe me, and trust in my interest, that is doubly deep for your sake."

Olive hesitated, but reason conquered, and she came trembling back to her seat, saying in an excited whisper:

"I cannot look at her again; I shall certainly betray myself if I do. Oh, how deathly she looks! I cannot bear it!"

Roger did not doubt her self-control, until the gypsy queen appeared from her tent to disturb the love-scene of Thaddeus and Arline; and then, as Olive started forward and leaned against the box-rail, with parted, colorless lips, he certainly thought the name hovering on them would escape. But it did not. She pressed her hands tightly together and looked down, with such glittering eyes that it is a wonder their intense gaze did not make itself felt, and draw an answering look from the pale, worn queen, who, it was very evident, was making every particle of her strength work, to carry her through her part. Roger noticed, with an excitement almost equal to Olive's, that as she advanced to unite the lovers' hands, that she cleared her throat huskily and grew even yet paler in the tent-lights, and that twice she opened her lips before any sound crossed them. The next moment Olive had sprung to her feet, as with the first words:—

"Hand to hand, and heart to heart—"

The voice ceased, a thin stream of blood crossed the queen's white lips and the curtain was rung down in a hurry, as she fell back into the gypsy's arms and was carried off.

"This way, give me your arm," said Roger, pausing to say nothing else as they left the box and made their way through the dim little hall to the stage door. It was locked, and the most imperative and repeated knocks, failed to bring any response; and pitying the trembling eagerness that made Olive cling to his arm, he turned back, making all possible haste through the auditorium. The greater part of the audience still kept their seats to hear what would follow, but several were leaving, so that their hurrying through was hardly noticed, though neither gave it a thought. Just as they turned into the alley-way, from which the stage entrance led, a hack was seen to drive hurriedly from the door, and Olive's

trembling strength almost forsook her, as she gasped out—

"That is she—they are taking her away,—and we do not know where!"

But it only took a moment to find where, to call another hack, help Olive in, to shout: "To the Virginia!" and then to be rattled off, through the darkness, in frantic haste; as cabby realized, from the excited order, that greatest speed was wanted.

Olive spoke no word through that drive, but the moment the hack stopped before the hotel, she sprang from it, and rushed into the house, appealing eagerly to the first one met—

"Where is she—the lady they have just brought in?"

"The actress? Miss Clare? Third floor, but I don't know the number."

Olive turned to see Roger coming in with a tall, kindly faced man, who hurried up stairs, while Roger said to her:

"It is the doctor, we will follow him;" and together they went up, through the dim halls, and climbing the steep stairs, until they saw him enter a door, around which several curious persons stood, and then Roger paused, saying with decision:

"You risk her life if you go in now, when she is in such a condition; the shock might bring on another hemorrhage."

"I will wait," said Olive, beginning to feel the stern necessity of rigid self-control. "But cannot you go in, and ask the doctor how she is, and ask him how long before I can see her?"

"I will try, wait here;" and Olive waited, while he went to the door, and tapped. She saw that he was refused admittance; but that in a few moments the doctor came out, and talked with him, after which they walked down to where she stood.

"Dr. Pierce, Olive; and I have told him a few of the sad facts of the case," was Roger's hurried introduction and explanation.

"And can I see her?" asked Olive, with trembling eagerness.

"I think not, but I am sorry," was the kindly answer. "The hemorrhage was not

very severe, but she is perfectly prostrated with overwork and excitement, so that I would dread the effect of any shock. Besides I have given her an opiate, from which she may not wake for hours, if it has the desired effect."

"But may I not see her when she gets to sleep?" pleaded Olive, tremulously. "I will be very quiet indeed."

"Yes, you may; I will call you," answered the doctor, and then some of the bystanders brought Olive a chair, and she dropped into it, and leaning her head against the door casing, waited, hardly noticing that through the hour that followed, Roger Congreve stood close by her side and studied the pale, anxious face, while pondering the revelation made to him that evening. He had almost decided that she had no heart, simply because it had not responded to his; but had she not?

"You may come now," whispered an attendant, opening the door; and with her heart bounding so that she could scarcely stand, Olive went in slowly, and holding her breath as she drew near the bed whereon lay the motionless figure. Oh, could it be Ernestine? She stood and looked, with eyes blinded by hot tears, and once ventured to touch one of the thin waxen-like hands lying on the coverlid. Did it seem possible? Light-hearted, beautiful Ernestine Dering, and this white, shadowy, motionless being, one and the same? The face, as seen in the glare of lights, and under its gaudy trappings, was a picture of health, compared to what it was now, lying on the small, hard pillow, with the golden hair pushed straight back, and the face as pallid as marble, with sunken eyes, and pinched, white lips. Olive stood and looked for several moments, with the sobs swelling in her throat; then she knelt down beside the bed, and hid her face in the coverings, and no one disturbed her; but with Ernestine's first move she drew back, and out of sight across the room, which was needless, for the sleeper only turned her head, and then sank into that death-like stillness again.

"Has she been ill long?" asked Olive of the single woman who still remained in the room. "Do you know anything about her?"

"Oh, yes, miss. I am Madame T——, the prima donna's maid, and I helped dress Miss Clare to-night," answered the quiet-faced woman, who was nearly dead with curiosity, but stood in some awe of the tall, strange young lady. "She has not been strong any of the time since she's been with us; but yesterday, Miss Downs took sick, and Mr. Hurst, he's the manager, put Miss Clare in her place, and she's studied and sung every minute since, to be ready for to-night; and I

thought when I dressed her, that she looked more like going into her coffin, than on the stage in all that toggery. She needs proper good care now, or she'll be like to die;—might you be a—friend, miss?"

"Yes; and I shall remove her from here as soon as she is able. What has she in the way of clothes, and where are they?"

"Laws! miss, not much, I guess, only that little trunk there," answered the woman, pointing to what might have been a good sized band-box, that stood in the corner, and which, in other days would hardly have held Ernestine's sashes, ribbons and trinkets, let alone the smallest corner of her wardrobe.

"I am going," said Roger, tiptoeing carefully to Olive's side. "It is past eleven, and the carriage will have come for us and gone back, and Uncle Ridley will be alarmed. I shall return immediately, and is there anything you want brought?"

"Yes," whispered Olive. "Pillows, eight or ten of them, wine, and my blue wrapper; Jean will be asleep; Bettine will get it for you;—that is all, I think;" and he went carefully away, to bear the startling news out to Congreve Hall; and Olive was left to her lonely vigil, for the troupe arrived presently from the theatre, and the maid was obliged to attend to Madame T——. Most of the performers had rooms on the third floor, and after a loiter down stairs, came up noisily, singing and chatting right by the sick-room, and Olive was horrified to hear that they stopped next door, from which place the merriment continued to flow forth unceasing. Did they not know that the sick girl lay next door, or at least that she was in the house? Olive stood it as long as she could, then sprang to her feet, and in a moment had tapped at the next door.

The sounds ceased for a moment, then some one threw it open, and the light flashed on her pale, indignant face and flashing eyes, with the wilted lilies at her throat, and the unmistakable air of a woman "born to command," in her erect head, and clear, indignant glance.

"Are you not aware,"—she had no time to couch her language in pleasing terms,—"Are you not aware that a lady lies at the point of death in the next room?"

The four men looked at the apparition in silent amaze for a moment, then one of them said, with an unmistakable hiccough and a silly smile:

"You don't say so! hic, come in, an' tell us all about it."

"Shut up, Bunce! can't you see it's a lady?" retorted he, who sheepishly held the door. "I'm—I'm sorry, mam," he continued, with a bow to Olive. "I—we—forgot; I hope we've not disturbed her much; there shall be no more noise, I promise you."

Olive disappeared, and returned to Ernestine, her heart swelling with furious indignation. If she had not been there, would the maid have gone to Madame T ——, and would the sick girl have been left alone in that death-like stupor? It seemed too heartlessly cruel to be true; Olive could not understand it.

Roger Congreve returned just before twelve, and found Olive sitting alone by the sleeper, and his wrath was fully equal to hers.

"But they all know you are with her," he said, "and there are all manner of curious conjectures floating round. Here are pillows, and wine, and I have brought Bettine back with me."

"Oh, I am so glad," said Olive, with a sigh of relief, "I have been pondering what I would do if she should wake up. What did Uncle Ridley say?"

"Say? Why, it was all I could do to keep him from coming here right away; and I left him trying to comfort Jean, who was nearly in a spasm of joy. She was awake and insisted on knowing why you did not come; otherwise I should not have told her to-night. Here, Bettine, bring one of those largest pillows."

Bettine came forward from where she stood near the door, bringing a large, soft pillow, very unlike the little hard one on which Ernestine's head rested; and as Olive carefully lifted the sleeper's head, they were exchanged, without disturbing the heavy stupefied slumber.

"I think the manager will be up here in a moment," said Roger, when Olive had taken her seat and Bettine had retreated to the corner, wiping her eyes on the rough little pillow-case; and even as he spoke, there came steps in the hall and a slight tap at the door, and Bettine admitted the doctor, followed by a tall, surly-faced man, who looked fiercely around the room, and scowled at Olive, who took her seat by the bed, with an instinctive feeling that the unconscious sleeper might need her protection.

"You see for yourself," said the doctor, stepping to the bed with the stranger, after having bowed to Olive and Roger. "She is alive, and really doing better than I expected; but a slight turn may be her instant death, or she may live

several months yet with perfect rest and comfort. She can never be of further use to you, for her last note had been sung, and her last act given."

The manager scowled down at the death-like sleeper.

"Nevertheless, I have a claim on her. I paid her fifty dollars in advance to buy necessary stage-wardrobe," he said, with a heartless coolness. "I never was such a fool before, but she had a fine voice and good stage air, and I thought she'd last."

Almost before he finished speaking, Olive had leaped to her feet with flashing eyes and quivering white lips, but before she could speak, Roger's quiet voice interrupted:

"Will you step this way, sir, and make out your bill against the young lady? I am quite ready to cancel all or any demands."

The manager turned and looked at him for a moment, in silence, then crossed the room with a shrug of his shoulders, and took the pencil held out to him, also the little page of blanks.

"Sign her release, while I make out your check," said Roger, drawing his bank book from his pocket, and hastily filling a page, while the manager slowly scrawled a few words on the blank, attached his name, and passed it over, receiving the check in exchange.

"It's not half what I ought to receive," he said, with surly grimace. "Here I've got to go and look up some one else, and she made the performance fizzle out to-night, besides being a deal of trouble all along with her delicate airs."

"Leave the room!" cried Olive fiercely, trembling and white with uncontrollable rage. "You have killed her. I hope you will remember it to your last day. You are her murderer, and whatever you paid her, it is more than likely she had given her life to work out for you, so what you are paid now is wages for your brutish work. Leave the room, I say; you have no longer a right here, nor any claim, if indeed you ever had one, for I tell you I don't believe you ever paid her a cent, even what you owed her, and you shall not breathe the same air with her longer."

"Young woman, be careful!" thundered the manager, growing an irate scarlet, as the fiercely uttered words rolled in upon him; but Olive met his gaze with flashing, undaunted eyes, and then the good doctor recovered from his

speechless amaze and came between them, after which, Bettine, trembling with awe and fright, let the two gentlemen out. Olive dropped back into her seat, and through it all, Ernestine slept, her thin hands folded over her quiet bosom, and an air of utter repose on her face, as of one too near another world to heed struggles in this, even though they reached her weary hearing.

So the night wore on, and save the doctor returning for a moment, utter silence reigned. Olive never moved from her low seat by the bed, with her face hid. Bettine dropped asleep in her chair, and Roger, over by the window, found that his busy thoughts kept him awake for hours, but that he finally grew drowsy, and at last dropped into a doze, with his head against the casing.

As the city bell tolled the hour of three, Ernestine opened her eyes slowly, with a weary air that seemed like regret, and looked about the dimly lighted room, with only a half conscious air. Roger received a slow wondering look, then Bettine, and then her eyes fell on the figure by the bed, with crushed white flowers in her hair, and face bowed from sight; but it seemed to matter little who they all were, for she made no move and looked away beyond them all, with a dreamy air of lingering stupor, that still held thoughts and memory in check. But presently a brighter light of reason crept into the eyes that made them open wider and look about once more at the three silent figures, with more wonder and closer attention, and at last she put out her hand slowly, and touched the bowed head beside her; and startled by the light pressure, Olive raised her head quickly, and they looked at each other.

For a moment her heart stood still in terror, as the dark eyes rested on her face, then there came a feeble, husky moan of delirious joy. "Olive! Oh, Olive!" and Roger, wakened by the slight sound, sprang up, to find Ernestine fainted entirely away, and Olive rushed wildly for water; at which Bettine also awakened, and shaking with fright, as her first thought was, that Ernestine was dying. But she was not, for with moistened lips and dampened brow, they brought a feeble flutter of life back, and with the first lifting of the eyelids, Olive bent down to lay her lips to those that tried to speak.

"Not another word for your life's sake, darling. I am here. I am going to take you home to mama, but you must not speak."

Words cannot describe the incredulous joy and perfect peace that touched the wan face at the words, nor the bewildering happiness that lighted the sunken eyes, as the feeble arms tried to clasp themselves about Olive's neck, but fell

weakly down.

Roger found his eyes blinded by tears as he stepped back to get the wine. "Give her some," he said, handing the glass to Olive, and slipping his arm under Ernestine's pillow to raise her head slightly, and Ernestine sipped slowly at the wine held to her lips, never once moving her eyes from Olive's face, then lay back with that contented, peaceful look, like some who, from facing despair, desperation, and the bitterest heart-ache, suddenly find themselves cradled in perfect peace, with no trouble, no want, no sadness, and too weak to wonder, hold fast their wild joy and are content.

For a long time it seemed as though Ernestine cared to know nothing, save that Olive was beside her, held her hand, and bent to kiss her every few moments; but, after a long time her eyes went to Roger, as though she had just discovered his presence, and Olive answered the question in them.

"It is our Cousin Roger, dear, and Uncle Ridley, and Jean will be here in the morning; can't you go to sleep, so as to be stronger then?"

Ernestine's lips trembled with joy, but she shut her eyes instantly, as though to win sleep and hasten the morning; but no sleep came, and so till daylight touched the world, Olive sat and held the hands that trembled eagerly, as the moments went by. At last, she grew perfectly quiet, and Olive, knowing she had dropped asleep drew back from the long-held position that had made every muscle ache.

"Won't you lie down?" whispered Roger. "You look like a ghost. I am going to sit out in the hall so as to keep things quiet when the boarders begin to leave their rooms."

"How good you are!" said Olive, looking up at him with a sudden gratitude, and noting how pale and worn he looked from the long night of sleeplessness and anxiety. "I can never thank you."

"Do not try," he answered, pressing the hand she had held out to him, and looking at her with eyes she could not have failed to read had she not been in such a tumult of absorbing thoughts, and then he went carefully out, and Olive, bidding sleepy Bettine to lie down, took her seat again by the bed, and daylight came up brightly, while she watched Ernestine's sleeping face, with eyes that were continually blinded by thankful tears.

Soon after breakfast, the carriage from the Hall came dashing up to the Virginia, and in a few moments, Mr. Congreve was stamping hurriedly up stairs, while James followed, carrying Jean, who was trembling like a leaf with eager excitement.

"God bless my soul! I never did!" cried Mr. Congreve, as Roger, hearing them coming, met them at the top of the last flight. "Such thundering stairs! Why I sha'n't breathe straight again for a month, and I don't want to go in on the dear child puffing like a crazy porpoise. Let me sit right down here to blow my nose and get my breath. How is she, Roger?"

"Better this morning. She ate a little breakfast and drank some wine, but is very weak yet. Jeanie, that is the room. You may go in, but go quietly," said Roger, and Jean, being placed on the floor, almost forgot to use her cane, as she limped hurriedly along.

Ernestine was watching the door with eager, hungry eyes, and the moment Jean appeared, she held out her feeble hands, and the next moment, Jean's kisses were covering her face, and the little girl was saying in joyous eagerness:

"I knew God would bring you back. I've asked Him every night since you went away. Oh, my precious, darling, Ernestine, I'm so glad that I can't help crying," the delighted sobs bubbling up as she spoke; while Ernestine, forbidden to speak, fondled the curly hair and dear little face, and feebly smiled her happiness.

"Well, my child, God bless you, I'm glad we've got you again," was Mr. Congreve's greeting, as he came in, making every effort not to be noisy or speak too loud, in consequence of which, his voice was dropped to a sepulchral whisper, and he walked as if the floor was spread with eggs. But his kind, sharp eyes were full of tears, his voice shook, and he held her frail hand as though it was a precious wafer, that slight pressure might demolish.

"The doctor was here, just now," said Olive, "He says we may take her out home by to-morrow, if she continues to do well."

"Yes, yes, to be sure," answered Mr. Congreve, retreating to the corner and employing both hands and an immense handkerchief to wipe away the tears. "Has the child everything that she wants, Olive? I—God bless my soul! she looks half dead already, as though she had been starved and treated like a dog! Confound my eyes! but then I must cry; I'd like to take a good out and out

bellow, I would, indeed; I haven't felt so stuffed with tears for fifty years. Have you sent word to your mother?"

"No; I wanted to ask you about it. Ernestine is out of danger, and yet, if mama knows she is found and so ill, it will make her sick with anxiety and waiting, so I thought we had better wait until she is able to be taken home, then write."

"Just so, exactly; you're right, no doubt. I hope the dear child can be moved to-morrow, for this place is like a musty chicken coop; I wouldn't put my worst enemy's dog in such a room, and I think I'll go down and blow off my feelings by telling the man who runs this shanty, just what I think of him;" and away went the excited old gentleman in a hurry, after telling Olive once more to spare no expense, if the dear child wanted anything.

The next day Ernestine was taken to Congreve Hall.

How many times had the girls thought of Ernestine, with her beauty, her grace, and queenly little airs, as being in Congreve Hall. How they had imagined her ornamenting its stately rooms, sweeping through the great halls, and queening it to her happy heart's content, a fit inmate to its splendor.

Now, on a bed, that could be lifted from the carriage, by two careful servants, and slowly taken in at the great entrance, wan, wasted, and helpless, Ernestine was going into Congreve Hall at last.

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# CHAPTER XIX.

# COMING HOME.

"We haven't had a letter from Olive this week," said Bea, breaking a silence that had fallen upon them, as they sat sewing in the cheerful sitting-room. "How long she has been gone! Isn't it most time for her to be coming home, mama?"

"She was to stay as long as she was enjoying herself, and pleasing Uncle Ridley," answered Mrs. Dering. "I hardly thought she would stay so long on account of her studies, but from what she writes about the scenery and gallery of pictures at Congreve, I suppose she is having a little artistic revelry that is very pleasant."

"Well, she has forever lost place in my eyes," said Kat severely, "for not snubbing that chap. 'Cousin Roger,' she calls him! Stuff! He's no more our cousin than I'm your uncle; and he's to own the Hall, when it ought to be ours. I should think his conscience would wear a hole right through him, and if she brings that picture of his head home with her, I'll jab the carving-fork into it, sure's the world!"

"It would make you feel better, I've no doubt," remarked Kittie, who sat by the window stitching ruffles, with a lady-like air, while a great bouquet ornamented the sill, shedding its fragrance through the room; it having been brought that morning by the polite colored man from Raymond's, with a tiny, three-cornered card, fastened to a rose-bud, and reading:

in crazy-looking capitals.

"Well, I don't see how she can," said Kat, "be so polite to a fellow who is paddling about in our canoe, while we flounder in the water, and get along the best we can. I think it's too mean."

"But it's not his fault," remonstrated Bea. "Uncle Ridley has a right to leave his money and house where he pleases; and I'm sure I can't see what right we have to fuss, especially after all he's done for us."

"We have too much to be thankful for to make complaints of any kind," said Mrs. Dering, looking out of the window, as the gate was heard to slam. "There comes a boy! You may go to the door, Kat, as you don't appear to be doing anything."

Kat lifted herself from the floor with a yawn, and strolled lazily out to the door, but came back in a moment, with quicker steps, and less color in her face.

"It's a despatch," she said, holding out the envelope that always bears alarm in its very face; and Mrs. Dering took it quickly, while the girls hung round her chair in anxiety. Was Olive or Jean sick? Neither. The paper unfolded, briefly read:

"I will be home on Wednesday with Ernestine. She is quite ill. Meet the train with an easy carriage and pillows, and with Dr. B.

"OLIVE."

For a moment not a sound broke the stillness, then Mrs. Dering dropped the paper, and hid her face in her hands, and the girls knew that her first thought was to return thanks for this answer to her long, yearning prayers. A moment after, it was as though a whirlwind had struck the peaceful room; no one seemed to know, in the excitement that possessed them, just what it was they wanted to say or do, and between the joy and anxiety that the news occasioned, they all laughed and cried alternately.

"To-morrow is Wednesday, and Ernestine will be here. Oh, don't it seem too happy to be true," cried Kittie, wiping away her tears with a strand of ruffling. "How do you suppose it ever happened? I can hardly wait; what shall we do to make time pass?"

There proved to be plenty to keep their hands in keeping with their thoughts, for a room must be prepared for the invalid, and thoroughly prepared, too. They went to work on it that afternoon, first building a bright fire in the great fire-place, and throwing open all the windows to let the sunshine pour in. How strange it seemed; how happy, and yet how sad! Ernestine coming home! Not dead nor lost, but coming home, feeble and helpless! Where had she been all these long, weary months? and had any of their heart-aches and longings reached her? Perhaps she had been sick and alone, had not known of their eager search, or been able to drag herself back to them.

The girls laughed and cried, while they swept, and dusted, and made up the bed like a snow-bank, ready turned down to admit the weary form. The whitest, most beautifully fluted curtains were hung before the windows, whose panes glistened like diamonds from hot soap-suds and crisp rubbings. All the pretty knick-knacks were brought in and put upon the walls with an eye to Ernestine's graceful little fancy likings. The easiest chairs, and prettiest rugs—in short, when finished, it was a little bower, and Kittie put the finishing touches in the way of flowers and vines, that, together, with the sunshine, made a sick-room of perfection to greet the coming invalid. Mrs. Dering went down to Mr. Phillips's to get Prince and the buggy, and found that the news had preceded her. The telegram had been repeated, and in an hour's time had pretty near made the circle of Canfield; so her appearance was greeted with joyful congratulations and sympathetic rejoicing; for Canfield had taken the matter to heart, and having grieved with the family, were now prepared to rejoice with it also. Miss Clara Raymond met Mrs Dering on her way to Mr. Phillips's, and offered their carriage, which was gratefully accepted, as it was large, low, and easy, and much more comfortable than the buggy for an invalid.

Little sleeping was done that night, and in the morning the girls cooked every dainty that Ernestine had ever loved. They cleaned the whole house till it shone, under the stress of excitement; and, as train time drew near, they fairly grew weak and sick with anxiety and suspense. Mrs. Dering did not say much, but when the carriage came, and she put on her hat, while the girls got the pillows, they saw that she was pale and trembling, and that her voice shook beyond control when she gave Dr. Barnett a smiling "good-morning."

There was nothing left to do, so after the carriage drove away the three girls sat on the steps, with their hands clasped, and waited. Kittie made one or two flying trips up stairs to see if everything was really beyond further improvement, while Kat vibrated nervously between the porch and the gate, and Bea sat still, looking at her ring, and wondering if Ernestine would like the giver, and what she would say.

"There!" cried Kat at last, with a nervous jump. "The train is in, now in just a little bit—"

It is possible that there was not a heart in Canfield but gave an expectant throb when the rumble and roar of the train shook the little place to its centre, and was heard to stop, a thing it did not often do; and there were but few who did not imagine, and earnestly sympathize with the joy it was bringing to one home in their midst.

"There they come! Oh, girls I feel perfectly faint," cried Kittie, making a grasp at the gate post, to sustain her trembling excited self. "How slow and careful,—she must be so sick."

No one answered, but six eager eyes watched, and three throbbing hearts waited, as the horses came with slow steps, and the carriage rolled carefully along. The top had been raised, and curious gazers along the way could see nothing; neither could the girls, when at last the gate was reached, but though they went out, something restrained their eager joyous welcome, and they said nothing.

Olive got out first, then Mrs. Dering, and Dr. Barnett, and then came a strange gentleman, bearing a perfectly helpless and evidently unconscious figure, with its face covered; and the girls shrank back to let them pass, then surrounded Olive with eager, trembling questions.

"She has fainted," Olive said. "She kept growing more excited after we left New York, and I thought she would faint when we came in sight of Canfield, but she didn't until the train stopped; and then the moment she saw mama, she tried to speak, and fainted right away."

There was no time to ask, or answer further questions, as they hurried into the house and up stairs, where Ernestine had been carried, and laid upon the soft, snowy bed; but after one glance at her unconscious face, they drew back and burst into tears. Olive was talking to the strange gentleman, for whose name no

one had thought to inquire, and Dr. Barnett and Mrs. Dering hung over the bed, winning life back to the fragile figure thereon. They all saw the first opening of her eyes, that went straight to one dear face, saw the feeble arms lifted with a strength, born of joy, and heard the sobbing cry:

"Mama, mama! darling mama!" and everybody cried.

After awhile the girls went in and kissed her quietly, then the room was ordered to be cleared, and under the influence of an opiate, Ernestine sank to sleep, with her hands clasping those of the dear woman who was, and would be always, "mama."

When they went down stairs, Olive presented them to Cousin Roger, and told in few words of all his kindness; and Kat, the vivacious, who hated and longed to see him removed from the face of the earth, was seen to drop two big tears on his hand that she was shaking heartily. To Beatrice came the same vague, uncertain feeling that Olive had experienced when first seeing him, and he caught the same bewildered look in her eyes.

Had she ever seen him before? If not, what was it in his face that reminded her of—something?

Mrs. Dering did not leave Ernestine's side again that day. Olive came up with her, and they held a long conversation in low voices; and a look of perfect content was seen to drift into the mother's pale, anxious face, as she listened how Jean was growing well, and then looked down at the quiet sleeper—the one who had been snatched from the burning, and given back into her arms.

"Just think, if I had not gone to Virginia?" Olive said that evening, while they were all in the kitchen, doing up the supper work. "It really makes me tremble to think how I did not want to go, and hesitated about it."

"If I had been you, I should have screamed right out when she came on the stage," said Kat, unable to imagine herself in such a position and remaining quiet. "How did you feel, Olive?"

"So weak that I could not move, I never came so near losing my senses in my life, and it is such a dreadful feeling that you can't scream. It was dreadful to sit there and watch her, and when the hemorrhage came, I just jumped and ran."

"Dear me, how you must have felt," said Kittie with a shiver, as she polished a tumbler brightly, and put it back in the water to every one's amusement.

"I don't know what I would have done without Cousin Roger," said Olive. "He was so kind and thoughtful."

"Who does he make me think of?" asked Bea, which caused Olive to look up in surprise.

"How strange; he reminds me of some one, too, and it worried me so for a while, but I thought it was nonsense, and never spoke about it," she said.

"Well, I s'pose it is a notion," answered Bea, and then talk went back to Ernestine and Jean, of whom, it seemed, enough could never be told.

The next day, a little discovery was made to the girls.

Mr. Congreve was seen walking about in the fresh autumn sunshine, before breakfast, and the girls saw him gathering a small cluster of flowers, selecting from the dewy bunches with much care; and after a while Olive, who had slept late with fatigue, came down in her grey wrapper with its blue facings, and part of the flowers were in her wavy hair, and part at her throat, with a little knot of ribbon.

"Good gracious!" cried Kat, rushing into the kitchen with a tragic expression, and setting a pile of dishes on the table with some force. "Do you see that? What's this family coming to?"

"Dust," responded Kittie calmly. "What's the matter, Kat?"

"Do you mean to tell me you didn't see Olive wearing the flowers he gathered before breakfast, and that you didn't see how he looked at her at the table?" cried Kat impatiently.

"That's the way they all do; it's the first symptoms I guess, for it's the way that Bea and Dr. Barnett began."

"Oh, the idea," laughed Kittie, "of Olive being in love."

"I don't care, perhaps she isn't, but he is," asserted Kat, with an appeal to Bea, who had just come in.

"I don't know," said Bea. "I saw him give her the flowers, and fasten those in her hair, but I don't think it's anything."

"Well, you watch—there they go now!" exclaimed Kat, whereupon they all

rushed to the window, to see Olive and Roger strolling out among the flowers.

"Would you ever think that was Olive?" said Kittie, as they looked. "Think how quiet and snappy she used to be, and how ugly she always looked, and just see how pretty she is now, and how she laughs and talks. But she's not in love, dear no; she looks as cool and dignified as a cucumber, not a bit blushy, or anything of the kind."

"Well, I should hope not," said Kat severely. "One engaged sister is enough; two would ruin the family."

"If such a thing was to happen," remarked Bea, with a little mercenary expectation, "Congreve Hall would be Olive's; just think of it, girls, how grand! and Cousin Roger is immensely wealthy, and there would be no end of splendid things;" and Bea sighed a little, as she spoke, for she was not going to win any wealth or grand home by her wedding, and there came, just now, a little moment of regret, that such would never be hers. Then she looked at her ring, and felt wicked and ungrateful. Would she exchange with Olive, or any other girl who might win wealth? No, no, never!

"Well, dear suz, what a funny place the world is," said Kat. "Here I've just hated that Roger Congreve, and now I could bless him forever, for being so good and kind, and after all, perhaps he'll be my brother, and Congreve Hall come back to us. I don't like it though," she added, with energy, "we're all getting broken up some way; it don't seem like old times, and I don't want any of us to get married! It's horrid, and I never will. Now Ernestine is home, I'd rather be poor all the days of my life, and have us all stay together, and never get old, or big."

"Very good, but 'buds will be roses, and kittens, cats,' as Jo says," answered Bea, going off with a laugh.

Ernestine was still too weak to see or say much this day. She had been much better on leaving Virginia, and as the trip home was taken in the most luxurious way afforded to travellers, she might have stood it very well, had it not been for the nervous excitement that completely prostrated her before home was reached. So Dr. Barnett prescribed the most perfect quiet, which was given, the girls only going in on tiptoe, now and then, to carry some little dainty, or smile their loving welcome, while Mrs. Dering spent all of her time at the bed side. Ernestine seemed perfectly content, for she lay for hours, with dreamy eyes fixed on Mrs. Dering's face, and never spoke or moved, as though she had been beaten and

bruised by her brief struggle with the world, and only wanted to lie at peace, with one dear face in constant sight; and to let her tired life drift in or out. The change was heart-breaking, and drove the girls from her room at every visit, to hide their tears, and think, as in a dream, of the time when Ernestine, gay, frivolous, careless-hearted girl, was the sunshine of the house, the one being who seemed to never feel or know the touch of care or sadness.

Roger was to go back the second day, and on the evening before, he said:

"The scenery about this little place is perfectly beautiful. Does Canfield afford a livery stable, Olive? If so, I will get a buggy in the morning, and you shall pilot me around the country."

Kat sent an expressive wink and nod of her head to Kittie and Bea, while Olive answered:

"There is a small one, I believe, where you might find something."

"Perhaps they'd loan you their wheel-barrow," added Kat, who found herself in a fair way of liking this distant relative, in spite of his usurping what she termed the family position.

So next morning Roger went down town, and came back in a rather dilapidated buggy, with a lamb-like looking horse, and said with a laugh, as he helped Olive in:

"The very best your city affords; I hope it will not break with us, for my life is not insured."

"My mind's eye rests lovingly on Congreve Hall, as presided over by my artistic sister," cried Kat, with a dramatic gesture, as they drove off; and the next moment she was looking after them with a touch of regretful sadness in her face.

"I don't like it," she said. "Bea gone, Olive going, Jean way off, Ernestine so changed;—oh, Kittie! when anything happens to you, I will be ruined for sure. You don't think you are going to fall in love, or be sick, or go away, or anything; do you?"

"Nonsense," said Kittie, but gave an expressive hug that was soothing and satisfactory, and set Kat's heart at rest.

The ride in that clear morning air, brought a warm stain of color into Olive's

clear cheeks, and a sparkle to her eyes, that was very becoming; and she laughed and talked, in a careless, happy way, that left no doubt in her companion's mind as to her perfect ignorance of his love, and made him more determined not to return to Virginia, leaving her in ignorance.

It was difficult to approach the subject, while her mind was so far away from it, and his perfect assurance as to her answer made it still harder for him. But Olive unconsciously led the way at last, for she was talking of their trip home, and dwelling gratefully on his care and kindness, her eyes bright with feeling, as she turned them to him suddenly:

"You have helped me through it all," she said. "I wish I could thank you for all your thoughtful kindness."

They were rolling lazily around a hill, with autumn colors on every side, and autumn's soft winds fanning the air into life, and Olive thought the answer she received was some deceptive flutter of their wings.

"Do not try," he was saying. "Every care or anxiety you have felt have been to me as my own. I have tried to show you what you were to me, and I have failed, but you cannot help but understand me, when I say that I love you, Olive."

She did not take her eyes from a distant hill-top, where their glance had rested, neither did she blush or look pleased when he finished, but was as silent for a moment as though studying on what he had said; then looked at him slowly:

"You surely do not mean it?"

"I surely do mean it, and have tried to make you see and know it, for weeks past, but your answer now is only what I had expected, for though I at first thought your indifference feigned, I soon came to see that neither I, nor any other man had ever received a thought from you, and to fear that I never would. You seemed wedded to your love of art, but now, when you know that I love you, cannot you find a little feeling somewhere in your heart for me, Olive?"

"No, I cannot," answered Olive, after a moment, and with the air of one who had been literally hunting for something, and failed to find it. "I could not help but think a great deal of you, when you made my visit so pleasant, and then was so kind when trouble came; but I never dreamed that you loved me; I really think you must be mistaken, it seems so strange. Why do you?"

There was no misunderstanding the honest wonder in her eyes, as she asked

the question, and no possibility of construing it into a desire for flattery.

"I have loved you," he said, "ever since that first sad night, so long ago, when you showed a womanly strength—"

"What night?" she asked eagerly, the old vague remembrance coming back to her; and, at the interruption, he looked at her in amaze.

"Is it possible you do not remember?" he asked.

"No, I do not; but the moment I saw you, there seemed a remembrance that has worried me ever since. What is it?"

For a moment he hesitated to tell her.

"It was I, who brought your father home," he said, at last; and with a swift, painful recollection, she dropped her face into her hands, and said nothing.

"When you came to the Hall," he went on presently, "and was introduced to me, there was such an air of surprise, together with a look of pain in your face, that I immediately supposed you remembered me, and that the memory was painful, so I never spoke of it. I was travelling here in New York, and was on the train just a few seats behind your father. I saw him when he received the blow on the temple, and went to him as soon as possible, and was the one asked to see him brought safely to his home. I did not know, until my return home, two weeks later, that it was Uncle Ridley's nephew."

After he finished speaking, they rode in silence for a long way, and the peaceful old horse, finding himself unguided, turned his head homeward, and jogged off more lively. Olive did not look up again. She was evidently lost in sad memories, that his words awakened, and he had not the heart to bring her back to a subject so foreign to her thoughts as his love. So in silence, they reached home, and, as he helped her from the buggy, Olive said with trembling lips:

"I'm glad it was you. I loved papa better than any one in the world, and I can never forget that you saw him last and tried to help him." Then, after telling her mother and the girls their additional cause for gratitude to him, she went off to her room, and was not seen again for some time; for when affected so that tears were her only relief, she always took them alone.

Roger went that night. He spent the afternoon sitting in Ernestine's room with them all, and telling over and over the last moments of Mr. Dering, what he had

overheard him saying to another passenger just a few moments before the accident; just how the blow came, so quick and painless, and how his last words had been of home, and how they would be surprised at his sudden departure.

Olive was not present, and fearing that Roger might consider it rude, Mrs. Dering explained the little habit of taking all her grief alone, and how the reminding of that sad night had doubtless overcome her. But Olive came down just before supper, and her face showed plainer than ever before, its traces of heavy tears, though she said nothing about it, and seemed to think her absence explained itself to the only one to whom an explanation was due.

While the girls were busy in the kitchen, and mother was with Ernestine, they were alone in the sitting-room, and Roger said to her, as they stood by the window, watching the shadows creep through the yard, and lift themselves in a misty cloud:

"Olive, have you no other answer for me, before I go?"

"No," said Olive, slowly. "You seem so different to me. In one way, I love you; I could not help it; and, in another way, you are nothing to me. I wish you would forget that you ever thought you loved me, and let me feel as though you were my brother."

"I cannot," he answered. "I do not think that I love you, but I *know* that I do, and that I always will; and some time, when you are older, and come to feel that home-love and art cannot satisfy you, I will come back and try to win a place in the new yearning."

"You needn't," said Olive, with discouraging honesty. "I shall never love any one that way. I don't want to. All I want is mama and the girls, and to study until I am satisfied with myself, or as near it as I can be. But you mustn't let that keep you away; you will forget this, indeed, you will, and must come and see us often, and then everything will be delightful."

"No; I shall never come until I feel that I do not come in vain. Do not doubt my love, Olive, because your own heart is so free from it. It is a girlish heart, and when it reaches womanhood, I may not be the one to satisfy it, but I will come and try."

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# CHAPTER XX.

# A SAD STORY.

ERNESTINE was getting better, and how could she help it, with everything heart could wish, perfect peace and quiet, and six devoted hearts and pairs of hands, ready to obey her slightest command. She did not issue many, for one of the changes that had come to her, was asking for little, complaining of nothing, even her own suffering, but lying still, patient, contented, unselfish and quiet. She seemed grateful and pleased at the least little act of kindness, a thing she would have accepted before as a matter-of-course, and complained at not receiving; and after she grew stronger, and the girls resumed their gayeties, she never seemed to regret for a moment, that she was removed from all such, and must lie still, day after day; when before, it was intolerable to pass a single day without something to pass away her gleeful spirits with Canfield, with its promising circle of girls, budding into young ladyhood, was beginning to put on quite a number of social airs, in the way of little dances, nutting parties, one or two literary clubs, and a card club; which acted upon the little place, like a fresh spring breeze, blowing in upon a pile of peaceful autumn leaves. The Dering girls were popular, and partook largely in all these innocent festivities, bringing gay accounts of them to Ernestine, to which she listened, with a quiet smile, but with never a wish to be in them. Nothing seemed to interest her so much, as the new experience and dignity that had fallen upon Beatrice; and for hours they would chat together of the new plans, and tender little fancies, which Bea had not the courage to confess to others, and Ernestine, bolstered up with pillows, would listen, and now and then, do a little of the pretty work that was going on to the bridal garments.

After a while, when she grew strong enough to talk more, and cough less, she told them of her life, while they had been separated, and the girls never forgot the day on which they listened to it. She was partly sitting up in bed, as colorless as the snowy ruffled linen about her, with her beautiful golden hair in the old-time waves, and curly ends; her lovely eyes, with their liquid brown lights and heavy lashes, and the dainty ruffles to her snowy night-dress, fastened at the throat with a fragile bit of coral, that seemed to throw a shade of its exquisite coloring into her stainless face.

It was a lovely home-scene, for the girls were sewing in their low rocking-chairs, Olive was sketching at the window, Mrs. Dering sat at the bedside holding Ernestine's hand, and over them all the autumn sunshine fell, warm and sweet, as with a touch of loving benediction; and the trill of Jeanie's canary down stairs, was the only sound, save Ernestine's low voice, sad and sweet, in its feebleness.

"I went on the midnight train, you know," she was saying. "It seemed terrible, and with all the people around, I felt as if I was the only person out in the night. Oh, it is too horrible to feel so alone and as though no one knew, or cared where you were going, or what terrible trouble you might be in. Nearly everybody in the car was asleep, and there was only one lady; so I sat down behind her, and for a long time I was so miserable myself that I didn't notice her; then her baby woke up, and began to cry, so did her little girl, and I saw that she was sick or something; so in a little bit, I spoke to her, and asked if I could do anything. She said no, at first, but afterwards said if I would take the baby a moment, as she felt so sick and faint; so I did, and he seemed so astonished that he stopped crying, and then the little girl wanted to come over in my seat, and I helped her over, and told the lady to lie down, as she looked very pale. I knew she was astonished at my being alone, and thought that she might ask my name, and after thinking about it a while, I decided to take my very own name, my—mother's," with a little choke over the name. "She did ask me in a little while, said I looked so young, and why was I travelling alone; and I told her that I was an orphan, that my name was Florence Clare, and that I was on my way to New York; and then she looked so kind and interested that I burst right out crying. I couldn't help it. She didn't ask me any more then, but when we got to New York, no one met her, and she was terribly worried. She asked me where I was going, and I was afraid she would think something was wrong if I told her I didn't know where; so I just gave any street and number, but I said that if she wanted me to go and help her, I could just as well as not, as no one was expecting me anywhere. She seemed very glad, so I carried the children out, and after a policeman had called a hack for her, we went to the St. Nicholas; she was very sick after we got there, and after I put the children to sleep, I sat up with her nearly all night. She was a widow, she said, and had written to a friend in New York to meet her on that train, but that, probably, he had not received the letter; and that she wanted to go right on to Boston, next morning, if she was able. I asked her then if she did not want me to go with her, to take care of the children, that I was all alone in the world, and obliged to work some way and somewhere, and after asking me a great many questions, she said she would think about it.

She seemed like a very good, kind lady, and I was afraid she would think there was something strange about me, so I made my story sound just as good as possible. I said I was coming to the city because I thought I could find work better than in a small place, and that I had no near relatives in the world, and would like to go with her, because she looked kind, and I would just as soon take care of children as anything else. She looked at my clothes, but they were my very plainest; and then she asked me what baggage I had, and I showed her my satchel, with nothing but some clothes in it, and then she said that I looked truthful, and too young and pretty to be alone in the city, and that I should go on with her in the morning. I don't know what I would have done if it hadn't been for her, for when I was on the train, I had no idea where I would go or what I would do. Before I left home, I tried to feel right, to forget who I was, but I couldn't; my head kept aching, and I thought every day that it ached harder, and that pretty soon I would be crazy; and then I thought of going away where I could never be found, and die somewhere, and something made me go. It seemed as if I was being pulled away, and every time I heard any of the girls say 'mama,' it came to me that you wasn't my mama, that the girls were not my sisters, then my head ached harder than ever and I couldn't cry. I thought God must surely feel sorry for me, and that he sent the lady on purpose—" and as Ernestine paused to cough and get breath, several tears were smuggled out of sight by her listeners, and Mrs. Dering's voice trembled, as she kissed the speaker, and said:

"He did, dear; believe it, I asked Him to care for and watch over you, wherever you might be, and I knew that He would."

"I went on to Boston with her," continued Ernestine, after a moment's rest. "I knew you would never find me there, and I didn't want to know that you ever looked for me; I knew you would, but I didn't want to hear about it. For awhile the lady watched me very closely, and I knew she was a little distrustful, but the children liked me, and though the work nearly killed me, I kept up. I was with the children constantly, slept, ate, and went out with them, washed, dressed and took care of them from morning 'till night; and sometimes I wished I could die, I was so tired and unhappy. I did not intend to stay with her, but meant to go on the stage just as soon as possible, though I never saw the papers, and had no chance of finding the names of companies. Once I asked to see the papers, but she didn't like it; she was never unkind really, but she always seemed a little suspicious, and when I asked for the paper, she asked what I wanted it for? I had a good place, and no need of the papers. I didn't want to tell her, for fear she

would turn me off, so I just waited. One day I was singing the baby to sleep; it was the first time I had ever sung in her house, and she happened to hear me, and came in and complimented my voice, said how beautiful it was, and why didn't I use it, instead of wearing my life out nursing babies. I said right away that I wanted to, and meant to go on the stage as soon as I could; then she was angry, and threatened to find another girl if I did not at once give up such a notion. I promised I would, but I didn't and a few days later, I was out with the children, and saw an advertisement for fifty girls wanted at a play, and as soon as I got back, I told her I was going to leave. She was very angry, and kept that week's wages, but I went, and the next day I answered the advertisement. It was for girls to dance, and I said I could not, and would not, and was just going to leave, when the manager came in, and stopped me. He began by making foolish speeches about how beautiful I was, but when I started away, he begged pardon, and said I was just what they wanted for a queen, who was to come out of a flower, and did not have to dance, which would suit me, since I was so over-particular. At first I thought I never could, and it made me so ashamed, to think of being in such a crowd, that I felt like hiding my face forever. But there I was, with no home and no money, and what could I do? So I signed the contract for ten nights, at fifty cents a night, and felt that I could never look you in the face again, or any of the girls. It was not as bad as I expected, but oh, so different from what I had always thought the stage was. We all had to dress in a little room that was as cold as ice, and most of the girls were so loud and coarse, and talked slang, and they all took a dislike to me because I was queen. They called me "old prudy," and had all kinds of coarse jokes that made me feel as though I would die of shame; I took cold the first night, the stage was so windy, and our dresses as thin as wisps, and then I was so mortified and miserable. I nearly starved while I was there, the pay was so small, and I couldn't afford to have any fire in my room at the small hotel, and took such a heavy cold that I thought I would die coughing. Oh, how wretched I was! I wanted to die, for I thought I had fallen so low that you would never care for me again, and I never felt that I needed God as I did then. I don't think I ever prayed honestly before, but it seemed as if that terrible feeling of being alone, would kill me, so I began to go to God, as I would to you, and it became such a comfort. I wanted to be good and honest, whatever I did, so that I could feel that I still had a right to love and think of you all. I stayed with that company the rest of the winter, at a salary of two dollars a week, and did all manner of odds and ends. Sometimes go on as a substitute, sometimes as a servant or some inferior character, and often to dress the leading ladies, when they found that I could do it nicely. The manager was a gruff, coarse man, but he had a kind heart, and after a while, he seemed to take a

sort of interest in me, especially when my cough grew so bad. He brought me medicine twice, and one night asked me if I had been used to such a life. I told him, no, but would not answer any other questions. When the company broke up in the spring, he found me a place as nurse-girl in a family that he knew, and said, that in the fall, a friend of his was going to organize an opera-troupe, and that he would try and get me in, for by that time, I had sung for him, and said that opera was what I had rather be in.

"I found my second trial as nurse-girl, a great deal harder than the first; for there were three children, all sick and cross, and when hot weather came, I had a little room up under the roof to sleep in, and the heat was frightful. I had to be up nearly every night with the children, for two of them were very sick during the hottest weather, and I was called upon for nearly every thing. Between the heat and working so hard, I gave out, and fainted one night, while sitting up with the little girl, and the doctor told my mistress that if I did not have a rest, I would be sick, and probably die on her hands. So in a few days, she sent me and her oldest girl out to her mother's, who lived in the country. I was so glad and grateful for the rest, that I never can forget her. The grandmother was a plain, good-hearted old lady, who seemed very sorry for me, and she used to tell me every day, that I would never live to see another year, especially after she found that my mother had died of consumption. I didn't care how soon I died, and told her so, and then she thought I was wicked, and began to preach long sermons to me, and give me all kinds of queer drinks and medicines, which did me much more good than the sermons, for after staying there three weeks, I was much better, as was Nettie; so we went back to the city, and I stayed with Mrs. Feathers until late in August.

"One day, Mr. Fox, the old manager, came and brought Mr. Hurst, the friend who was going to organize the troupe, and I sang for him. He liked my voice, but said he would not engage me until I had rehearsed once or twice with the company, so that he could see what I amounted to, and Mrs. Feathers said I might keep my place with her, until he had decided. After one or two rehearsals, he engaged me, at four dollars a week, and so I left Mrs. Feathers. She was so kind, gave me a new dress and two dollars, and said if I broke down in health, that her mother had taken a fancy to me, and would like to have me come out again and stay awhile with her. I felt so grateful that I threw my arms around her neck and cried, and she kissed me; I never shall forget how good it seemed to really be kissed again by some one who was a mother, and whom I knew, felt sorry for me.

"I had a very rough time in the new troupe. The manager was cross and rude,

and I had to study hard to catch up with the old members; we rehearsed stiff and steadily, and started out in September, visiting only small places first, and not making much money, so that our pay was often behind. In a while I was promoted from chorus singing to character, and I had no money to buy a wardrobe, so the manager paid me fifteen dollars that he owed me, and advanced ten—"

Here Olive gave an indignant breath, but said nothing, on second thought; and Ernestine went on, without noticing the interruption.

"I bought some stage clothes with part of it, and used the other to redeem my ring, that you gave me, mama, that I had been obliged to pawn for my board; but while I was working out the ten for him, I had to pawn it again, and one of my dresses, as I hadn't a cent. We travelled south, and were in Virginia a few nights before going to Staunton, and when I heard that we were to go there, I felt as though I never could! I didn't know whether Jean was there yet, and I didn't expect she would come to an opera if she was; but to go there, and perhaps be so near her, when I would have been glad to have died, just for the sake of seeing, or hearing from one of you, in some way—oh, it was so hard! The manager grew very much provoked and impatient because I coughed so much and was so weak, and threatened to discharge me, as I was getting useless; so I used to nearly strangle trying not to cough, and never dared say I was tired again. The very evening we got to Staunton, Miss Downs, one of the leading ladies, was taken quite sick, and the manager told me I would have to take her part next evening, in 'The Bohemian Girl,' so I sat up nearly all night to study, and sang all next day, until I was ready to drop. When the time came to go to the theatre, I was so faint I could not stand up and dress; I begged them not to tell the manager, for I knew he would discharge me right there; but Madame T—— heard of it, and sent her maid up with a hot whiskey-toddy, and to help me dress, and that is the way I started out for the evening.

"You know the rest. From the time that I felt my voice leaving me, and everything began growing dark, I did not know anything, until I opened my eyes, and saw Olive! Oh, I thought I was in Heaven, surely; it seemed too sweet to be true. I wonder I did not die, instead of faint, with pure joy. Even after I had looked at her long, had heard her speak, and felt her kisses, I could not believe it. I almost expected to wake up and find that I had been dreaming between acts, on the cold, windy stage, or that the manager was scolding me for falling to sleep, and daring to dream of happiness and you. I don't think I would have lived much longer, and perhaps when I found that I was really going to die, I could not have

left you without a little word of some kind, for my heart used to nearly break with longing to know if you loved me yet, or would ever want to see me again. I did not feel as though I ever had a right to go back, but when I found that I was coming, that you wanted and loved me, oh, mama! I thought then my heart would surely break, I was so happy!"

At this point every one was crying. Mrs. Dering had laid her face down in the pillows; the girls had, one by one, retired behind their work, and Kat, with her head wrapped in the towel she had been hemming was crying, while she vowed vengeance alike on saint and sinner.

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# CHAPTER XXI.

# MY LADY.

"I WOULD like to see my lady."

It was an imperious demand, that every one in the Dering household had become used to, likewise, to the speaker, a mite of humanity, with wicked big blue eyes, a pug nose, and a frowzled head of brown curls.

She was dressed to day, in a long white fur cloak, a cap of the same, and a mite of a muff, with scarlet silk tassels, and hung to her neck with a broad scarlet ribbon; and she had rung the bell with her own wee hand, and presented her message, in that imperative way, that indicated a spoiled, but precious specimen of babydom.

"I do hope you will forgive us," said the smiling faced young lady, who accompanied her. "We don't intend to come every day, but mother made some delicious chocolate cake yesterday, and I thought possibly Miss Ernestine might relish a taste of it, with some of my wine jelly; and when I spoke of bringing it, Pansy heard me, and insisted on coming too; so here we are."

"How very kind you are," said Bea, taking the dainty wicker basket, knotted with scarlet ribbons, and peeping in at its fancy glass of moulded jelly, the delicious cake, and a bunch of hot-house flowers. "We should be glad to see you every day; how could we help it, when you always come laden like a good angel!"

"I would like—to—see—my—lady!" repeated Pansy, with impressive dignity, and some severity of manner; for what did she care about jelly, and good angels, and all that. "I haven't seen her since the other day before yesterday morning."

"You shall see her right away," laughed Bea, setting down the basket. "Excuse me a moment, Miss Clara, Kittie is busy in the kitchen. I'll take Pansy out there, before we go up stairs."

Kittie was pealing apples, and meditating on how she would trim her hat,

since it had to be trimmed over, and nothing new to do it with; but she put all such thoughts aside when she saw her visitor, and made a seat for her on the bench.

"I 'spect I'm most gladder to see you than I ever was before," said Pansy, with a devoted smile, as she took her seat near Kittie.

"Why, what are you sitting there for? Here I am," said Kat, who sat opposite slicing apples. "I thought you always knew me."

Pansy looked from one to the other, for a moment, then nestled close to Kittie, as she remarked with decision:

"You're not my lady; you're the other one."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I 'spect I couldn't jes tell, but then you are."

"I shouldn't wonder if you were right, but I want to tell you that you mustn't love Kittie so much; she's mine, and I'm jealous," said Kat, with a foreboding shake of her head.

"But she keeped the bear from eating me up," cried Pansy, with unshaken belief that she would have been forever lost except for Kittie's timely arrival. "I jes never'd seen my papa once any more, 'f she hadn't finded me in the woods; and he said I ought to love her jes as much more as ever I could, and I *do*," accompanying the assertion with a loving clasp of Kittie's arm, the suddenness of which sent her apple spinning across the floor.

"There, see; I'll get it," she cried, running after it, with a triumphant glance at Kat. "'F I'd knocked your apple, you'd a scolded me."

"Oh, no; I'm an angel," laughed Kat. "Kittie's the one that scolds."

"Do you?" asked Pansy, leaning against Kittie, with a devotion that nearly knocked the whole pan of apples over.

"I never scolded you, did I?" asked Kittie.

"No, but Auntie Raymond says I mind you the bestest of anybody. I think I do. I 'spect it's because I love you best, right up next to my papa; do you love me?"

"Ever so much."

"Well, I don't know what I'll do," said Pansy, with a long sigh, after she expressed a little rapture over the assurance. "My papa said the other day, what I'd do when we went back to the city 'thout you, and I said I was going to take you along; 'll you go?"

"How could I? Leave my mama and sisters?"

"But don't you love me 'n my papa?"

"I love you a very great deal."

"'N not my papa?"

"I think he's a very nice gentleman, and that you ought to be a very good little girl, and love him lots and lots."

Pansy drew back, and slowly surveyed her idol, as though she had just discovered the first flaw. "I think you might love him, too," she said with a grieved air, and some resentment.

"If she loved him, she wouldn't love you so much," said Kat, slyly.

"Then I'm glad you don't," exclaimed Pansy, with sudden satisfaction, and returning to her seat with an enraptured smile.

There was no mistaking the child's devotion. She firmly believed that Kittie had saved her from being lost forever, and on the foundation of her great gratitude, she had built an overwhelming love, that expressed itself in various ways. She never let any one of the family come to town without bringing flowers, and she insisted on coming in at least three times a week, herself; and it may be remarked, that whatever Pansy set her mind on, she did.

Between aunts, uncles, and cousins, and a father, who was rapidly coming to the conclusion that she was the most wonderful child alive, she was in a fair way of being spoiled, and had finally come to where she ruled the household with the most imperious little will, which every one submitted to, and thought delightful.

Twice since the picnic, she had come with her papa, in the phaeton, and taken Kittie to ride, and three times, Mr. Murray had come in the long summer evenings, and brought her to spend an hour or two; and there Kittie's acquaintance with him ceased.

In the rides, he had talked to her but little, preferring to listen to the unbroken chatter which Pansy kept up with her. And then he saw, that to her, he appeared in a fatherly guise, which made her feel perfectly free and unrestrained, and he thought it best to leave it so for the present.

His calls in the evenings had been entirely devoted to Mrs. Dering. They would sit on the porch, in proper, elderly fashion, sometimes joined by Bea, while the twins and Pansy would roam about the yard, and play together like three children, and Mr. Murray would have nothing to say to the one he really came to see except "Good evening, Miss Kittie," when he came, and when he left.

No one, except his own sister, suspected in the least that anything took him there save a desire to accompany Pansy, whose absorbing devotion everyone in Canfield knew by this time.

Mr. Murray was quick to see that in the mother's eyes, Kittie and Kat were the merest children, and that a thought of any other kind in connection with them, would not be harbored for an instant; and he also saw, that never a girlish heart was freer from anything of loves or lovers, than Kittie's, and so long as it was so, he was quite content to let it remain, and watch it grow to maturity. There was no denying that he was strangely and powerfully interested in her, wonder and laugh at the idea, as he would, though he could not yet think that the feeling had assumed the name of love. It was only that respect and interest that comes to the heart of man when he meets a woman, lovely, fresh-hearted, and unselfishly sweet.

The approaching dignity of sixteen lay over the girls, and while Kat was still a most thoroughly romping tom-boy, Kittie was wonderfully womanly, with pretty, graceful, lady-like ways, the sweetest possible voice, and the loveliest eyes that ever looked, with girlish innocence, into the face of the man who felt that love her he could, and love her he would, in spite of himself.

There was something irresistibly attractive and sweet to Paul Murray, in watching the love between his little daughter and the young girl. Kittie's slightest word was law to Pansy; and there was something so womanly in the way she exercised her influence, and made the child's love a source of benefit unto her spoiled, wayward little self.

When fall drifted into the chilly reign of winter, Mr. Murray went back to the city. He had intended going long before, but had put it off, a week at a time, until

winter had finally come; then he decided with a sudden determination, and, as if to test his firmness of purpose, had slipped away from Pansy, and galloped into town, trusting to the darkness to hide from Canfield's prying eyes, that he was coming to the Dering's alone. Not that he cared; oh, no, he would just as soon have heralded to every soul therein that it was so, but for Kittie's sake, it was best to give no one's tongue a chance to wag. Many a bud is rudely hastened into blossom by impatient fingers, and withers from the shock; it must not be so now.

He fastened his horse at the gate, and went slowly up the walk, wondering a little if they would be surprised. A bright light came from Ernestine's window, and out from down stairs, falling across the porch floor; and before ringing the bell, he paused a moment, and looked in. How bright and homelike everything looked, and there, before the grate, stood the very object of his visit, making the prettiest picture imaginable, with a big kitchen apron on, her sleeves rolled up, and reading a letter. He knew it was Kittie, in a moment, for in her hair was a knot of scarlet ribbon, and the foot resting on the fender wore a bow, of the same color, astride its slippered toe—little niceties that Kat, was seldom, if ever, guilty of.

Beatrice answered his ring, and tried to look as though she had not expected some one else, some one who would have given her a more cordial greeting, than "Good evening, Miss Dering."

"Good evening, Mr. Murray; walk in, please, and I will call mama," said Bea, ushering him into the sitting-room, with some little wonder, and going up stairs.

Kittie had vanished with her letter; but as Mr. Murray sat down, he saw the envelope on the table, and immediately experienced the most peculiar and unpleasant sensation, on observing the masculine scrawls thereon. What gentleman was writing to her? he wondered, with quick resentment; and the next moment Kittie came in, and found him studying that envelope closely. She had thrown off her apron, and let down her sleeves, and he thought she looked prettier the other way, though he found that either way she was suddenly invested with a stronger attraction than ever; for a little competition will always make us more eager, and the star of our desire much brighter. He explained, with a laugh, as they sat down, that he had just been admiring the free, easy chirography on the envelope; which same was a fib of first degree, but then—

"It is Cousin Ralph's; I think it beautiful," said Kittie, unconsciously obliging, but giving no relief, for Mr. Murray's mind went back to the day he met "Cousin

Ralph," handsome, manly fellow, and he remembered that it was only second cousin, and that Ralph had been very attentive to Kittie at the picnic, and that—oh, what didn't he think, all in a few minutes; and how true it is that

"Trifles light as air, are to the jealous,,
Confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ."

The rebound from a feeling of perfect security to one of miserable doubt, at finding the field already taken, nearly drove Mr. Murray into a precipitancy that he might have regretted forever. As it was, he answered Kittie's inquiries for Pansy, in a pre-occupied way, that was surprising, and seemed too much pleased with that envelope to ever lay it down; and yet, with all his looking, he failed to discover that the name, in a maze of flourishes, was Miss Kathleen Dering, instead of Miss Katherine. Just so do we make up our minds to see things in a certain light, and see them so, in spite of fate.

How pleasant it was, sitting there in the warm firelight, with Kittie opposite, in the low rocking chair, and no one else near. It seemed so homelike and sweet to this man who had no fireside of his own, and only a memory of one short, happy year, when another girlish face and heart, not unlike Kittie's, had been all his own. He wished now, that no one else would come in to spoil this cozy chat; but they did, in just a moment—Mrs. Dering and Bea; and Kittie resigned the low rocker, for a corner over on the lounge, to his great regret.

They all heard with polite and honest expressions of regret, that he was going to leave for the city on the next day; but after hearing that he was going to leave Pansy behind, Kittie was quite satisfied.

"I have no home, you know," he said, looking at Mrs. Dering, with an expression that caused her kindly heart to pity him. "I shall board, and be hard at work 'till late every night, and poor little Pansy would have a dreary life with a hired nurse. Besides, the influences surrounding her would not be such as I would like. So Sister Julia has kindly promised to keep her until I can make some arrangements, and become a little settled."

He staid for some time; promised to call in and see Olive, who had gone to her studies at last; and then he rose to leave. If he held Kittie's hand a little longer than any of the others, no one noticed it; and if, in that good-bye, his eyes went to her face less guarded in their expression than usual, no one noticed that either, because no one dreamed of such a thing.

"May I have Pansy with me as often as I want her?" asked Kittie, just before he left.

"Certainly; I shall always be pleased to hear that you still love the child, and that she is sometimes with you," he answered, lingering, as if loth to go. But at that instant a step was heard on the porch, and a certain expression in Bea's face warned him that the sitting-room would now be in demand; whereupon he gave a hasty good-bye, and left; not without a little envy for Dr. Barnett, who entered at the same moment, and who came, in the full assurance of recognized right, such as was not yet Paul Murray's.

Of course, the family discreetly retired, after a few words of greeting to the young man, and while the cozy sitting-room took unto itself these

"Two souls with but a single thought,"

the others went up to Ernestine's room to finish the evening.

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# CHAPTER XXII.

# TO REAR, TO LOVE, AND THEN TO LOSE.

SPRING came, and with it much that was of absorbing interest, of untold importance, and yet so sad. In May, Bea would leave the home of childhood and girlhood, and would be mistress of one of the prettiest little cottages in Canfield. She was blithely happy, and sang and sewed from morning until night, in a blissful content, that made mother and sisters smile and sigh at once; and wonder how home would seem with Bea gone. Such marvels of pretty things as had been made, and such a little gem of a bower, as the new home was, and how happy and gay everything was, to be sure. Every Saturday night, when Olive came home from the city, her first trip was to the little cottage, to see the latest improvements; for there were several, in the way of a verandah, a frail, spidery looking summer-house, with a sick looking vine started over one corner, a new front fence, and a hitching post. Each and every one was of greatest importance and everybody in Canfield was as interested, as though they were one great family, just marrying off their first daughter. Bea visited her future dominion every day, as did the twins; but Ernestine was not to go, until everything was ready for the new occupants, and then she was to pass her opinion on the whole, and suggest any changes that might strike her graceful fancy.

"It must have a name," said Bea, coming in one day, just a week before the wedding. "When Meg got married in 'Little Women,' she went to housekeeping in a little cottage, and they called it Dovecot. What shall I call mine?"

"Call it a house and let it go; better not begin with fancy names and all that, it won't last," advised Kat, rigidly practical.

"Yes, it will—always," asserted Bea, with the fond delusive belief, experienced by every women when in love, that life will be one endless courtship and honey-moon.

"I think a name is a pretty idea," said Kittie, recalling all the Roman titles she had ever heard of. "Call it—let's see, call it Fern-nook."

"Yes, I would," laughed Kat "It's so appropriate. There's not a fern within a

mile, and not the ghost of a nook anywhere."

"Well, I thought Bird's-nest a real pretty name," said Bea, swinging her hat by its ribbon, and looking thoughtful. "But, somehow, I want something else."

"What kind of flowers are you going to have?" asked Kittie, with a view to selecting something appropriate this time.

"Geraniums in the big bed in front, with a border of some kind, then I will have vines all over the porch, and a lily in the little urn, and a heart-shaped bed of pansies under that shady side-window. None of those do for a name, though."

Kittie confessed that they did not, but said in a moment:

"We'll go up and ask Ernestine, if she can't think of something no one else can." To which they all agreed, and hurried up stairs forthwith.

Ernestine was sitting up in the big rocker, in a lovely white wrapper, and a little fancy scarlet sacque. She looked very frail and weak, though very lovely, and much interested when the important question was put to her. The girls had perfect faith in her selection, and waited patiently, as her eyes went from the budding trees outside, to the gleams of sunshine playing across the carpet, then to the bunch of purple pansies in the vase on the table.

"Call it Hearts-ease," she said.

"I told you," cried Kittie. "That's just the name."

"Hearts-ease it is, to the end of the chapter;" exclaimed Kat with a flourish as of benediction.

"Yes, that is lovely—and there comes Walter, I'll go right down and tell him," said Bea, and flitted gayly away.

"A penny for your thoughts, Ernestine," said Kat, watching her eyes go out to the sunshine again with a dreamy smile.

"I was thinking how happy everything was," answered Ernestine slowly. "It's all so lovely. Olive is doing so splendidly in her painting. Bea is so happy. Jean is coming home, and—I am here. I can hardly believe it even now, and I so often wonder if I'm happy enough."

"This will be a gay old household," said Kat briskly, warmed into gayety by

the sad tone of the invalid's voice. "Uncle Ridley will make Bea a handsome present I expect."

"How strange and delightful it will be to have Jeanie home, bless her precious little heart," cried Kittie with loving eagerness. "I can hardly wait, and mama seems almost too happy to live."

"Jean has not changed much," said Ernestine. "She is taller and sweeter looking, but just the same dear, quiet little thing. She walks with a cane now, and is perfectly straight. How glad I shall be to see her, I wish she was coming to-day!"

She came the next, as if in answer to their eagerness and longing, and this is the way it happened.

Mrs. Dering was in the hall, when she saw a carriage stop at the gate, and though Mr. Congreve and Jean were expected in two or three days, it never occurred to her, that they might come before; so while she took off her apron, and brushed a little flour—having been in the kitchen—from her dress, the arrivals had left the carriage, and were coming in at the gate. She got as far as the door, then paused, and caught her breath as if in a spasm of sudden joy.

Coming up the walk with swiftly flying feet, outstretched arms, and glowing face wildly eager, was a light girlish figure in a pretty travelling suit, and the mother, feeling her strength forsaking her knelt down on the porch and opened her arms, her lips dumb, her eyes blinded with great joyful tears.

Could it be? Oh, had God been so good? Was the flying figure, with strong perfect limbs and bright eager face, her crippled, crooked little Jean? It seemed a dream too blissful to be true but the next moment, their arms were clasped, and Jean's tears and kisses fell like rain, on her mother's face and hair.

"Oh mama; precious darling mama! are you glad? are you happy that I'm well? Speak to me, mama; what are you crying for?"

"I'm so happy, darling. Oh, my little Jean, I'm so glad and grateful," cried Mrs. Dering, with a great sob, as she folded the little girl closer, and kissed her again and again. "I knew you would come back to me better, I did not dream you would come well. Why did you not tell me, darling?"

"I wanted to surprise you," began Jean; but just then Kat came into the hall, beheld the astonishing spectacle, and with one shrill utterance of Jean's name,

that summoned the whole family, she had rushed to the porch, and taken the little girl in a great hug.

Well, what a hub-bub there did follow! How everybody hugged and kissed everybody, in the abandonment of joy; how Uncle Ridley was deluged with caresses, and suddenly found himself holding Mrs. Dering in his arms, and patting her wildly on the back, while she cried on his shoulder. And didn't Ernestine creep slowly down stairs, and appear like a frail spirit in their midst, and wasn't she whisked on to the lounge in a hurry, and kissed heartily by every one in the excitement.

"God bless my soul! How happy we all are!" cried Mr. Congreve, with a final gasp of joy, and sitting down with an exhausted smile. "I never expected to be in such a good humor again as long as I lived—no I never did. I'm fairly swelled up with happiness, and I've bust a button right off my vest."

Everybody laughed heartily. Gay words and blithe laughs hung on every one's lips; everything was sunshine, and every one was happy. What a household idol was Jean in the days that followed! How mother and sisters clung to her, watched her walk—oh, joy of all joys—so straight and free; and how many, many times did Mrs. Dering go to Mr. Congreve, and put her arms about his neck, like a child, to thank him, again and again, as the agent whom God had sent to be the means of answering her most fervent prayers!

Well, to be sure, as Kat had said, it was a lively household now.

The day before the wedding, the girls all went over to the new house—to "Hearts-ease." Mr. Phillips sent the buggy over so that Ernestine could go, and she and Bea drove over, while the rest walked. It was a pretty little place, indeed, as they came in sight of it, nestled under a big tree, that was just budding into pale green in the spring sunshine. Everything was ready for the young bride to take possession on the next day, even to the mat laid before the front door on the new porch, and the bright tin cup hanging to the freshly painted pump in the little back yard.

Bea unlocked the door, with an air of proud importance, and they went in, all anxious to show Ernestine and Jean every corner, as it was their first visit. The little mite of a square hall, and the small sitting-room on one side, were covered with brown and white matting, with soft, woolly rugs of brown and white. Curtains of soft, shady brown were at the windows, and the walls were papered in clear creamy white, with a deep border of brown dashed in gold. The chairs

were all willow, also a pretty, standing work-basket, already filled with some of Bea's light work; and there, on the table, lay some of the young doctor's books and papers. The tiny dining room next, with its round table and new chairs, its little closet, with the shelves covered with snowy paper, and well stocked with dishes, all plain and cheap, but of pretty shapes and serviceable strength. Then the kitchen, shining with new tin, and a brisk little stove, and the rack hung with neatly-hemmed dish-cloths; the brand new cake of soap on the table, and the orderly line of pots and kettles—oh, it was all a sight to tickle your eyes.

Up stairs, the ceilings were low, and a very tall person would have bumped his head unmercifully, but then, it all looked lovely. The pretty bedroom was all in blue, and nearly everything in it was the work of Bea's hands. She had made all the pretty mats on stands and bureaus, also the carpet ones on the floor. The daintily ruffled Swiss curtains, knotted with blue bows, she had made, washed, fluted and put up. All the fancy, pretty work about the bed was hers; and the bunches of forget-me-nots that adorned the chamber-set, looked as though they had sprung into real life on the snowy surface, instead of having been stuck and artistically plastered on. Oh, it was all lovely, and beyond improvement, every one said, and Bea laughed and looked so proud and happy.

"This is to be my spare room," she said, throwing open the door to the back room. "The view from this window is just as pretty as the front, because it looks off to the hills; and just as soon as we are able, we will furnish it, and I shall fix it just like my room, only in pale pink. Won't it be lovely?"

"Ecstatic!" cried Kat. "Who is it to be for?"

"All of you. I expect you and Kittie will have it first, when mama and Jean and Ernestine go to visit Uncle Ridley next year. There are lots of things we can't afford yet," Bea continued, as they went down stairs. "I haven't anything to put in the hall, and it looks a little bare, but I don't mind it much. Then the parlor hasn't a thing in it except the carpet and curtains; but I can wait easy enough. I don't want Walter to think I'm at all dissatisfied or want to be extravagant, because I think everything is just lovely, and I'm so happy."

"Uncle Ridley said when he started for the city this morning, that it was because he was in a hurry to see Olive, and to bring her home to-night; but I just know he's going to bring you something beautiful!" exclaimed Jean, who had flitted everywhere, like a butterfly, and looked radiant with happiness.

"Of course he'll get something," said Kittie, polishing the slim, shining

bannister with her handkerchief. "Let's hurry home; the train has just come in since we left, and I know Ralph has sent something; he said he was going to send his representative."

"I don't see anything that can be changed," said Ernestine slowly, as they took a final peep into the sitting-room, "unless you put that bracket with the figure under the picture over the mantel, and leave that space between the windows for the head that Olive is going to paint for you."

"Yes, I'll do that. And now come; you look so tired, dear. Kittie, unhitch Prince for me, will you, while I lock up?"

"Oh, Bea, dear! I hope you will always be so happy," exclaimed Ernestine, with a wistful sadness in her voice, as they drove slowly home; and she laid her head on Bea's shoulder with a tired sigh. "It all seems so lovely, and I am so glad, though I shall miss you so after you are gone."

"But I'm not gone," said Bea, much touched, as she slipped her arm around the frail form with a loving pressure. "I'll be over home every day, and you will come and stay with me, and everything will be just as it is now, except that Walter will be your brother, and you know he loves you like one now."

"Yes, he is a dear fellow, and he will make you happy, I know. But I will not have you always, as I have since I came home—there, the girls have beaten us home, and Kat is waving her hat over the gate, so I suppose the box has come from Ralph."

Bea drove faster, in pleased anticipation, and as soon as they drew near, Kat cried excitedly:

"Hurry up! It's come! pretty near as big as the woodshed, and awful heavy! Kittie and Jean are getting the nails out. Don't stop to hitch. Prince is too glad to be here to go off of his own accord. Here, Ernestine, let me carry you," and, as she spoke, she caught the frail, light form in her strong young arms, and walked off to the house with perfect ease, while Bea tied Prince, and followed in a flutter. Sure enough, an immense box stood on the back porch, with the whole family around it, waiting for the owner to unpack, and Bea went down on her knees beside it, and began to throw out straw with an excited laugh.

"Oh, my patience! dishes!" cried Kittie, as the first bundles began to appear, and immediately arose the most extravagant cries of delight and approval, as one

by one, Bea took out, and unwrapped the daintiest morsels of china, exquisitely painted in grasses, butterflies and flowers. Oh, how lovely they were; the frail, tiny things, looking more like fairy waiters than anything intended for mortal use. Then came a dozen tea-spoons, table-spoons, knives and forks, all engraved; a lovely card basket, swung by a silver chain, from the finger of a winged Mercury; two beautiful napkin rings, marked "Walter" and "Beatrice;" a dozen of the finest damask napkins, with a gorgeous "B." in the corner; and lastly, a fancy dust-pan and brush, an indescribable sweeping cap, six of the most perfect kitchen aprons, a patent stove-hook, and an old shoe, with "Good Luck," painted in red letters on the sole.

"Oh, I declare, I never did!" cried Bea, sitting down on the floor, to laugh and cry at the same time. "Isn't it all too lovely!"

"What does the card say?" asked Jean, as the others began to carry in the china and things. "Just

"'Beatrice,
From
Aunt Tremayne and Ralph,'"

answered Bea, looking at the card, that had been tied with a white ribbon to the nose of the tea-pot. "How good they are! I'm too happy to live."

So it seemed, as she helped take in the things, laughing and crying, and touching them with careful, caressing fingers. They made a most imposing show when arranged on the table, and during the day more modest presents, that came in from well wishing friends, were added to the collection. There came a fancy clock from Mr. Dane, three dozen handsome towels and four beautiful table spreads from Mrs. Dane; and a variety of little things from the young people, with whom Bea was a favorite.

As soon as Mr. Congreve and Olive arrived, on the evening train, they were taken in to view "the show," but the old gentleman added nothing to it, to every one's surprise; though he seemed pleased with everything there, and said it was a plenty for one bride.

After supper, Olive disappeared and was gone some little time, but where, no one knew, and finally Mr. Congreve jumped up, with the remark, that he had

heard her say something about Mrs. Dane's, and as he knew where it was, he guessed he'd walk over after her.

"Never mind, Uncle Ridley, if she is there, Mr. Dane will walk home with her, and you must be tired," said Mrs. Dering.

"God bless my soul, Elizabeth! I'm not an old man," exclaimed the crusty old gentleman of seventy odd years, as he threw open the door, and strode briskly out into the May moonlight. "I think a great deal of your Olive; she's a thorough Congreve, and I'd rather lose my best handkerchief than have anything happen to her—I had indeed. So go in, my dear, go in," and Mrs. Dering obediently went in, as he tramped briskly down the walk.

That last evening of Bea's in the old home came very near being a sad one, in spite of every one's attempt to the contrary. Ernestine stayed down stairs for the first evening since her illness, and the excitement brought a stain of color into her white cheeks that made her look more like her old self, as she lay on the lounge.

Bea sat on the stool at her mother's feet, and Mrs. Dering softly caressed the plump, white hand, that to-morrow she would give away, and now and then a pause would come, when the mother's eyes would fill with tears, and her lips tremble, and then some one would rush in, to break the silence, and thrust irrelevant nonsense into the groove cut for April tears.

Wherever Mr. Congreve and Olive came from, they had a serious talk on the way home. Something evidently disturbed the old gentleman's mind, and he fidgetted nervously, until he had relieved himself with the explosive remark:

"So you sent Roger home, did you?"

"No, sir, he went," answered Olive, with a smile but with some surprise.

"Humph! He did, and what did you say, to make him come home, looking like a criminal expecting to be hung?"

"I said I couldn't love him, and I can't and don't," answered Olive, feeling provoked to think that Roger couldn't keep his own counsel.

"Tut, tut! what did you say that, for?"

"Because it's the truth; I like him very much indeed, but I don't want any

lovers, I'm too young, and something else to think about," exclaimed Olive with unmistakable aversion to the thought.

"Heighty-tighty! your mother was married at eighteen," cried the old gentleman briskly.

"I can't help it, sir. I never want, or expect to marry. My work is all I want."

"Yes, but your work will fail you some time, child; a one-sided love on a single altar soon burns itself out for want of fuel. There must be

"'The happiness thrown on from kindred flames to sustain
A spark of devotion for a lifeless love.'

"The time will come when you may be alone in the world, and I'm much mistaken if your art alone will satisfy the cravings of your woman's heart."

Olive listened in some amaze to such a lengthy speech from the usually short spoken gentleman; and though she felt no less certain of lifelong satisfaction with her art, she asked meekly.

"What would you have me do, Uncle Ridley? I don't love him."

"But are you sure you don't, my child? I knew he loved you all along, and it made my old heart glad; but I never knew how very dear you were to him, until he came back from here, and told me what you had said. You think marriage would interfere with your work, but it will not; why, Roger is as proud and anxious for your success as ever you could be for yourself. He told me that if you would only let him share your work and efforts, that he would take you abroad, that you should see the finest paintings the world holds, and that you should study with the finest masters. You—" but here he paused, for Olive gave a gasp, and turned white as a ghost in the moonlight. *Abroad, masters!* The words struck her like a flash of lightning, and made her tremble with a great rush of delicious longing. She clung to the old gentleman's arm for a moment, and wondered if she was dreaming; but his next words brought her back; though she heard them but dimly.

"Here is a letter for you; he wanted me to bring it, and Olive, don't make up your mind too quickly. Both you and Roger are very dear to me, and I would like to see you both happy before I die—as I suppose I must before many years, and

—and—confound it! where's my snuff?—I hope you will send a different word back to him."

Olive took the letter and put it in her pocket, still in that dazed wonder, and when they reached home, she longed to go off up stairs, and think it over alone, but it would be unkind on Bea's last evening; so she followed Mr. Congreve into the sitting-room, where a chorus of questions met them.

"God bless my soul, what curiosity!" cried the old gentleman, crustily. "She went down town and I went after her, let that do."

So no one asked another question, except Jean, who got on to his lap with the freedom of one who knew that nothing she did would receive reproof; and she whispered something in his ear, that made him smile good-naturedly, and immediately take an immense pinch of snuff.

That night, as on the one so long ago, when Mr. Congreve made his first visit to them, two persons found it hard to sleep, even after silence and slumber had long held the others.

To-night, as on that other, Mrs. Dering sat alone in her room, only now she sat by the window, instead of the dying fire. Now, as then, Jean slept soundly, only now her childish face wore the rosy flush of health instead of feebleness and pallor, and the little form was straight and perfect, instead of crooked and crippled.

Who, but a mother, can appreciate a mother's thoughts, when she stands on the threshold of the first separation; the first giving up of her own into another's love and keeping "for better, for worse, until death should them part." The pale young moon climbed slowly up above the tree-top, and just as its slanting rays reached the window-sill, and fell in across the floor, the door opened carefully, and Olive's voice spoke:

"Mama? You are up?"

"Yes, dear; are you sick? What is the matter?"

"Nothing. I only want to tell you something;" and Olive pushed the stool up as she spoke, and sat down.

"I meant to tell you before, but somehow I never did. Will you listen now?"

"Certainly, dear;" for well enough she knew that something weighed on Olive's mind to bring her there at that time. So Olive told her story, without a blush or hesitancy, from the beginning down to the receipt of the letter; and as Mrs. Dering watched her face in the pale light, so clearly expressing its dislike to any lover, and its rapt devotion to her art, she knew well enough what the decision would be.

"And I'm going to say no," finished Olive, at last. "Have I done right, mama?"

"Perfectly, Olive. I am surprised, and yet not wholly so, for something of the kind occurred to me when he was here. Never marry where you do not love, dear. No possible advantage, influence, or station, that can be gained by a loveless marriage, will ever be sufficient recompense for the galling misery of two hearts, grinding their life out, for want of sympathy and mutual love to oil the way. I admire and think a great deal of Roger Congreve, and you have won the love of a good man, dear, which if true, will bide its time patiently, and when you are older it may seem different to you."

Olive looked up in mute amazement. Even mother said that to her.

"No," she said obstinately, in a moment. "I don't think it will be so. I know it will not. I'm sorry that he loves me, because it will always keep us from being friends. Mama, surely you would not have me do such a thing as get married, and drop my work, as I would have to do, more or less, with so many new duties?"

"No, dear, no; I am only too glad that your heart is still free, for you are too young to think of marriage. I would not consent to it. Besides you are quite right; with the duties and responsibilities of a wife, you could not devote your whole time and love to your art, and I should feel very sorry to think that anything is going to interfere with perfecting the talent which God has given you. But sooner or later, Olive, there comes to every woman, who stands alone, a yearning for love and home; a desire to feel that there is some one whom she can claim as her own, and to whom she is dearer than aught else. Love your art, dear, work faithfully in it, and if it should always satisfy your heart, I will be quite content, for then you will always be my own. If the other feeling ever comes, God will take care of it. Now go, dear; don't let this keep you awake longer, for we want all fresh faces to-morrow. Good night."

The clock struck one, as they gave a kiss in the moonlight, then Olive went slowly away; not a whit less certain, that every one was wrong, and she was

right; no number of years could make any difference to her.

Everything joined in making the next day the brightest, and loveliest that had ever dawned. Never did a May morning sun come up with a purer glitter of gold; never had the birds sang so sweetly; and never before, as any one remembered, had the rose-vines over the porch, blossomed before June, and yet this morning, there were three snowy half-blown buds peeping in at the window of Ernestine's room, and she picked them to put in the bride's brown hair.

Pansy Murray came over early in the morning, and brought a beautiful bouquet to each of the sisters, excepting Bea, to whom she said with mysterious smiles: "I couldn't bring your bouquet, but our green-house man's going to come with it;" and then finding that Kittie was too busy to pay much attention to her, she devoted herself to Jean, whom she had seen once before, and fallen quite in love with.

Bea had had some little longings for a stylish wedding, but it had been impossible, besides, she had found that Walter preferred a quiet home one; so this morning, when the girls helped to dress her, and she put on her pretty brown suit, with the white rose-buds in her brown hair, she was perfectly content, and would not have had it otherwise.

"You look lovely," cried Kittie, with a rapturous sigh, when the last thing had been done, and they all drew back to inspect.

"That dress is a beauty, and you look like a daisy."

"What do you think?" cried Kat, rushing in just then. "Raymond's gardener has brought your bouquet, and what do you think it is?"

"What?" cried the girls eagerly.

"A beautiful wedding-bell, all of white flowers; and he's hanging it in the folding doors;" upon which announcement, every one ran down stairs, to view the new beauty, and the bride jerked the flowery clapper by its white ribbon; then departed in haste, and with a sudden shyness, as Dr. Barnett and the minister, were seen coming slowly up the walk.

No one cried when the supreme moment came, though Kittie was heard to sniff suspiciously, and Kat stared straight at a certain spot in the ceiling, until she was pretty near sightless; while Ernestine's eyes rested on the young wife's face, with a loving wistful sadness, that was pathetic, and made Mr. Congreve whisk

his handkerchief briskly about his eyes. Mrs. Dering stood with her arm about Jean, Olive was next with her arm in Mr. Congreve's, and so they listened, and watched the little ceremony that gave Bea to another, and left the first vacancy in the home nest. As soon as it was over, and the rush of congratulations and kisses were given, Dr. Barnett took Bea's hand and with a lowly bow, said to them all:

"Mother and sisters, relatives and friends, my wife and I will be pleased to have you come with us to our new home, and help eat our wedding breakfast."

Everybody buzzed with surprise, and looked for explanation to every one else; but no one seemed to know more than another, even Bea, blushing like a rose, as she put on her new hat, looked as surprised as anybody. So there was nothing to be done but wait for some revelation.

The walk from the old home to the new, was very short, and as the gay party took it in the warm sunshine, every one on the way called, or smiled their congratulations to the pretty bride who walked with Uncle Ridley, while the young husband followed with his new-made mother. When they came in sight of the little cottage, there was smoke coming gayly from the kitchen chimney, and the front door stood widely open.

"What is it?" whispered Kittie, in a spasm of curiosity.

"A breakfast already for them," answered Olive. "Dr. Barnett has got Huldah, and Bea doesn't know it."

Well, dear me, what a jolly confusion did follow. Bea was too much overcome to welcome any one to her new home, and nearly gave way to tears when Huldah was seen bowing ecstatically in the back-ground, and saying over and over: "Welcome home, Mrs. Barnett, how-dy-do?"

"This is where Uncle Ridley and Olive were last night," cried Jean excitedly, throwing open the parlor door, and pushing Mrs. Barnett in. "Just look!"

Bea tried to speak, but couldn't, and threw her arms about Mr. Congreve's neck, while everybody else "oh'd" and "ah'd" about the parlor door. For wasn't it furnished with three of the most beautiful easy chairs, a tiny lounge, two spidery-legged tables, with gilded chains—and—oh!—a piano! A shiny, beautiful upright piano, with a blue velvet stool.

"I didn't do it all, Olive did half," cried Mr. Congreve the first chance he had of making himself heard above the babel of admiration and gratitude; whereupon

Olive put in a hasty denial. She hadn't done a thing but come over and arrange. Everything was from Uncle Ridley except the silver vase and bracket, between the windows.

"Well, you've seen it now, that'll do. I was invited here to breakfast, and I'd like to have it," cried the old gentleman, in a testy voice, which the good-natured gleam in his sharp eyes denied. So everybody pranced into the dining-room, and Bea was placed behind the coffee-urn, and couldn't do a thing but blush, and look too happy and overcome to attend to her duties.

Perfect silence fell, as the young husband lifted his hand, and in a voice that trembled slightly, asked the minister to request a blessing on this, the first meal in the new home. But when that was done, everybody broke into a babel of fun again, and a merrier meal was never witnessed anywhere.

"I shall come over and call on you this afternoon, Mrs. Barnett," was Kat's good-bye, when good-bye moment came.

"Everything is lovely; may you live long, and always be thus gay," said Kittie, who began to feel a queer sensation in her throat, and wanted to get off in a hurry.

"I don't know what to say, except that I want you to be so happy, Bea dear," Ernestine said, giving a good-bye kiss lingeringly.

"Well, I think weddings are splendid, though I wish you wasn't going to have a new home, Bea," remarked Jean with regret, as she tied on her hat, and shook hands with her new brother.

"I shall miss you dreadfully, and our room will seem so lonely," was Olive's next remark. "But you must not let us be apart much."

"I will not," said Bea with full heart and eyes. "I will never love you any less, and we will all be just the same, except that you'll have a brother, and you know you've always wanted one."

"I hope you'll be happy, dear child, I do indeed," said Mr. Congreve, with an exhaustive hand shake. "But married life is full of swampy places, and you must both be careful. I've only one piece of advice, and that is, whatever you do, don't let your confidence and trust in each other get a shake, for it is the tree of married life, and one shake will knock off more apples of love and happiness than can ever be replaced."

"God bless you both," said Mrs. Dering, with one hand in that of her daughter, the other in that of her new son. "I give her to you freely, Walter, with perfect faith in your love and loyalty, and a dear daughter is the most precious gift a mother ever yielded up. Be worthy of each other's perfect love and trust, and once more, God bless you. Good-bye."

To hear, to heed, to wed,
Fair lot that maidens choose;
Thy mother's tenderest words are said,
Thy face no more she views.
Thy mother's lot, my dear,
She doth in nought accuse;
Her lot to bear, to nurse, to rear,
To love—and then to lose.

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# CHAPTER XXIII.

# WHEN GOD DREW NEAR AMONG HIS OWN TO CHOOSE.

"AND is that the word you are going to send back, Olive?"

"Yes, sir."

"And Roger must go abroad, alone?"

"I suppose so, if he goes at all."

Mr. Congreve sighed, and Olive began to tap her foot impatiently on the grass.

"Uncle Ridley, I couldn't; I should hate him; I should hate myself and my art, too, if I felt that I owed all its success to some one else. He would be miserably unhappy, and so would I. Even if I loved him as he wants me to, I couldn't accept everything from him."

"Too proud, Olive, too proud; but then I suppose you are right; indeed, I shouldn't wonder if you were," muttered the old gentleman, walking slowly back and forth with his eyes down. "But I hate to take this word back to the boy, I do indeed."

"Well, I'm sure, he's a man, and I really think by this time, that he is quite reconciled to it. At any rate, he'll get over it before long," said Olive complacently.

"God bless my soul!" cried Mr. Congreve, pausing before her, with a puzzled wonder in his shrewd eyes. "Do you honestly so little realize what Roger's nature is, or how much the boy loves you, and how he is waiting to hear what word I bring!"

"He ought to know by this time that it is the same I gave to him. I told you, no, the day after you gave me the letter; surely, you told him so when you wrote."

"But I didn't, though. I thought, like as not, with the prospect of travel, you might change your mind after you'd thought about it more, and I told him that I was giving you time."

"You must think I am very weak and uncertain," said Olive with some impatience. "If he really is anxious for an answer, it is unkind to keep him waiting."

"Well, well, that's so, I know, but I must confess that I thought the masters and travel would bring you 'round," and Mr. Congreve shook his head, as if in dire perplexity.

"I had rather work day and night, and win my own success, be it ever so little, than to owe the widest fame to another. Besides, I don't want to be married, I wouldn't be for anything; I want to belong to myself, and do as I please!" cried Olive, vehemently; then slipped her arm through his, with a little coaxing gesture, such as she sometime used with the crusty old man, and said:

"There, Uncle Ridley, it is all settled, so let's not speak of it any more. There come Walter and Bea; we'll walk down to the gate and meet them."

This was all a month after the wedding, and it was the loveliest June Sunday, imaginable. Mr. Congreve had dreaded so to go back to Virginia without Jean, that he had yielded to their entreaties, and spent that length of time with them; but now he was going on the next day; and the old gentleman's feelings were so deeply stirred with the thought that he was obliged to resort to his crusty manners to hide them. He had most fervently hoped that Olive would change her mind, though possessed with an inward conviction that she would not; yet even while he so deeply regretted her decision, he could not but admire the independence, that refused to sit with idle hands, and receive every advantage and advancement from another. Surely, if Olive ever did marry, she would bring something to her husband besides her dependent self, and he might know, above all doubts, that indeed, he was truly loved in her heart of hearts.

Every member of the family had grown to dearly love the crusty, abrupt, peculiar old man, who wore the goodness of his heart like a mantle about him, yet so modest with it. They never knew, until after he had left them, how much good he had quietly done in his morning walks about Canfield. How he had bought poor little lame Katie Gregg a great wax doll, that could speak and cry; filled the pantry of the hard-working widow mother with packages unnumbered, pretending to be so innocent of the deed, when she found who was the giver, and

tried to thank him. There came to them, for many days after he had gone, reports, here and there, of the little deeds of kindness and acts of thoughtful generosity, the need of which, he had discovered at odd times and said nothing about, with the modesty which is characteristic of the true giver.

The parting was a truly sad one, yet not without its funny side, for the old gentleman was so torn up in mind that his actions were irresistibly funny. He whisked his red handkerchief about with such energy that its edges were pretty near in strips; and he blew his poor old nose in such repeated and violent fashions, that it clearly resembled a highly colored tomato.

"There won't be any little girl any where," he said, mournfully. "It will be so lonesome in the morning, and in the evening, and all in the day, and I will wonder if Jeanie is never coming down stairs to sit in my lap in the old library. I shall get cross, and ugly as a bear, for want of two little hands to smooth the wrinkles out of my old forehead, and a dear little girl to keep my heart in good working order. It will all be dreadful! dreadful!"

There was something pathetic in the picture they made, sitting there. The old man, with his white head and tear dimmed eyes, holding Jean in his lap, with her arms about his neck, and his wrinkled cheek rested on her curly hair.

"I haven't very much longer to live," he went on, in that pathetic way, "and I shall have to crawl through the last little while all by myself. I suppose the dear good Lord knows best, but I don't see why He gave me two little girls to love, and then took them both away. Even Olive won't go back with me, and Roger will go off, and it will be dreadful! dreadful!"

So far down had the poor man's spirits gone, that he seemed perfectly lost in pathetic resignation. Even the apparently unquenchable handkerchief hung limp and inactive from a coat-tail pocket, where it had been jammed in a moment of unresigned despair; and the big tears dropped one by one on Jeanie's hair, as he talked now in that quiet, grieved way.

"Will you come back to us?" asked Mrs. Dering, much touched, and laying her hands on his shoulder. "We should so love to have you, Uncle Ridley, all of us. Go home and send Roger off if he wants to go; leave the Hall with such old servants as you can trust, and then come back to us, and call this home. Will you?"

"Will I?" Mr. Congreve jumped up, and the handkerchief came out in all its

color and activity. "Are you really in earnest, Elizabeth? Would you have such a crusty old humbug as I am, around?"

"In the truest and warmest earnest, Uncle Ridley."

"Oh, please do," cried Jean eagerly; and the other girls echoed it.

"If I ever! God bless my soul! I never did!" exclaimed Mr. Congreve, falling back into his chair, perfectly overcome. "You will let me come and stay till next summer, then you and Jean and Ernestine go home with me, as you promised?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Dering.

"Well, well, I might have known that the good Lord would fix it some way. That's just the thing. I'll do it, Elizabeth; I will. Where's my snuff-box and satchel! It's pretty near train time."

Jean ran to get them, while Mr. Congreve went up stairs to say good-bye to Ernestine; and when he went off at last, it was in the gayest possible spirits, with promises to be back as soon as Roger started abroad; and so all the sadness was taken from the parting.

They thought he would be back in, at least, a month, but the time lengthened itself into three and four, and yet he did not come. Roger was sick, to begin with, and did not gain strength very rapidly, and nothing could have made the old man leave him.

"But I can stand it very well," he wrote. "I know that it's not going to last, so I can keep up plenty of spirits, with thinking of the time when I will come. The boy is getting better fast, and as soon as he settles up a little business, he is off, and then I will shut up and be off likewise, in a hurry."

But they at home, found hands and hearts busy with new work that was sadly brief and bitter. As the warm weather came, Ernestine began to fail rapidly. She suffered no new pain, and uttered no complaint, but as the days went by, and the intense heat of summer burned all purity and life from the air, she just seemed to droop, and bow her head feebly beneath the oppressive heat; and the frail stem of life snapped, with the weight of its own slight self. They had hoped against hope, that the sad end could be fought off, and with the first coming of warm days, Mrs. Dering had proposed going to the sea-side with her; but Dr. Barnett, who had fought eagerly and desperately with the dread disease, told them that it would do no good. The excitement might only hasten the end, and better to leave

her quiet, and so contentedly happy as she seemed, than to bring new faces and new scenes to worry and distract the last feeble remnant of her strength. So they submitted themselves to his word, as one of authority, and took upon themselves the sad duty of watching a loved life drift peacefully out, and trying to say, as the end drew near: "Thy will be done."

The big rocking-chair, the pretty wrappers, and gayly colored sacques were all laid aside now. The feeblest strength could no longer lift the frail form, and all the patient sufferer said when lifted or moved was, "I'm so tired; that will do; it is quite easy." Then the short breath would give out, and she could only thank them with her eyes, that daily grew more eloquently beautiful, as though the spirit, refined through suffering, were taking its last, long farewell look at mother and sisters, and uttering wordless thanks, which the heart loving then framed, but the lips weakly refused to utter.

"The end is not far off," Dr. Barnett said, one sultry August night, after he had left the sick-room. "I shall go down and telegraph for Olive to come on the first train."

Mrs. Dering laid her clasped hands on his arms with a little gasp, as of one long expecting a bitter draught, and finding the cup held to her lips at last. But she was very quiet.

"You think it will come to-night?"

"Hardly. She may live through to-morrow, but no longer, mother."

There was something so helpful in his presence, the warm, loving utterance of that dear name, and the strong, tender clasp of his hands, and she clung to him for a moment, as in recognition of the comfort and help he was, and had been in these sad days.

"They have telegraphed for Olive," Kittie whispered to Kat and Jean, as they three sat sleeplessly on the bedside, with their arms about each other, and a pale, hushed awe in their faces.

"That means that she is going to die," cried Kat, trembling. "Oh, how dreadful it is! I don't think it's right, no I don't."

"Hush," said Kittie, solemnly; but she couldn't say any more. Her own heart was sadly rebellious, and could not think it was right.

"It must be," said Jean slowly, in her sweet, quiet way. "God never does what isn't right; He can't, girls, though we can't always understand why some things are."

No one was disposed to speak further on the subject, the like of which has vexed many great minds, the world over, but they sat there hushed and quiet, and with awe-stricken hearts, as though they heard or felt the noiseless approach of the coming king, who passed them by, and went into the room where the pale mother watched and prayed beside the quiet sleeper.

Dr. Barnett came back soon, and brought Bea with him; but after looking in to speak a few hurried words that tried to be of comfort, she went into the other room, to take her place by the bedside, while the worn mother snatched a little rest, if not sleep, on the lounge near by. So the night crept slowly by, while anxious hearts and sleepless eyes kept sad vigil. In the first grey dawn of morning, Olive came; but when daylight fairly blushed into rosy sunshine, Ernestine awoke from a long sleep, clear-eyed, feverless, and rational, and recognized them all with a quiet, peaceful smile.

"You home in the middle of the week?" she said to Olive, with a little wondering surprise.

Dr. Barnett sent one swift, wordless glance of warning, and Olive caught it.

"Yes, I was not very busy this week and thought I would come home last night," she said, warmly pressing the almost transparent fingers lying on the coverlid, adding brightly: "How well you look this morning!"

"I feel better," answered Ernestine, slowly. "So strangely better; all rested and in no pain. Where is mama?"

"Here, darling."

"I—I feel so much better, mama," lifting the feeble hand, with a look of pleasure in her wan face. "It seems as if I was lying on the softest feathers, and all well again. Everything is so very easy, and I haven't any pain."

"You are much better, dear, and we are very glad;" but Mrs. Dering bent her head as she spoke, that no one might see the tremble of her lips, for well she knew, without any word or glance at her son-in-law's face, that the sufferer was passing into the sunlight of God's rest and love, and that the passing away of pain was because His hand had already touched her.

But to the girls it seemed different. To them, the clear, bright eyes, the quiet, easy breathing, and restful feeling, meant better for life, and they had a joyful jubilant time over it down stairs. They gathered the loveliest flowers in bloom, and took them up stairs, and Ernestine smiled brightly and even held them for a few moments in her weak hands, keeping a pure, pale, creamy bud, when they put the rest in water.

During the day Dr. Barnett brought some mail from the office, among which was a letter from Ralph for Kat, and a strange one from New York for Kittie, which proved to be from Mr. Murray.

"How funny!" she said, with a pleased smile.

"What is he writing to you for?" inquired Kat, sharing the general interest and curiosity to such an extent that she forgot her own letter. "Is Pansy sick?"

"No; he only says how she is, and how she wishes for me every day, and wants me to write a letter, all to herself," answered Kittie, too busy running her eyes over the few lines, with the signature

"Yours, most sincerely,
"PAUL MURRAY."

in bold, handsome hand, to notice the different expressions in the eyes that were watching her pleased, smiling face. Perhaps no one detected therein just what Mrs. Dering did, for it takes a marvelously small thing, to open a mother's eyes. But then Kittie's pleasure was as innocent as a child's; she read that letter over and over, and admired the beautiful writing, but thought that all her pleasure grew from the fact of hearing from Pansy, who had been gone a month, and said, as she put it in her pocket, "It was very kind in Mr. Murray to write, I'm sure for I did want to hear from Pansy."

But every one forgot the letters after awhile.

At supper-time Ernestine asked for something to eat. She even raised herself from the pillow by her own strength, and said how very hungry she was, and as the girls left the room to get what she asked for, a strange cold thrill struck their hearts. Eagerly, as though famishing, Ernestine ate the cream toast that they brought, drank the chocolate, and asked for more.

"Give her all she wants," said Dr. Barnett, in answer to an appealing look from Mrs. Dering; and so they brought more, with the strange pain still in their hearts; and she ate it eagerly, with that unearthly brightness in her eyes, and such a fluttering stain of scarlet in her wasted cheeks. The sad truth came first to Beatrice, as she looked from husband to mother, and read it in their pale, quiet faces; then it came to Olive, for she drew near, and put her arm around Bea, with a touch that both gave and asked for help; and then Kittie and Kat, seeing the hopeless sadness in their faces, suddenly realized that they stood in the dread presence at last, and with one accord turned to each other for help; while Jean crept to her mother's side, and hid her face in the folds of her dress. So death found them, as he drew near, and claimed a place before mother, sisters, or brother; but he did not come repulsively, or like the grinning head that portrays him to our mind's eye; instead, it seemed as though a white angel, with kindly eyes had drawn near, and breathed upon the sufferer before he kissed the life from her lips; for after a short stupor Ernestine awoke, and looked upon them with peaceful, shining eyes.

"Don't cry," she said, softly. "I am only going before, as papa did. I think I saw

him while I slept, and I am not afraid. It is not a dark river, mama, but beautiful and bright, and nothing can happen, for God stands there and smiles. Please don't cry, or shut the windows; let the sunshine come in, and be glad that I will never suffer any more. Lift me up, mama."

Mrs. Dering did so, and with her head pillowed on that dear breast, Ernestine sank to sleep like a child, breathing softly; while the shadows fell, and no one stirred. But the early moon rose slowly, and lighted the room, and as she drew her last breath, with a fluttering little sigh, it fell across her face, pure and sweet, and touched the withered rose-bud, lying on the pillow.

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# CHAPTER XXIV.

# TWO SECRETS.

JOY and sorrow, laughter and tears come and go and mingle as one in memory of the past. Between *now* and *then*, time weaves a veil, misty with tears of our sorrow, and diamond dusted with the bright laughter of our joy, and as we look through it, on the path that weaves our footsteps, the sunshine and shadows, that have fallen thereon, mingle and soften each other, so that neither the brilliant light of one nor the saddening shade of the other can pain our eyes, that look back, in wistful, happy memory.

In the fresh, pure air, that follows rain on a summer day, Kat was leaning from the window, and watching the sun go slowly down behind the hills; while slender spires of light shot up into the hazy atmosphere, and pierced the flitting clouds. She was gazing idly, with eyes in which many thoughts lay dreamily, and the slight smile that touched her lips came, perhaps, from something in the letter that lay open in her lap, or maybe from the distant view of a basket buggy, drawn by a white pony, coming slowly down the road, as though the riders were in no haste.

At any rate, she smiled; and it crept from the corners of her roguish mouth up to her eyes, and made her face very attractive, especially as she leaned it against the vines that crept in at the window, and looked thoughtfully down at the open letter. It was one such as she received very often now-a-days, as a very large pack, all of that year's date, much worn, and tied with a blue ribbon, would testify. Most of them were dashed boldly off on large office paper, with "Kathie dear," flourished into one corner, and news of all kinds, inquiries and odds and ends, filling several sheets, and "Yours, Ralph," in business scrawls at the bottom. But this was different. It was on small note paper to begin with, much more carefully written than usual, and contained no address whatever, simply starting off with what the writer had to say, and only filling three pages.

There was one particular place where Kat's eyes lingered, and where she smiled, very slowly, as though it was something not to be enjoyed fully, all at once; and we will look right over her shoulder and read it as she does again and

again:—

"The time is up now, and I am coming, if you say for me to. Will you? All my work has been done with the hope that you would let me come and share my success, whatever it might be, with you. It has been my one thought, and greatest incentive since I learned to know, and love you, as I did in the old days, when we skirmished and were gay, together. To-day, when I saw my name added as junior partner, to the finest law firm in our city, I thought of you, and felt more willing and proud to offer you that name. If you bid me come, I will do so; the walk out to Raymond's is short, and shall I meet you on the road!

"RALPH."

Should he meet her on the road? I've no way of telling you, I'm sure, for her answer is written and gone, and I, like you, will have to wait and see.

The white pony and basket buggy draws nearer, it comes through the gate and up the drive, and as Kat watches it, some one comes to her side and looks out also.

"They've been a dreadful long ride," says the new-comer, with an impatient relief, as she leans against the window.

"Yes," answered Kat, with a little start, just realizing the fact.

"I think it's very funny," Pansy continued, with a truly puzzled air. "When we was here before, papa always said to me, 'come, Pansy, let's go take Miss Kittie to ride,' and now he never does; he goes off all alone by hisself, and takes her."

"Is it possible!" said Kat with an air of interest.

"Yes, 'tis; an' he does a lot of funny things. Once when we was to New York, I wanted a penny, and he said to get it in his pocket, an' there wasn't one penny there, but all the pretty letters Miss Kittie had writed to me for my own. I thought 'twas so funny, but he said they were safer there, than in my box, an' I better leave 'm, so I did."

"Very strange," said Kat, with a solemn shake of her head.

"I'll guess I'll go down and ask him what for he didn't take me," said Pansy, going away, and leaving Kat to put her letter up and try to look quite composed

before Kittie came.

You must know that this was two years later, and that the twins were spending a few weeks with the Raymond's, where there were several other young people. Olive was working hard and rising steadily, and had never once been heard or suspected of wishing that Roger Congreve would come home from the continent, where he still roamed and threatened to settle. She was completely devoted to her art, and was now paying her way by teaching, while she was being taught. Mrs. Dering and Jean were in Virginia, and when Olive or the twins came home, it was to Bea's home, where everything was cosy and happy, with the rising young physician and his pretty little wife.

Two years had made some changes in the twins, more perceptibly so in Kat than Kittie; for time and love work wonders, and while she would never quite reach the perfection of lady-like grace and dignity, that made Kittie so charmingly attractive, she certainly had quieted much, was more careful of her language and dress, and bade fair to be a most delightful little woman after all, and one that Ralph might well love and be proud of having won.

When Kittie came up stairs, she was very quiet, and in answer to inquiries, said that her head ached. Kat was relieved to think she would not have to be on close guard, for she did not feel like telling her secret just then, and had rather dreaded Kittie's eyes. But Kittie was wholly absorbed in something else; she put away her things, and sat down by the window without saying much.

"It's pretty near tea-time," remarked Kat presently. "Are you all ready?"

"I—don't believe I'll go down," said Kittie. "I'm not hungry."

"Humph!" thought Kat, with a sudden and intense curiosity. "I guess I'm not the only one that has a secret."

"Did you have a pleasant ride?" she asked, after some silence.

"Yes—very;" answered Kittie absently.

"You were gone long enough."

No answer.

"I had a letter from Ralph;" guardedly.

"Did you?"

"Yes; I expect he'll come before long."

"I'd like to see him;" with more interest. "Wouldn't you?"

"Yes—rather," answered Kat, with a smile at herself in the glass, where she was comparing the effect of pink, or blue bow in her hair. "I'm going down now; what shall I say for you?"

"That I've a headache, and not hungry," said Kittie, and Kat whisked gayly off, laughing to herself, to think how she had intended to be the mystifier, and instead, was the mystified.

When Kittie was alone, she went to the glass, and leaning her chin in her hands, looked herself steadily in the face, as though absorbed in a new and astounding discovery. It was hard to tell just exactly how it affected her, for she looked a good deal astonished, rather sober, but very much pleased and a little bit shy.

"I'm sure," she said, nodding to herself with all earnestness, "I never dreamed of such a thing before, but—but—I do believe it's so;" and then she colored up all of a sudden, and the reflection disappeared from view.

Kat came upstairs very soon after supper, and found her sitting in just the same place by the window, and just as little inclined to talk as before, which made matters seem uncomfortable.

"I declare!" muttered Kat, slamming about in the clothes-press, with no particular object in view, except to make a little noise. "This is abominable! I think she might tell me, but I'm not going to ask. I'm sure, I'd tell her quick enough, but she don't care, and I sha'n't 'till she asks me;" and then becoming aware of the inconsistency of her reflections Kat shut the door with some force, and sat down in silence.

There was no telling how long this pleasing quietude might have lasted, if it had not been for an immense bug that sailed in at the window, close to Kittie's nose, and began to bump gayly around the room, while both girls flew up, in feminine nervousness, and opened fire upon him, with any objects they might lay hands on.

"Good gracious!" cried Kat, after a breathless battle, during which three chairs had been laid low, various objects upset, and the lamp blown out. "Let the old thing go; it won't stay in the dark. What geese we are anyhow, afraid of a bug."

"I wasn't afraid," said Kittie, dropping into her chair with an exhausted sigh. "But they always make me fidgetty; and, beside, it came in right across my nose. Well, anyhow, it's cooler in the dark."

"What in the world are you so quiet for!" exclaimed Kat, in despair, after a few moments, during which silence settled again.

"I? Nothing," said Kittie, with a little start.

"Nonsense!"

"Well, it's the truth; I didn't know that I was so quiet," said Kittie, who in truth had nothing to tell. "I'll talk gay enough if you'll start me on something."

"You never had to be started before," grumbled Kat, who would have teased and tormented unmercifully, had it not been for the weight of her own secret, which was wonderfully subduing.

"We had a delightful ride," continued Kittie, but with very apparent exertion. "Mr. Murray drove out by Hanging Rock, and that's five miles, you know, and then we came home by Craig's creek, and—it was very long. What did Ralph say? Where's the letter?"

"Oh!" said Kat, with a little gasp—for Kittie had covered the whole ground so quickly that it quite took her breath—"you can't read it in the dark, and if we light the lamp that bug will come back. It was only a small one. He has been admitted to the firm, and is coming pretty soon to see us."

Something in the voice, for Kat couldn't hide anything successfully, drew Kittie's thoughts from herself, and made her turn to look closely at the face just visible in the dark. It had been a settled fact in the family, for the past year, that Ralph was growing very fond of "Kathy dear," and that very likely she had been the great object in his thoughts when he went away, and promised to come back, and then—

"Kat," said Kittie, with great solemnity, when her thoughts reached that point, and she was conscious of feeling hurt. "I never thought you'd keep such a thing from me, and wait for me to ask."

"Neither did I think you would, but you are."

"Me? Why I've nothing to tell."

"Honestly?"

"Not a thing. And have you, really?"

"Nothing, except that he asked me if he should come, and I sent a letter right off, and told him yes," confessed Kat, relieved to share her secret, and feeling very glad and happy as she laid her head in Kittie's lap, as though to hide her face from the darkness.

Kittie entirely forgot herself in that moment. There came a little choking feeling in her throat, to think that she now came second in this dearest sister's heart, and she put her arms around her, with a little resentful, defiant clasp, and said nothing.

"Haven't you anything to confess?" asked Kat, in a moment.

"Come, dear; be honest."

"Not much," said Kittie, slowly. "You know, I always thought Mr. Murray was ever so much older than he is, and I never dreamed of his liking me, or any such thing, and it all seems so odd. But since he came this time, and we have been together so often, why—it all seemed different, you know, though I can't tell just how. To-day, while we were riding, I dropped some flowers out of my hair, and he picked them up, and asked if he might keep them, and—and—that's all," finished Kittie, quite shamefacedly.

"How romantic!" sighed Kat. "He'll say something pretty soon, and I'm very glad. It would be dreadful for one of us to go, and not the other. But it all seems odd, doesn't it, dear?"

So they sat together for a long time, dreaming the dream that comes rosily and sweet to all, and the silent clasp of their arms, and the pressure of their cheeks, laid together in the twilight, expressed the warm love that mutual joy brightened; and into this new experience, as in all that had come to them, they went hand in hand.

After awhile, Kat went down to the parlors, where the young people were, and a very funny thing happened. It was too warm to dance, play games, or, in fact, remain in the house; so they strolled out in the yard, and over the veranda, and once, as Kat sat alone in a big rustic chair, she saw Mr. Murray coming towards her. The light fell through the window, and out on to her face and head, showing a silver butterfly that Pansy had given to Kittie, fastened in her hair; and guided

by this, Mr. Murray drew near, and paused at her side, never doubting that she was the one he had been in search of. A few words were sufficient to reveal his mistake to Kat, but some mischievous impulse kept her quiet as to her identity, so they talked on and on, and presently he began to tell of the home he had prepared in the city, and Kat's heart sank with a sudden thump, but what could she say? He went on without giving her chance to utter a word, and just as she was growing cold with apprehension, and hardly hearing what he was telling, he laid his hand on hers that were clasped in her lap, and said very tenderly:

"Will you share it with me, darling? I have hoped and dreamed that you would, and have made it beautiful for your sake. It has been many, many months since the sweet possibility"—but there Kat jumped up, scarlet and ashamed.

"Oh, Mr. Murray! I'm not Kittie; I'm so sorry; but I thought—I meant—I don't know just what. I'll tell her to come down and I think she will," Kat cried incoherently, and vanished with a complicated and wonderful gesture of her hands, that might have passed for a supplication for forgiveness, a benediction, or total despair, or most anything.

"Go down stairs," were her first words, as she rushed into the room where Kittie sat, and cast herself on to the bed with a hysterical laugh. "I've been, and gone, and done, and had a proposal from Mr. Murray, and you better go down quick. Oh, it's too funny, and he's dreadfully in earnest; there's something about a sweet possibility, and you'd better go down and listen to it."

"What do you mean?" cried Kittie, starting up, and dropping her book, with a vague idea that Kat had lost her senses.

"He thought I was you. Oh, it's too funny! and he is out there by the geranium-bed waiting for you," cried Kat, convulsed with laughter; and Kittie dropped into her chair, all trembling.

"Oh, Kat! how could you?"

"Bless you, I didn't do anything except promise to send you down, and you better go. There, you look like a peach. Put this little posy in your hair and go on."

"Oh, I can't," cried Kittie, all blushes and shyness.

"Yes, you can, you must; it will never do in the world!" exclaimed Kat with decision; so with many pauses, much hesitation and trembling, Kittie went, and

appeared shyly before her lover with down-cast eyes, and all the sweet color fled from cheek and lips.

Of course, no one said anything, but somehow the secret crept into the gay company, and Kittie found her ordeal so trying that she threatened to go home.

"Of course we'll go as soon as Ralph comes," said Kat, who had her own reasons for wanting to get away then; so Kittie promised to wait those few days. It was very evident that Kat was going to meet him on the road, for one lovely afternoon, a few days later, she was seen to stroll away, dressed with particular care in a pale blue lawn, with bunches of forget-me-nots in her hair and belt, and a very big hat that conveniently and becomingly shaded her eyes, and flapped in the breeze as she walked.

The train was in; it had whizzed around the corner of Raymond's farm over an hour ago, and Ralph had had time to nearly make the distance between the depôt and a certain tall sycamore tree, where she had decided to stop and wait; so she strolled slowly, with her eyes down, and thought of him. He would look just as he used to, she thought, not realizing the time that had elapsed, nor how much she had changed herself. There would be the merry dark eyes, and faint mustache, the eager, almost boyish face and figure, and he would kiss her, as he used to, and how funny it would seem, to think they were nearly engaged.

She smiled to herself, unconscious that he was drawing near, and eagerly watching the pretty, slight, blue-robed figure, strolling in the sunshine; but she looked up in a moment and saw him.

Was that Ralph? She felt her heart jump clear into her throat; as she paused, and stared at the tall gentleman rapidly approaching, and she had no strength to take another step. She had arranged a little speech to deliver at the proper moment, but,

"By the sycamore passed he, and through the white clover;"

then all the sweet speech she had fashioned took flight. He came nearer with eager brightness in his handsome eyes; he took her two resistless hands and looked under her hat-brim.

"Kathleen, is it you?"

At the sound of the voice, which was still the same, Kat was covered with a swift, shy confusion. She had expected a boy; there had come to her a man, who had come at her bidding, and who loved her. She longed to run away or hide her head, or something, but how could she when he held her hands, and persisted in looking under her hat.

"I expected to find you racing along the road or sitting on a fence, and waiting for me," he said, with a laugh. "I looked for my dear romp, and instead of that, I meet a graceful lovely young woman with the sweetest face in the world, and I don't believe she's glad to see me."

"What made you go and change so?" stammered Kat, still unable to reconcile the vision before her with the boyish Ralph Tremayne. "I'd never known you, anywhere."

"Nor I, you, hardly. What made you go and change so?" retorted he.

"I haven't."

"Neither have I."

Whereupon they felt better acquainted, and laughed socially; then he kissed her, and slipped her hand through his arm.

"You're not sorry you told me to come, are you?"

"Not a bit. Are you sorry you came?"

"Not a bit. You're altogether lovely and charming, my dear, and may I tell you how much I love you?"

"I guess you'd better not. I'll have to get a little better acquainted with you first, you've gone and grown so big and handsome, and all that," answered Kat, feeling more comfortable, and looking up at him with some of the old saucy twinkle in her eyes.

"Bless those eyes," he exclaimed, with every symptom of telling the forbidden fact. "I must tell you, dear, that you have grown lovely."

"You told me that once."

"Don't you like to hear it?"

"I shouldn't wonder if I did. But I must tell you something important before

we go any farther," said Kat solemnly.

"Do so at once; I'm listening."

"Well, Ralph, I've—I've had another proposal since I wrote to you," confessed the wretched little hypocrite, with lowered hat-brim.

"You have? By jingo! Who from?" Ralph dropped her hand, and the ruddy color went from his face suddenly.

"From a New York gentleman at Mrs. Raymond's, and—and—"

"Go on," said Ralph shortly, his voice cold and hard.

"He said he had built—no, bought—no, had a beautiful home, and asked me to share it, and I didn't know what on earth to say, so—I told him—that I wasn't Kittie, and then he changed his mind."

"Kathy!" What a blessing it was that no one was anywhere near, for right there in the sunshine, Ralph threw his arm around her and drew her close, to kiss the saucy lips and eyes. "How could you? I'm stunned out of a year's growth! Was it Murray?"

"Well, I don't think you'll miss it," laughed Kat. "Yes, it was Mr. Murray, and Kittie's going to share that home."

"You don't say so. We'll go off doubly and very soon, too, for of course the little mother will be willing."

"Yes, of course," said Kat.

So they strolled on in the sunshine, and the sweetest story in the world, gray with age, yet fresh as spring-time in their hearts, made the sunshine brighter than ever before to their happy eyes.

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# CHAPTER XXV.

# MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A GOOD-NIGHT. FIVE YEARS LATER.

THE house was lighted from attic to basement, and though it was Christmas Eve, the air was like spring, for nature sometimes turns freakish, and smiles on us when we are expecting the cold shoulder. Here and there, a window was open, for the Derings always did love plenty of air; and so a merry sound of laughter and gay voices was wafted out into the night air, and the old trees rustled joyfully, as though the sound were a familiar and happy one to them, and it did their old bones—or bark, good to hear it. Even the vines, that clambered about as gayly now as ever—only closer and thicker, tapped on the windows and nodded their leafless heads, as though in welcome, and fairly rustled with joy clear down to their aged roots, to see all the dear children at home once more.

The front door stood hospitably open, as it had always had a trick of doing, and in the wide old hall were two children, one of whom sat on the stairs, with a sober, thoughtful face, while the other, in diminutive petticoats, was trying to stand on his head against the stout bannister-post. One failure followed another, in discouraging succession, but the little fellow kept determinedly at it, in spite of bumps and thumps, and finally succeeded in hoisting his fat legs up for the briefest second imaginable, which was perfectly satisfactory, and after which he righted himself, with serenely glowing face.

"Did," he said, triumphantly; to which the judge, sitting gravely on the stairs, assented with much solemnity, and seemed to be casting about in his mind for some other feat to propose.

"Hurts," said the young tumbler, rubbing his top-knot with a mite of a hand, and glancing severely at the judge.

"Stand on this," said the judge, coming down and offering his square inch of pocket-handkerchief, which was accordingly laid down by the post. "That makes it thoft; won't hurt now. Do't over."

With a readiness and faith that was sublime, he of the petticoats went at it, and had just succeeded in turning a side somersault, such as was never seen before, when further effort was nipped in the bud by some one coming into the hall.

"Good gracious!" cried a merry voice, as the tumbler was caught up, shaken, and set down with some force. "What are you up to now, Thomas, my lively son?"

"He wath standin' on hith head, auntie," explained the judge, with great politeness, as the tumbler appeared too much confused by all the circumstances to make any answer.

"Wath he, indeed?" laughed Thomas's mama. "Mashing his little head all to jelly; poor Tommy!"

"No," said Tom, whose remarks were more noticeable for brevity than anything else. "No shelly."

"Yes, indeed, little soft-head; come, ask papa," and with that Mrs. Tremayne—for who should it be but lively Kat—shouldered her small, but ambitious son, and carried him away. The judge looked forlorn after that. He folded his small handkerchief and put it carefully away in its tiny pocket, then he sat down on the lowest step and looked thoughtfully out of the front door, as though he expected further developments to arrive from that direction. Nor was he disappointed. There arose a sound of labored and energetic breathing from without, as of some one toiling up the steps, and then something in white fluttered across the porch, and in at the door, and the judge fairly beamed with delight and satisfaction.

"Hullo!" he said politely.

"'Llo," returned the new-comer.

"Where'd you come from?"

"Off," said the stranger, with a flourish of both small arms, intended to indicate some great distance. "Runned off."

"Did you? From Pansy?"

"Yeth." And the bunch of ruffles and brown ribbon shook its head with distinctive force, while the bits of slippered feet began to dance wildly up and down the hall.

"Mama'll come," said the judge, warningly, and, sure enough, out came a lady, with the loveliest face, and a white lace cap on her grey hair.

"Come, dears," she said, in a voice we know well and both flew to her, for who was dearer to their loving hearts than "Dramma?" "Time for little birdies to be eating supper, and getting little peepers shut up tight, before Santa Claus comes," she said, going towards the dining room, with a little hopper clinging to each hand, and playing peep around her. Tom was already at the table, pounding with his spoon, and smiling serenely through the milk that spattered his face from forehead to chin, and there were two other bowls and spoons and high chairs, ready and waiting.

"Naughty Louise," said Mrs. Kittie, as she lifted the white-robed morsel to her chair, and tied on her bib. "Run away from poor sister Pansy, and make her feel bad."

"All baddy, mama?" inquired Louise, looking over her bowl with repentant eyes.

"She comed in the front door," said Philip, otherwise the judge, who was the eldest hopeful of the Barnett household, and was, at present, under the care of aunt Kathy, as mama Bea had the baby in the sitting-room. "I thaw her," he went on to explain with care; but was evidently disgusted, that every one laughed and talked, instead of listening to him; so paused right there, and ate his bread and milk in silence and with dignity, not even unbending when Tom and Louise had a skirmish, and testified their cousinly regard, by throwing their spoons at each other, and upsetting what milk had been left in their bowls.

"Dear me, what children!" cried Kittie, running for a towel, with a laugh that sounded as though "such children" were very delightful.

"Thomas, Thomas!" said Mrs. Kat, with an air of grave reproof, such as she sometimes wasted on her lively son; and Thomas looked up at her, with roguish eyes, brimful of mischief, and fairly crowed with glee, a method of expression that he resorted to in gay moments, as it was still an exertion for him to talk.

When the young people were finally carried off to bed, every one went along, for the gentlemen were all down town, and what better could the mothers and aunties do than follow the procession headed by "Dramma," and watch the roguish imps get into their snowy little nests? There was much skirmishing and crowing, but it all ended in a doleful wail, for Tom fell out of bed and bumped

his precious head, and refused to be comforted, in any way, shape, or form, until Philip was heard to remark with admiration:

"You stood on your head, Tom, and wath straight up," and that was Balm-of-Gilead to the infantile soul of that Young America, for he immediately ceased to weep, and looked content.

They all lingered there some time after the children had grown quiet, but finally went down stairs, and left Grandma rocking and watching, till the last little peeper should be closed, for she insisted on staying, as all the little folks were not with her always, and dearly she enjoyed each moment spent with them.

Down stairs, the sisters clustered about the fire, with all the old girlish love and glee, and looking at them, in that familiar group, very few changes were noticeable, for time brings few foot-prints if the heart is happy. Bea wore a matronly little cap of bits of lace and blue bows, and held in her arms a gleeful baby, with roguish eyes and sunny little rings of hair, who was named after dear grandma, and who obstinately refused to go "by-low," as any well regulated baby ought to do, by seven o'clock in the evening. Kittie and Kat, on the lounge with clasped arms as of old, looked scarcely a whit changed, though they were both indelibly stamped with the grace and elegance of city ladies, and had fulfilled the promise in girlhood, by becoming truly refined and lovely women. The little stool by the fire was not vacant, for there sat Jean as of old, with the same sweet face and lovely eyes, only now she was taller than mama, and the still childish face wore a perfect happiness, for on the hand that supported her chin, the firelight showed a ring, and in the smiling eyes any one could read the story of it. Olive was there too. Olive, of whom they were all so proud, and who was still Olive Dering; and time had made her very fair to look upon; for energy and purpose had stamped her face indelibly, and the clear eyes were beautiful in their light of strength and happy content. She was no longer a struggling girl, battling with all circumstances, and fighting her way into work, but a woman, restful, yet not resting, in perfect success; for every nerve was still alert to further progress, and every wish and ambition had been sacrificed to one great desire, which would next year be satisfied; she was going to Europe. Masters and travel awaited her eager heart, and her own hand had carved the way. Her studio in New York was filled with works; many homes, far and wide, owed their pleasure, in the portrayed face of some dear one, to her pencil or brushes; and a large class, constantly increasing in size, trod the first pathways of art under her careful guidance. And so with hard work and economy, the money had come in, and been laid away; and now at last, there was enough. Mother and

Olive were going to Europe.

I know it is all very nice and easy to carry a girl through ambitious battles in a book, and after a lapse of years, which are left to the imagination, to bring her out, glowing with success, and with her heart's desire realized. It is done in a book this time; but Olive Dering's love and longing for art, her struggles, determination, and final success, are taken from the life of one who still lives, and who is now enjoying the perfect happiness earned by hard labor, in the galleries of the old masters. There had been toil and troubles and trials; discouraging tears and times of despair, in the years through which we have slipped without a pause; but it would do no good to tell them all; it is enough to know that patience, perseverance and will had overcome them, as there is rarely a case where they will not.

"Next year this time we'll not be here together," said Kittie, breaking a long pause, such as will often come, when hearts are content with worldless communion.

"Why not?" asked Jean. "Mama and Olive being in Italy, is no reason why you should not come and spend Christmas with me."

"Bless the baby, to think she will be married then," exclaimed Bea, caressing the brown head with loving hand. "Every one gone from the old home but Jeanie, and she presiding over it, a married lady; to think of it, girls?"

"So wags the world," said Kat with a brisk nod. "I think it would be sad to come here and spend Christmas, with Olive and mama gone; but you must all come to Boston, and if my house isn't big enough, I'll have an addition put on."

"No, my home is best," put in Kittie with decision. "It's between you all, and is plenty big enough. That is the place."

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Pansy, who was now a tall pretty girl of ten, and perfectly devoted to mama. "We want you to come to New York, and spoke about it before we left home; didn't we mama?"

"Yes, and we'll wage a brisk war with any one who puts in a claim, so you had better subside at once my dear," answered Kittie with a smile at her twin, which looked like most anything except a war-like preparation.

"There's the gate, the boys are coming," was the answer of Mrs. Kat, and sure enough, there arose a clatter of feet on the porch, a smell of cigar smoke in the

air, and in came "the boys," with the usual amount of noise, which boys, big or little, invariably make; and then grandma came flitting down stairs, with a smile and a warning "hush;" and there they were all together.

Supper was a gloriously gay meal, where every one's health was drank in fragrant coffee, from Grandma Dering, down to Prince, who had been returned to the home of his youth, and was passing his last days in peaceful content, with just enough exercise to keep his old bones from rusting out too fast. And then they talked of those who were gone from the circle: Father Dering, Ernestine, and lastly, dear old Uncle Ridley, who had died that year, and for whom every one had such a warm loving memory.

After supper the boys went off to the library to smoke, and mother and daughters clustered together in the dear old sitting-room, to chat lovingly as in other days; for now, as then, the sweet motherly face, to which they still looked for love, comfort, and praise, was the dearest in the world to them, and the loveliest, they all thought, with its serene happy smile and contented loving eyes.

"Has anybody any disappointments to tell to-night," she asked, looking around at the bright happy faces, and remembering another night long ago, when they all sat so, and told such.

"Yes, I've got one," announced Kat, just as briskly as she had done on that other night. "I can't, to save my life, arrive at the point where I will always look stately and unruffled, and ready to receive callers, in spite of babies and household work, as Mrs. McGregor does, who lives opposite me. And then, I do believe that Thomas is going to be short and fat, instead of tall and slim, and from present indications I think he will prefer being a clown to anything else in the world. That's my disappointment, and it's just about as sensible as my other, but it's the best I've got. What's yours, Kittie?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered Kittie, looking down into Pansy's upturned face, and laying her hand lovingly on the curly head. "I have the dearest husband, and two of the most precious little daughters in the world, and what more could I ask? I always did want curly hair and black eyes, but Pansy has one, and Louise the other, so I'm content. The only disappointment I have, is that mama and Olive will not be with us next Christmas."

"Well, I've a very small one," said Bea, as she rocked and trotted, with a vain attempt to get small Bessie's eyes shut. "Walter isn't quite as well as I should like to have him; he works too hard, poor fellow, and I want him to go off to the

mountains next summer, and get rested, but we can't all afford to go, and he says he will not go and leave me at home in the hot weather with the house and babies. So I can't help worrying and wishing that I could help him some way."

"You do help him, dear," interposed Mrs. Dering promptly. "You keep home bright and happy, and anticipate all his wants and wishes. In times of weariness or trouble, he has you and the dear babies for comfort. You love, sympathize and help him in a thousand ways, the want of which he could not do without."

"And sew on his buttons," added Kat. "Don't leave that out, for if he's anything like Ralph, it's a mighty big item."

"And here's my little girl," continued Mrs. Dering in a moment, and looking down at Jean, whose head lay in her lap. "Has she any?"

"None, mama," answered Jean, looking up with happy eyes. "Except that you are going away, and that Uncle Ridley is not here."

"Surely, no one supposes for an instant that I have any," said Olive, and every one shook their heads in a decided negative, except Mrs. Dering, and she looked across into Olive's eyes with a smile, and Olive, catching the look, dropped them to the fire, and said no more. She had intimated that she had none; but was it so in the depths of her heart? Was she quite content?

"You do to-night, as you did before, and no one asks me for mine," said Mrs. Dering with a smile. "Do you rightly guess that I have none?"

"We hope that you have none, mama," said Bea, lovingly.

"Indeed, I have not, my dear girls; instead, as I sit here to-night with you all around me, I wonder if I am fully grateful for how good God has been to me. I look at you, and I see in my girls just such good, true women as their father would have them, and I am more than content. I would that these three vacant places might be filled to-night, but God knows best, and I feel only love, not regret. No, my dear girls, I have no disappointments to-night, only a heart full of happiness and content."

They were silent after that for a little while, and then Bess dropped to sleep, and Olive crossed to Bea's side, as the gentlemen were heard coming from the library.

"Let me take her up stairs, Bea—you look tired;" and Bea handed the precious

charge over, and Olive went slowly up stairs, with her arms tenderly clasped about the little form, her cheeks laid to the soft baby face, and a look in her eyes that mother might have read had she seen it.

The sleepers already there, and sprawled about in characteristic attitudes, was a sight to hold one's gaze.

Philip lay perfectly straight and orderly, with a sober countenance, and both hands crossed on his little stomach; while Tom, the tumbler, had completely reversed himself, and lay with his feet on the pillow, his body in a snarl, and his head just ready to fall off the edge with the next jerk. Louise had dispensed with her pillow, it was on the floor, while she lay in the sweetest possible attitude, with one tiny hand under the dimpled cheek, on which the long, dark lashes rested softly, and one wee snowy little foot peeped out of the clothes. Olive laid the baby in its nest, and covered it warmly, bending many times to kiss the rosy little face; then she righted Tom, restored the pillow, and removed some of Philip's covering, as he seemed to be too warm; and then she stood still looking at them.

Was she perfectly happy, and quite content?

The pale light that fell across her, as she stood there watching the sleepers, with eyes that were traitorously expressive, would have made a very dear picture to one pair of eyes, had they not been too far away to rest on. The grey dress which she wore, fell in colorless draperies, and the soft laces at her throat and wrists, were very becoming to the clear skin. In the rich dark hair, was a white flower, that touched the tip of her ear as with a caress; but greatest of all was the eyes, that were growing dim with tears, as she stood there. The feeling that was in her heart was no new one, but to-night it came differently from what it ever had before. Then it had only been a half defined loneliness that could be quenched with a little effort, and pass without a name; but to-night it came surging up and assumed shape and title before her eyes. She had no claim on these little ones; she would never be able to stand so and watch one of her own in its innocent sleep. Would never feel the tender happiness of knowing that her blood beat in another little heart, that her life had given breath to its laughing lips, and the warm color to the dimpled cheeks. In the room down stairs, each sister had her own; even little Jean would soon be claimed by one to whom she was dearer than all else in the world; and in a few years mother might be gone, and then—*success* was hers. She had worked and won. Her name was on many lips, and her fame spreading. The goal she had looked forward to for years, with

eager heart, was hers at last, and while the anticipation, had in this case, lost nothing through possession; did it wholly satisfy her? Was there no corner, no longing, or want that brushes, oils, and inspiration failed to satisfy? Her eyes grew blind with strange, wistful tears, a queer choking filled her throat, and with a sudden movement she had crossed the room and knelt down by the baby. Had she no disappointment? Would she not have said "come," to some one, still a wanderer beyond the seas, had it been in her power? Or, had he stood before her, with the old, old longing, would she have drawn back and said: "My art is all I want."

Ah, indeed, Uncle Ridley had been right:

"A single flame gives little warmth, and needs a kindred spark."

Art was none the less dear, but the woman's heart had asserted itself, and there was a yearning passionate cry for a love that would answer to that, which had so strangely grown within her heart, and which called for something more than a lifeless irresponsive idol.

Sometimes, even out of books, the right thing happens just at the right moment; then, again, sometimes it does not; but this is what happened just at that moment. Some one had been standing in the shadow outside the door, for several moments and now entered, and crossing the room, stood beside her, kneeling there, and said:

"Olive."

She stood up quickly, and looked at him for a moment, and knew him, in spite of seven years' absence, and the bronze and change wrought by time and constant travel. Yes, she knew him, for the eyes were the same, and wore the look she had seen in them last. It was a true love that had bided its time, and won its reward at last. She did not blush rosy red, as most women would have done, but a speechless joy came slowly into her eyes, where the tears yet lay, and she was quite silent.

"You have no welcome for me?" he asked, holding out his hand. "Have I waited so long, and come in vain, at last, Olive?"

"No," she answered, finding her voice, and it sounded strangely sweet and glad, even to herself, as she drew nearer and laid her hand in his. "I am glad that you came; I—I have wished that you would."

It was not a romantic place at all, with the three little tumbled beds and sleepers; the diminutive stockings, shoes, and slips, scattered about, and Philip unmistakably snoring, as became a worn-out judge. But as he clasped the hand laid in his, and drawing her to him, kissed her gladly, I doubt if the most romantic spot, either side the sea, could have made that meeting sweeter to either of them.

"I was on the porch when you passed through the hall," said Roger, in a moment. "I had been out there some little time watching you through the

window, and studying your face, that I have so longed and hungered to see in these years, and I read in it such complete happiness, that my heart failed me. I had waited till you should reach the perfect goal of your ambition, and should know what it was to own fame; and as I looked at you, to-night, I thought it satisfied your heart entirely. So I was tempted to go away without having you send me. When you came into the hall with the baby, I followed you up here—quite against my will. As you stood here a few moments ago, and I saw that sadness creep into your face and eyes, I first thought that, perhaps, I had not come in vain. And have you really wished that I would come, Olive?"

"Yes; neither my work nor my life is perfect without you, Roger, and I think that I have known it for some time, though I never so fully confessed it to myself as to-night. I honestly sent you from me, and I honestly welcome you back. I have nothing more to wish for now."

So together they went down stairs, and the wanderer's welcome far exceeded his strongest hopes. A new ray of light and joy seemed brought into that circle, with this new union of hands, hearts, and happiness; and as Mrs. Dering kissed each of her girls good-night, she said, looking into Olive's eyes, with a loving smile:

"I fully believe, dear, that now you have no disappointment."

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The illustration on page 267 was not available for inclusion in this ebook.

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